BETWEEN EMPIRE AND NATION: THE EMERGENCE OF EGYPT’S LIBYAN BORDERLAND, 1841-1911

Matthew H. Ellis

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
HISTORY

Advisor: Molly Greene

September 2012
Abstract

“Between Empire and Nation” provides a spatial history of Egypt’s western borderland in order to illuminate the Egyptian nation-state as a work-in-progress in the decades prior to World War I. It argues that state and nation did not come fully formed to Egypt’s western domains, but rather emerged only gradually as the result of a complex and ongoing process of contestation and negotiation between an array of state and non-state actors along the borderland, each harnessing their own distinct sovereign capabilities. This interpretation challenges long-standing historiographical and nationalist assumptions about Egypt’s geographical stability and legibility, which have served to conceal the set of remarkably fraught, fluid and tentative processes through which Egypt was constituted as a modern territorial nation-state.

To illustrate these themes, this dissertation highlights several overlapping layers of interactivity—between different states engaged in the region, as well as between state and society—that coalesced to transform Egypt’s western domains into a contested borderland. In the first two chapters, it demonstrates the role that key local actors—most notably the Sanusiyya Brotherhood—played in mediating various centralizing projects undertaken by the Egyptian state in the region. The third chapter focuses on the activities of the Khedive Abbas Hilmi II in Siwa as a means to explore the complex interplay between various competing marks of sovereignty in the borderland. The final two chapters chart the emergence of a clearer sense of “borderedness” between two distinct political spheres in the region, even despite the sustained lack of any clear territorial definition. This transformation was, again, animated by processes of negotiation and
contestation—between the Ottomans, Egyptians, and Italians, and between these state actors and the various Bedouin tribes who inhabited the borderland.

Drawing on a range of archival materials from the state archives in Istanbul, Cairo, Rome, and London—as well as the underutilized private papers of Abbas Hilmi II—this dissertation examines the case of Egypt’s western borderland as a means to address broader historical debates about the nature of nation-state space, borderland society, and overlapping scales of sovereignty and political authority.
Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................ iii

Table of Contents............................................................................................................................ v

Note on Transliteration.................................................................................................................... vi

List of Abbreviations........................................................................................................................ vii

Acknowledgments............................................................................................................................... ix

Introduction......................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Anomalous Egypt? Law and Sovereignty at the Margins of the State in the Long-Nineteenth Century................................................................................................................. 36

Chapter 2: Siwa, the Sanusiyya, and the Nature of Egyptian Sovereignty.......................... 88

Chapter 3: Western Promises: Abbas Hilmi II, Siwan Politics, and the Khedivial Mark of Sovereignty.............................................................................................................................. 129

Chapter 4: Towards a Social History of the Egypt-Benghazi Borderland...................... 209

Chapter 5: The Origins of Egypt’s Western Border Conflict, 1902-11......................... 286

Conclusion.......................................................................................................................................... 367

Bibliography....................................................................................................................................... 372
Note on Transliteration

Throughout this dissertation, I have adopted a transliteration system that strives for clarity and consistency above all else. Arabic words are rendered in a much-simplified form of the IJMES standard, without diacritic markings. I use the most commonly accepted spellings for Arabic place names (Benghazi; Dakhla; Sollum), even if these do not always accord with the strictest conventions for transliterating Fusha. Where Anglicized versions of place names have become de rigueur in English usage (Alexandria; Tripoli), I use them.

The issue of transliteration becomes particularly thorny in this dissertation when I confront place names rendered quite differently in Arabic, Turkish, and—to a lesser extent—Italian (Benghazi v. Bingazi v. Bingasi; Derna or Darna v. Derne). At the risk of perpetuating certain nationalist assumptions about the natural or inevitable political identity of certain geographical locations, I have typically chosen to use the Arabic place names wherever appropriate, since these are likely to be most recognizable to readers. Only in rare instances do I adopt a Turkish spelling for a location in the Arab world (for example, Defne and not Dafna, given the frequency with which the former appeared in both Ottoman and British documents regarding a specific tax bearing that name.

Finally, I have left the transliterations of all Arabic and Turkish book and article titles, as well as publishing houses, exactly as they are given in standard library catalogs and databases. Although this inevitably leads to some unfortunate inconsistency—university library catalogs and Worldcat alike seem to have embraced an entirely different system for Arabic transliteration than that which governs the world of academic
publishing—it seemed the best solution given that the entire point of citing references is to make it simple for other readers to find them if they so wish.
**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHII</td>
<td>Abbas Hilmi II Papers (Durham University Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHR</td>
<td>The American Historical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIE</td>
<td>Ambasciata d’Italia in Egitto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASMAI</td>
<td>Archivio Storico del ex-Ministero dell’Africa Italiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOA</td>
<td>Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Diwan al-Dakhliya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUL</td>
<td>Durham University Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Foreign Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IJMES</td>
<td>International Journal of Middle East Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAE</td>
<td>Ministero degli Affari Esteri (Archivio Storico Diplomatico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEC</td>
<td>Middle East Centre (St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNW</td>
<td>Majlis al-Nuzzar wa al-Wuzara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>The National Archives (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>War Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A full list of the archival sections of the Başkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, with their corresponding abbreviations, is included in the Bibliography.
Acknowledgments

This project has taken more than three years of my life. It brought me to four great world cities for research, and it was written in four different Brooklyn apartments. It has been with me through some extreme personal highs and lows. As such, producing this dissertation would not have been remotely possible without the support, guidance, feedback, love, and encouragement of a great many people. If this acknowledgments section winds up being slightly long, it is only because I truly believe that there would be no Between Empire and Nation without all of you.

First, I am blessed to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from such a wonderful and distinguished dissertation committee. I am extremely grateful that Eve Troutt Powell agreed to come on board as my external reader—Eve’s own work, which challenges us to think more deeply about what exactly we mean by “Egypt,” has been an important model for my research. Graham Burnett has been a close mentor and friend to me ever since I set foot in Dickinson Hall. It is a testament to Graham’s patience and passion as a teacher that he took under his wing a slightly lost, fledgling first-year graduate student who knew nothing about the history of science, and always found time for him whenever he needed to talk. My initial ideas for this dissertation were forged from the excitement I felt in Graham’s classroom, and during our frequent discussions about spatial history and geography in his office. Cyrus Schayegh has challenged me to think much more widely and deeply about my arguments, always pushing me to take them a step further than I ever thought they could go. Through Cyrus’s close reading of my drafts and his creative and thoughtful feedback, I have been able to stay consistently focused on the broader theoretical implications of my work. The dissertation is far better
as a result. Molly Greene has been an exemplary advisor every step of the way. She has made my writing stronger, my ideas sharper, my historical judgment more sound. I thank her for her dedication to and sincere enthusiasm for this project, and for her unflagging support and guidance throughout.

Beyond my committee, I have been fortunate to draw on the vast material and intellectual resources of Princeton University. In the History Department, Sue Naquin, Bob Tignor, Sheldon Garon, Michael Gordin, Michael Laffan, and Max Weiss all offered valuable advice and feedback at various stages of my research. Conversations with fellow graduate students Dan Stolz, Karam Nachar, Kathi Ivanyi, and Rania Salem helped push my thinking in some new directions. Kristy Novak patiently answered many of my questions and helped ensure I had everything I needed from the department to go about my work. I am especially indebted to Lauren Kane for facilitating so many aspects of my professional life this past year, from my dossier to all the paperwork surrounding the completion of this dissertation. The History Department as well as Princeton’s Institute for International and Regional Studies provided crucial funding for language acquisition and a preliminary research trip. M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, in the Department of Near Eastern Studies, merits special thanks for all of his support with reading my Ottoman primary materials. The energy and dedication he showed for this project went above and beyond what I ever could have expected; many of my most exciting archival finds only started to come alive whilst reading them together in his office.

I am thankful to many professors and colleagues outside Princeton who have offered guidance and encouragement at various stages of this project. Palmira Brummett, Paula Sanders, Yoav Di-Capua, Lucie Ryzova, Michael Reimer, Walter Armbrust, Jane
Hathaway, Lisa Pollard, and Claudia Gazzini have all taken an interest in my work and patiently answered many of my inchoate questions along the way. I am especially grateful to Zachary Lockman, Michel Le Gall, Khaled Fahmy, Will Hanley, Marilyn Booth, Tony Gorman, Bret Gustafson, Manu Goswami, Keith Brown, and Stacey Philbrick-Yadav for taking the time to meet with me at length to discuss how the project should take shape, and for reading various drafts and conference papers.

The fieldwork that this project entailed could have been rather complicated, given the frequency with which I moved around during my year abroad, but it actually all went remarkably smoothly. For this I have the Social Science Research Council and the American Research Center in Egypt to thank. Both organizations generously supported my research for this dissertation, affording me the opportunity to visit five different archival sites and thus cast my conceptual net as widely as possible. The project is by far richer as a result. Sam Zief at the SSRC, and Djodi Deutsch at ARCE, took great care to facilitate all my logistical needs and helped make my time abroad extremely easy and care-free. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Muhammad Safi al-Din Abulezz, Director of the Egyptian Geographical Society in Cairo, for serving as my ARCE affiliate during my time in Cairo.

The research staffs at the Bašbakanlık Archive in Istanbul, Dar al-Wathaiq in Cairo, the Historical Archive of the Ministero degli Affari Esteri in Rome, the National Archives in London, and the Durham University Library all served to make my research a complete pleasure. Special mention should go to Dr. Fuat Recep at the Bašbakanlık, for sharing his expertise on Ottoman paleography and diplomatics; and to Jane Hogan and Michael Harkness at the Durham University Library, for introducing me to the various
special collections held there. Steve Urgola went out of his way to help me find materials of interest at the AUC library. Also, I wish to thank the Mohamed Ali Foundation for granting me access to the Abbas Hilmi II archive held at the Durham University Library: all citations from that collection are reproduced by the kind permission of the Trustees of the Mohamed Ali Foundation and Durham University.

Wherever this project has taken me, I have been extremely lucky to enjoy the company, wisdom, insight, and good humor of many wonderful friends and colleagues. To my research companions at the Başbakanlık—Ibrahim Kalkan, Will Smiley, Josh White, and David Gutman—I thank you for your help getting over my Rikaphobia, and for lots of delightful afternoons spent together over tea or Iskender Kebaps. Paul Arpaia showed me the ropes at the Ministero degli Affari Esteri and served as a most genial guide to Rome. I looked forward to my daily lunches with Kristin Tassin at the National Archives in London. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to re-connect with Humphrey Davies in Cairo: I benefited enormously from his wisdom and deep knowledge about Cairo and Egyptian history and letters, and I always looked forward to his frequent movie nights. My fellow ARCE researchers—Stephanie Boyle, Zach Berman, Sara Nimis, Junaid Quadri, and Gregory Hoadley—became instant close friends and partners in crime. I thank you for sharing so much of your knowledge of the Cairo research scene, and for always keeping things light and fun no matter how stressful things got at the archive. I would also like to give a brief shout-out to my cohort at the SSRC workshop in Austin, though Louisa Lombard deserves a special word of thanks: Louisa, I am not sure you will ever know just how profound and inspirational I found your work to
be, or how lucky I feel that I encountered it just when I did. I look forward to continuing our dialogue in the future.

I had no idea that I would instantly make such extraordinary friends at Princeton. Lo Faber was always a scholar and a gentleman, and an ideal office-mate; I learned so much from the time we spent together our third year, attempting to navigate British history and figure out how to teach. Alex Karels, Ryan Harper, Lynn Harper, and Tuna Artun have been among my very best friends these past several years: I thank you for your laughter, your generosity of spirit, your floors and couches, and your unconditional patience, support and love for me no matter how I came to you. I would never have made it through 2011 without your unwavering friendship.

It is impossible to imagine enduring the considerable intellectual and personal challenges that the PhD has entailed without having had so many wonderful people in my life so close by. Maria Siebel has been a constant fount of wisdom and inspiration for me. Keren Fleshler offered nothing but encouragement and patience when I was at my most vulnerable with this project, and was always a model of professionalism, calm, and sound judgment. Hana Shepherd came to know this project quite well in its formative stages. I benefited enormously from her searching intellect, her provocative questions, and her insight into the broader themes that I was exploring, as well as from her humor, curiosity, and zeal for travel and adventure.

I was delighted to find out that Omar Cheta would be in Cairo at the same time that I was, but I had not anticipated that we would become so close during that period. I simply cannot imagine my six months in Cairo without Omar; certainly the archival experience would have been much more harrowing and far less fun. I have learned so
much from Omar over the course of our many discussions about Egyptian history and politics, and he has helped shape my thinking towards the dissertation every step of the way; I also must thank Omar for assisting me with Arabic translation countless times.

I was very glad to share the experience of half-marathon training with Lucy Rosenburgh. Matt Swan and Laura Zuckerwise have been generous friends and wonderful Brooklyn neighbors—having them close by has given me and my work a special boost over the past year or so. Dave Goodman and Amanda Croushore have really been my rock these past two years living in New York City. They have seen me through the roughest patch of my life, making themselves available at a moment’s notice when I was in need, tirelessly offering up so much of their time and energy. Dave and Amanda, I thank you for being such compassionate and dedicated friends; I do not know where I would be without the two of you.

I also want to thank many of my friends outside of Princeton and New York who I unfortunately do not get to see nearly as much as I would like. Carmen Gitre has the uncanny ability to make me feel better about absolutely everything, and she more than anyone has helped me keep this whole PhD endeavor in healthy perspective over the years. Aaron Jakes has been like a long-lost brother ever since we met at Oxford—I am grateful to be able to share so much of my work and my life with him. Andy Howard, Emma Crossen, Ben Roth, Nick Goodbody, Shana Minkin, Jennifer Pruitt, Lucas Goodbody, Foster Cronin, Jeff Garland: we might have been living far away from one another these past years, but you are very much a part of this thing. Thank you all for making our friendship such a priority.
My brother Andy and my parents, Steve and Esta, have been my biggest champions throughout my tenure at Princeton. I lack the words to express the gratitude I feel for the limitless love and support they have shown me during the long path to completing this PhD. They always had complete faith in me, and often reminded me of why I got into this business in the first place. They saw this route working out long before I ever did, and they never stopped believing that I would arrive at this point. This dissertation is dedicated to them.
Introduction

“Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.” – Ernest Renan (1882)

“The Libyan Desert is part of our country, and it is incumbent upon us to ascertain our borders there, so that we may better know our country. By traversing the desert I will have established some of the rights of our nation.” – Ahmed Hassanein (1923)

Egypt is typically treated as a special case in the historiography of the modern Middle East, and not without good reason. Yet one of the major tropes that scholars most commonly fall back on to make the argument for exceptionalism—the shibboleth that Egypt, unlike the other nation-states that would emerge out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, maintained a distinctive sense of territorial cohesiveness over its several-thousand-year-long history—bears further investigation. The picture we tend to have of Egypt as a relatively continuous and stable geographical entity from time immemorial is in fact belied by the curious history of the first modern political map that sought to define its contours.

This map was a key part of the historic settlement that Mehmed Ali reached with the Ottoman Government in 1840, concluding a decade-long power struggle between the

---

1 Ernest Renan, Qu’est ce qu’une nation? (What is a Nation?) (Toronto: Tapir Press, 1996).
2 Quoted in Michael Haag, Introduction to The Lost Oases, by Ahmed Hassanein (Cairo: AUC Press, 2006), vi.
3 Geographer Gideon Biger, who actually discovered an original silk copy of the map in the British National Archives in Kew Gardens in the early-1980s, was the first to call it both the “first political map of Egypt” and the “first map of modern Egypt.” The term “political map” refers to a map “designating political boundaries which form part of a written agreement between two signatories.” See Gideon Biger, “The First Map of Modern Egypt: Mohammed Ali’s Firman and the Map of 1841,” Middle Eastern Studies 14 (1978): 83; Gideon Biger, “The First Political Map of Egypt,” Cartographica 19 (1982).
4 Enclosed with BOA: İ.MTZ(05) 34/2004 (Jan. 6, 1906/30 Zilkade 1323) The Ottoman Turkish text at the bottom of the map reads as follows: “This is a copy of the sealed map, drawn up in the office of the Imperial School of Military Engineers, that was graciously sent when the Province of Egypt was granted to the late Mehmed Ali Pasha with the privilege of inheritance in 1256 [1841 A.D.].” The map appears to be a modification of the well-regarded Jacotin map, which was drawn up by surveyors during the French occupation of Egypt from 1798-1801 and ultimately published in 1816. See Biger, “First Political Map,” 88.
rogue Egyptian governor and his imperial suzerain. On February 13, 1841, Sultan Abdülmecid I issued a firman of investiture that outlined the basic terms of the accord: in exchange for the complete withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Syria and Palestine, as well as a significant reduction in the size of Egypt’s standing army, Mehmed Ali would receive the right to hereditary rule over Egypt. What is often neglected in discussions of the firman, however, is the fact that it came with an attached map—a curious oversight given that the decree explicitly spelled out that the scope of Mehmed Ali’s rule would be “contained within the ancient limits depicted on the map” sent by the Grand Vezir. If, by issuing the 1841 firman, the Ottoman Government had been forced to make an unprecedented concession to a formidable provincial power broker, then the appended map was intended to serve as a sort of counterweight, circumscribing Mehmed Ali’s authority and thereby clarifying Egypt’s position within the broader domain of Ottoman sovereignty.

Given that the political stakes were so high, it is particularly striking that the picture of Egypt inscribed in the 1841 map—which the Ottomans understood to represent

---

5 The standoff began when the Egyptian army occupied and began to administer the Ottoman provinces comprising Syria and Palestine towards the end of 1831. Mehmed Ali’s forces posed an even more serious threat to the Ottoman Government, at one point advancing within approximately 100 kilometers of Istanbul. It was only the intervention of the British army that thwarted the Pasha’s designs and compelled him to reach a compromise with the Ottoman Government. See Khaled Fahmy, Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

6 If the terms of the agreement are clear, interpretations over its meaning are not. Whereas earlier generations of scholarship saw the firman as evidence of the European powers’ bent to thwart the emergence of an independent Egyptian nation-state at this time, Khaled Fahmy argues powerfully that the firman was actually “the crowning success of the Pasha’s long career,” given that his overarching objective was personal rule, not the implementation of some “‘national’ experiment at development or independence.” See Khaled Fahmy, “Egypt under Muhammad Ali,” in The Cambridge History of Egypt, Volume 2, edited by M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 175-6; Fahmy, Mehmed Ali.

7 Hatt-i Şerif of Feb. 13, 1841 (21 Zilhicce 1256), included in Documents Diplomatiques Concernant l’Égypte de Mehemet-Ali jusqu’en 1920 (Paris: E. Leroux, 1920). A second firman that the Sultan issued that same day to address the issue of Egypt’s possessions in the Sudan repeated this same notion though with a slightly different formulation: Mehmed Ali would now have control over Nubia, Darfur, Kordofan, and Sennar, in addition to “the Governorship of Egypt, comprised within its known limits.”
the “ancient” and “known” territorial bounds of the province—differs so significantly from that of the present-day nation-state. This is most apparent when we look to the boundaries of Egypt depicted on the map, all of which fall well short of their current location. In the south, the map’s borderline intersects the Nile at around Aswan, approximately 250 kilometers north of the present boundary (which cuts across instead at Wadi Halfa). In the east, the map leaves a large portion of the Sinai Peninsula outside of Egypt, labeling the territory instead as part of the Hijaz (part of present-day Saudi Arabia). Finally, in the west, the boundary commences from a point along the Mediterranean coastline that corresponds roughly to the present-day port town of Marsa Matruh (more than 200 kilometers east of the present boundary, which lies just beyond the port of Sollum).  

The extent to which the Ottomans’ territorial conception of Egypt at this time diverges from the image of the country that has been seared into our contemporary collective geographical consciousness is only the first of the 1841 map’s surprises. Despite the Ottoman Government’s best intentions, the map’s inclusion with the firman actually settled very little. For over three quarters of a century, in fact, this first map of modern Egypt went missing. It was not published with the firman, and—even though both the Ottoman and Egyptian governments were fully aware of its import as the key document for settling any territorial questions that arose—no one seems to have been able to locate it in Egypt prior to World War I. This was not for lack of trying. In 1892,

---

8 The map gives Ras al-Kenais as the precise point along the coastline where the borderline begins (Marsa Matruh, which became a more prominent locale in the 1900s, was not labeled). Later on, the Ottomans would refer to this border area as Ras ‘Alam Rum.
10 According to Egyptian historian Fatima ‘Alam al-Din ‘Abd al-Wahid, the map was lost or concealed deliberately. Fatima ‘Alam al-Din ‘Abd al-Wahid, *Hudud Misr al-Gharbiyah: Dirasah Watha’iqiyah*
for example—during the first phase of a long conflict between the Ottomans and the
British over control of the Sinai—the Ottoman Grand Vezir lamented that the map could
not be found in Cairo, since it alone could “establish the legal bounds of the [Ottoman]
state.”\textsuperscript{11} A decade and a half later, during the height of the Sinai crisis, the Ottomans
again fixated on this “map showing Egypt’s borders” that, “upon being searched for once
again, could not be attained.”\textsuperscript{12} The British also called attention to the mysterious absence
of this telltale map. In 1907, for instance, Lord Cromer noted that “this map is supposed
to have been lost in a fire which destroyed a great part of the Egyptian Archives. The
Turkish copy is occasionally alluded to by the Porte, no one has ever seen it, and its
existence appears doubtful.”\textsuperscript{13}

The elusive map finally resurfaced only in 1925, on the eve of the ultimate
diplomatic settlement of Egypt’s western border. In the course of their negotiations with
the Italian Government, the Egyptian authorities searched anew for the map but, once
again, could not find it anywhere in Cairo. On May 20, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign
Affairs appealed to its ambassador in Turkey to search for the map in Istanbul’s archives;
several months later he finally located a copy and sent it back to Egypt for perusal. This
copy was subsequently published along with the official western boundary treaty, signed
on December 6, 1925.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{1} \textsuperscript{11} BOA: Y.A.HUS 256/51. “Legal bounds of the state” is a loose translation of the formulation “\textit{hukuk-u devlet}.”
\bibitem{12} BOA: I.MTZ(05) 34/2004 (Jan. 6, 1906/30 Zilkade 1323). The text reads: “\textit{Yeniden araştırılmış ise de, böyle bir haritaya dest res olunamadığından}.”
\bibitem{13} MAE: AIE 117 (Cromer memo, June 14, 1907). These are only a few among many such examples I could give.
\bibitem{14} “La Frontière Occidentale de l’Égypte,” Document n. 1-1926, Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale, 1926), 11 (accessed in the archive of the Royal Geographical Society). See also Brownlie, \textit{African Boundaries}, 104. The settlement of the border question remained elusive even after
\end{thebibliography}
Unsettling Egypt

Aside from the part it played in the eventual resolution of Egypt’s western border question in 1925, this story of the missing first map of modern Egypt serves as an apt metaphor for one of the central themes of this dissertation: namely, that long-standing historiographical and nationalist assumptions about Egypt’s geographical stability and legibility since the time of the Pharaohs actually conceal the set of remarkably fraught, fluid and tentative processes through which Egypt was constituted as a modern territorial nation-state. Particularly in light of all the attention that historians of Egypt and the Middle East have consistently paid to the nation-state as a constructed and contingent enterprise, the degree to which the territorial dimension of Egypt’s constructedness has been neglected in most scholarship is truly startling. It is as though a generation of scholarship on Egyptian nationalism and state formation has simply taken the 1841 firman—with its vague gesture towards the “ancient” and “known” territorial bounds of Egypt—at its word.¹⁵

---

¹⁵ Examples abound, but we can see this tendency in scholarship both old and new. For instance, in his classic work on the “evolution of the Egyptian national image,” for instance, Charles Wendell argues that the “geographical or territorial factor”—the fact that “Egypt is determinable with unusual ease and little or no dispute”—greatly facilitated the rise of Egyptian national consciousness. At the same time, Ziad Fahmy’s compelling recent monograph on Egyptian nationalism seems to take it for granted that Egypt is really the Nile Valley (though with the apt caveat that the Sa’id did retain some cultural distinctiveness): “The topography of Egypt…with most of its inhabitants living in an easily accessible thin strip of land stretching from Aswan to the Mediterranean, has historically facilitated centralization efforts.” Charles Wendell, The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image: From its Origins to Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 123-4; Ziad Fahmy, Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011), 21.
This scholarly propensity manifests itself in a number of different ways in the
historiography. On one hand, much work produced in Egypt—written within a firmly
nationalist paradigm—treats Egypt’s territoriality as something of a black box, a
fundamental essence of Egyptian identity that it is at once wholly unnecessary as well as
politically dangerous to question. In Gamal Hamdan’s well-known multi-volume study
_Shakhsiyat Misr_ (“The Personality of Egypt”), for instance, Egypt’s self-evidently
timeless geography is in fact the most crucial element defining the character of the nation
throughout its hallowed history.\(^{16}\) On the other hand, the field’s intensive focus on
reconstructing the evolution and discursive contours of Egyptian anti-colonial
nationalism has caused the territorial question to fall by the wayside. There are two main
explanations for this.

First, scholars’ preoccupation with the experience of colonialism in Egypt has
naturally led many of them to fix their gaze upon Cairo—the center of the colonial state
(where British power was at its height), as well as the primary stage for anti-colonial
resistance as Egypt’s nationalist movement developed. What this has meant in practice,
however, is that the lion’s share of recent historiography of modern Egypt essentially
remains the historiography of Cairo. Only recently has the field witnessed a mild re-
orientation, with more work being done on Alexandria, the Sa‘id, the Nile Delta, and the

Suez Canal zone.\textsuperscript{17} Egypt’s desert spaces, which comprise the fuzzy edges of the national territory in every direction, have for the most part been completely overlooked. If it is true that historians of the medieval period, in part following Ibn Khaldun’s lead, have given ample attention to the relationship between city and desert in Egypt, one is still hard-pressed to find serious treatment of Egypt’s desert peripheries in any scholarship on the nineteenth or twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{18} One basic goal of this dissertation, then, is to correct for this geographical lacuna in the historiography of modern Egypt by questioning what the desert margins of the nation-state might mean for a political community so strongly identified with its capital city as well as the fertile, life-giving spine that is the Nile Valley and Delta.

The other main reason why so much scholarship on colonial Egypt has shunted the territorial question to the side is that it has largely mirrored the particular preoccupations of Egyptian nationalist discourse as it emerged in the late-nineteenth century. And so, while historians have cultivated a sophisticated framework for discussing the complex ways in which that discourse has been constructed—and, in turn,  


how different groups or classes of Egyptians have been represented therein—\(^{19}\) they have largely ignored the territorial question because the intellectuals and nationalists whom they study themselves paid little heed to it. As numerous scholars have shown, the major ideological thrust of Egyptian nationalism in this period was not the defense of the nation’s territorial integrity, but rather the assertion of a strong anti-colonial identity, articulated most typically through the language of modernity. Moreover, insofar as nationalist intellectuals did concern themselves at all with the place of geography in the formation of a modern Egyptian identity, it was to assert a vague territorial discourse predicated on the “Unity of the Nile Valley.”\(^{20}\) This was an interesting paradox: leaving aside the seemingly more obvious question of how to conceive the territorial bounds of the Egyptian nation (which would ostensibly entail some consideration of the vast swaths of desert space on each side of the Nile), these intellectuals instead posited a complex


\(^{20}\) Omnia El Shakry has called this discursive move an “ideological bid for territorial integrity based on ethnographic and geographic claims.” El Shakry notes that this discourse gained currency in the 1890s, against the backdrop of Great Britain’s reassertion of military control in the Sudan, which culminated in the signing of the Condominium agreement in 1899. Most of her work, however, focuses on this geographical ideology in the 1930s and 1940s. Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 74-83.
dialectical definition of territorial Egyptianness that hinged on their country’s putative inseparability from the Sudan.\textsuperscript{21}

The emergence of the “Unity of the Nile Valley” trope in the 1890s was part and parcel of a broader interest in geography that burgeoned in Egyptian elite and intellectual circles over the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1875, as part of his larger initiative to widen the breadth of Cairo’s literary and cultural institutions and promote Egypt as a place of serious scientific learning, the Egyptian Khedive Isma‘il (r. 1863-79) established the Société Khédiviale de Géographie d’Égypte—a salon that was home to an array of explorers and amateur scholars (European as well as Egyptian). From the very outset, however, the Society’s major thrust was not to research the geography of Egypt as such—which it seems largely to have taken for granted—but rather to provide an intellectual edifice to support Egypt’s colonial projects in Central Africa and the Sudan (most typically by sponsoring exploratory expeditions and ethnographic studies). In this way, the geographical knowledge produced under the Society’s auspices served its members’ underlying ideological aim of asserting Egypt’s modernity and thereby setting it apart from the rest of the African continent in civilizational terms.\textsuperscript{22} As the Society’s first president, German geographer George Schweinfurth, put it, “the Geographical Society of Cairo has all the advantages offered by a country which on the one hand is in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Eve Troutt Powell’s pathbreaking work on Egypt as a “colonized colonizer” explores this dialectical construction of Egyptianness vis-à-vis the Sudan in depth. See Eve Troutt Powell, \textit{A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
\item This idea that Egypt consistently sought to set itself apart from the rest of Africa through its colonial projects \textit{in Africa} is another salient theme that emerges in Troutt Powell’s \textit{A Different Shade of Colonialism}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
intimate contact with European civilization, and on the other touches the most mysterious lands of central Africa. We are here at the gateway of the unknown.”\textsuperscript{23}

If the Society—which represented the vanguard of Egyptian geographical knowledge production at the time—thus remained so narrowly oriented towards the African interior, the few Egyptian scholarly works from this period that did in fact address the geography of Egypt proper were similarly vague or casual in their conceptions of territory east or west of the Nile. Muhammad Amin Fikri’s pioneering 1879 treatise *Jughrafiyat Misr* (“The Geography of Egypt”) is a key case in point. As historian Yoav Di-Capua has suggested, Fikri’s volume was perhaps the first Egyptian work of “national geography” to embrace the “European territorial concept” of nationhood;\textsuperscript{24} as such, the very first line of the book presents the so-called “natural” boundaries of Egypt, “a great state in the Northeast of Africa.” And yet, despite this promise of more precise territorial definition, Fikri’s boundary descriptions are extremely ambiguous: most interesting for my purposes, Egypt’s western boundary in his view is simply considered to be “The Libyan Desert.”\textsuperscript{25} Likewise, a Geographical Dictionary of


\textsuperscript{24} Di-Capua argues that Fikri’s work was actually an aberration for the period, given that it broke from the time-honored Ottoman-Egyptian *khitat* geographical tradition that approached space and territory primarily through the lens of city-hinterland relationships, and which was exemplified most famously by ‘Ali Mubarak in his *al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiya al-Djadida li-Misr al-Qahira wa-Muduniha wa-Biladhiha al-Qadima wal-Shahira*. Di-Capua suggests, in fact, that Mubarak’s work (like many others written in the same vein) was a wholly self-conscious rejection of Fikri’s attempt to introduce European geographical norms into the Egyptian scene. Timothy Mitchell underscores this point that Mubarak was decidedly uninterested in writing anything akin to a national geography: the subtitle of the work, “The Description of Cairo and its Towns and Villages” reflects his focus on the capital city’s relationship with its productive hinterland. Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 48-9; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Technopolitics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 345 [f.n. 9].

\textsuperscript{25} The full first line of the text, describing Egypt’s natural boundaries, is as follows: “Egypt is a great state in the Northeast of Africa. Its natural boundary to the north is the Mediterranean Sea; to the east it is the
Egypt published two decades later still fell back on the amorphous formulation that, “properly speaking…Egypt is bordered on the West by the Libyan Desert,” and that “the Western frontier does not have precise limits.”

Di-Capua’s recent book on the evolution of the Egyptian historical profession offers a compelling model for how to work past this prevailing scholarly tendency to take Egypt’s emergence as a modern political unit for granted. As Di-Capua demonstrates, the idea that the primary category of historical analysis for Egyptian intellectuals would be the modern Egyptian nation-state was by no means a foregone conclusion, but rather was the product of the fundamental changes in conceptions of time, space, and subjectivity wrought by the steady onset of historicist ideas beginning in the 1890s. For Di-Capua, it was only the impact of historicism on prevailing understandings of these three “dimensions of reality” that “enabled the gradual appearance of modern history as a new literary genre,” displacing older, more traditional forms of historical knowledge and thus allowing a powerful new view of modern Egypt to develop. Although Di-Capua recognizes that this was a slow process, during which a range of transitional hybrid modes of historical writing made a brief appearance, he argues that the transformation was largely complete by around 1905: from this point on, most studies of modern Egypt would now be “biographies of an autonomous, singular, self-referential nation,” which could be “exclusively harnessed for the cause of distinctive territorial nationalism.”

In this dissertation, I echo Di-Capua’s call to historicize the process through which Egypt came to be understood and then consistently represented as a “politically

---

Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea; to the west it is the Libyan Desert; and to the south it is the lands of Nubia.” Muhammad Amin Fikri, Jughrafiyat Misr (Cairo: Matba’at Wadi al-Nil, 1879), 1.

27 Di-Capua, Gatekeepers, 28-9.
28 Ibid., 9; 63.
defined space.” In a sense, I aim to unsettle established underlying notions of Egypt’s territority just as Di-Capua does for its historicity. At the same time, however, I disagree with Di-Capua’s claim that the modern territorial definition of Egypt (which in his view included the closing of the country’s “desert frontiers”) was complete by the first decade of the twentieth century, providing a clear backdrop to the new historiography that Egyptian scholars sought to write. According to Di-Capua,

By 1905, the once unbounded kingdom of Muhammad ‘Ali took the familiar shape of Egypt without the Sudan, almost exactly as we know it today. Gone were the huge desert frontiers with their ambiguous political status. Bit by bit, the vast overlapping domains were marked. As the twentieth century progressed, each piece of land gradually came under direct political sovereignty. No marginal areas were allowed. The entire desert was claimed. People and tribes were squeezed into well-defined geographical categories...Egypt was now thought of as one geographical unit, and not merely as ‘Greater Cairo.’ The old category of geographical knowledge began to be displaced. History, once loosely committed to a vague sense of territory, was now taking place in an arbitrarily marked geographical space called Egypt, clearly defined and with no quotation marks.

This interpretation is too facile. Even if Di-Capua is right to suggest that older traditions of representing Egyptian space had largely been displaced at this time by new, more overtly nationalist modes of geographical thought, it does not follow that this revised conception of territority was at all close to being worked out on the ground. What Di-Capua is charting here is essentially the crystallization of a certain updated discourse of Egypt’s territorial integrity in the decade before World War I that was still completely at odds with the realities of Egyptian administration and sovereignty beyond the Nile Valley. Egyptian intellectuals might have gained a new conceptual stage for the

---

29 Ibid., 62.
30 In Di-Capua’s view, major geopolitical events such as the European partition of Africa, the Anglo-French agreement over the Sudan in 1899, and the Sinai border dispute of 1905-6 were decisive in the crystallization of new conceptions of geographical reality in Egypt.
31 Ibid., 51.
32 Again, for Di-Capua ‘Ali Mubarak’s Khitat represents the prime example of the older “landscape” or geographical almanac tradition that was ultimately eclipsed by modern geography.
unfold

ing of their national history, but the scope of the historical narrative they could craft was still largely constrained by the territorial unevenness intrinsic to the processes of Egyptian nation- and state-building throughout the period.

In this dissertation, I aim to provide a spatial history of what I call the “Egyptian West”—the broad swath of territory comprising the Western Desert and oases as well as the long stretch of Mediterranean coastline from Alexandria to Sollum. Through this history we will see that the Egyptian nation-state was very much still a work-in-progress in the decades prior to World War I. This is intended as more than just an effort to fill in some gaps in the literature by excavating the history of an oft-neglected, sparsely populated part of the country. I argue throughout the dissertation that to neglect Egypt’s peripheral regions and borderlands—of which the lands west of the Nile represent a prime example—is to overlook the host of significant political and social mechanisms that governed the constitution of the modern territorial nation-state in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, mechanisms which have largely been obscured by the powerful myth of Egypt’s geographical unity over time. By unearthing the complex, interactive processes through which both state and nation were articulated in the Egyptian West, I seek to ask broader questions about the nature and meaning of nation-state sovereignty in the period prior to World War I more generally, in Egypt and elsewhere.

33 Even though the deserts and oases comprising the Egyptian West make up two thirds of Egypt’s total territory, only a fraction of Egypt’s population has ever lived there. Today, 99% of Egypt’s population (which is around 80 million) live on only around 5.5% of Egyptian territory.
**Historiographical Considerations**

My research contributes to three main bodies of historical scholarship. Although I will continue to explore the connections between my work and these literatures over the course of the individual chapters that follow, here I will provide an overview of the key historical debates in which I will engage throughout this dissertation.

**Nation-State Space**

The study of nationalism has benefited greatly from the theoretical insights of the so-called “spatial turn” that has animated much of the humanities and social sciences in recent years.³⁴ Beyond Benedict Anderson’s basic contention that nationalism must be understood in large part as a particular feat of the spatial imagination,³⁵ historians of the nation-state have adopted a range of critical approaches to highlight the fabrications and concealments that the consolidation of a nation-state as a bounded political territory inevitably entails. Many of these approaches center around the various technologies that states harnessed in support of the new ideology of territoriality that became the ascendant principle governing the organization of political space around the globe starting in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

Charles Maier defines territoriality as “the properties, including power, provided by the control of bordered political space, which until recently at least created the

---

³⁴ Barney Warf and Santa Arias, eds., *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009). As David Harvey (among many others) has suggested, the deployment of “space as a keyword” across such a wide array of disciplines has inevitably led to the muddling of even the most basic conceptual vocabulary, to the point that different scholarly approaches to space and spatiality often have very little in common. See: David Harvey, “Space as a Keyword” in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, edited by Noel Castree and Derek Gregory (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). A broader discussion of the expansive field of “spatial history”—which would include the prolific body of scholarship by neo-Marxist scholars such as Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, who focus on the spatial rescaling intrinsic to modern capitalism—lies outside the scope of this introduction. I focus here instead on those works of spatial history that deal more specifically with conceptions and constructions of nation-state territoriality.

framework for national and often ethnic identity.”36 Although the world was in fact organized around empires, not nation-states, for much of the period that Maier construes as the axial age of territoriality (circa 1860 until 1970 or 1980),37 Maier suggests that the new territorial ideal was internalized by both imperial and national states—and that this happened almost everywhere at roughly the same time.38 What was at stake was the idea of more active control over bounded political space, however it was carved up, now understood to be charged or “saturated” with potential energy that states could tap to bolster their sovereign capabilities.39 More than just a fixation on the idea of boundedness, then, the new territorial ideal that exercised states in this period also emphasized to a much greater extent what was happening within enclosed borders. From

37 Ibid., 808. Lauren Benton suggests that Maier “exaggerates the power of territoriality” as the paramount organizing principle of the period, particularly in light of the persistence of “spaces of uneven sovereignty” that form the main subject of her recent book (which I treat in depth below). I would suggest, however, that the two approaches need not be seen as mutually exclusive. Maier’s main focus is on territoriality as the modern ideal for the organization of political space, whether or not it could always be effectively implemented on the ground. Maier also conceives of territoriality as a longer-term work-in-progress, and Benton’s analysis stops only a quarter-century into Maier’s periodization. As I will argue below, the history of the Egyptian West in this period can be interpreted as the onset of a slow, creeping (if late-coming) conception of nation-state territoriality in a region that had very much endured as one of the geographical enclaves that Benton describes. See Lauren Benton, A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900 (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010), 7 [f.n. 13].
38 In this way, Maier is explicitly rejecting a “simple diffusionist model” for explaining how and why a similar “paradigm shift” towards territoriality occurred around the globe at roughly the same historical moment. This view vaguely echoes that of Manu Goswami, who challenges Partha Chatterjee’s critique of Benedict Anderson’s own diffusionist model for the rise and spread of nationalism by revisiting Anderson’s idea of the “modular nation form.” Although Goswami, like Chatterjee, rejects Anderson’s formulation insofar as it pegs non-European nationalisms as mere derivative discourses, she deems it necessary to revive modular nationalism—albeit with a much more fluid and dynamic model underpinning it—to account for the proliferation of a certain common cauldron of nationalist tropes and practices everywhere at roughly the same time. The strong “family resemblances” between nineteenth-century nationalisms around the globe thus spur Goswami to probe the complex “multiple social modalities” through which the territoriality of the nation-state was produced in such a wide variety of contexts in this period. See Manu Goswami, “Rethinking the Modular Nation Form: Toward a Sociohistorical Conception,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 44 (2002): 771-76; Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).
39 Maier draws a direct link between this new “conception of energized space” and concomitant developments in scientific thought—for example Maxwell’s field theory of space as “potentially energized.” Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century,” 818-21.
now on, imperial or national territory would be “envisaged not just as an acquisition or as a security buffer, but as a decisive means of power and rule.”

As such, historians have paid increasing attention to the array of technologies and discursive practices that various states have mobilized to realize this new spatial ideal of the era, first bounding and then activating the full extent of their territory. In the case of many states in the nineteenth century, this often meant working to link up the discrete regions of the inchoate national polity to an unprecedented degree. Eugen Weber’s classic *Peasants into Frenchmen* marks an early attempt to chart this process. The limitations of his modernization model aside, the work showed clearly how the government of the French Third Republic, by deploying certain powerful modern tools of statecraft—roads and railroad networks; compulsory national schooling; universal conscription—made great strides towards fostering a more cohesive national identity across the bulk of sovereign French territory. By 1914, state and nation were effectively rendered coterminous across a far more unified political space.

The practice of mapping—perhaps the paramount technology undergirding the new territoriality in the nineteenth century—has been a particularly fruitful area for historical research on the production of modern nation-state space. Ever since the emergence of a new “critical cartography” in the mid-1980s—propelled by geographers such as J.B. Harley and Denis Wood, who sought to bring the theoretical insights of

---

40 Ibid., 818.
42 Critiques of Weber’s work abound, but typically center around two broad points. One is that the work is too teleological: Weber, overemphasizing the power of the tools of modernization to shape national consciousness, ignored the sundry ways in which local or regional identities could continue to coexist alongside Frenchness. Second, Weber’s model is too top-down, seeing the directional arrow moving only from the center outward, and thus ignoring the key role that local mediators played in negotiating regional and national identities. I will re-visit Weber’s work in Chapter 1, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of his model for conceptualizing the Egyptian periphery.
Foucault and Derrida to bear on a field that, up to that point, had largely taken its own key texts, maps, to be completely value-neutral—historians have been keen to illustrate the sundry ways in which maps and mapping have been used as powerful “weapons” or tools of state formation and nationalism. The idea of the critical cartographers that maps, rather than reflecting some objective spatial reality, actually make that reality played right into the hands of historians of both nation and empire seeking to decode the representational modes and practices that various agents of state power deployed to shoehorn the messy configurations of social relations that actually exist on the ground, behind the map, into some ideal-type bounded political community.

My own project is indebted to three different spatial histories of the nation-state, all of which embrace methods from the new critical cartography to offer unique insights into how national territoriality was conceived, constituted, represented, and enforced beginning in the late-nineteenth century. Thongchai Winichakul’s *Siam Mapped* represents perhaps the most cogent study to date of the power of maps and mapping to

---

45 Several of the most innovative such studies pay close attention to the work of explorers, mapmakers and surveyors as they moved through the spaces it was their job to mark, fix, and represent as known or possessed. Ironically, by following these ostensible agents of modern territoriality so closely as they went about their work, these historians find themselves in a privileged position to demonstrate the set of paradoxes, tensions, and erasures that make the processes of trying to capture “objective” spatial reality and render it legible so fundamentally elusive. See D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987); Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); Raymond Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).
46 Timothy Mitchell describes this as a process of the nation-state forcing people to “reduce the significance of those interconnections, exchanges, genealogies, hegemonies, moral systems, and migrations that defined a social landscape whose horizons reached beyond what became the boundaries of the nation.” Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 180.
reify a sense of national identity.⁴⁷ The overarching theme of Winichakul’s rich study is how the mapped image of modern Thailand, within its present-day borders—what he terms the nation’s “geo-body”—emerged as the primary discursive tool working in the service of Thai nationalism, to the point that this image is now seen as an inviolable facet of modern Thainess. As Winichakul demonstrates, it is the authority and presumed authenticity of map knowledge that makes the inscription of the Thai geo-body so hugely impactful: “The geo-body of a nation is merely an effect of modern geographical discourse whose prime technology is a map. To a considerable extent, the knowledge about the Siamese nationhood has been created by our conception of Siam-on-the-map, emerging from maps and existing nowhere apart from the map.”⁴⁸

While I owe a great debt to Winichakul’s insights concerning the impact and durability of bounded political space as a key discursive component of modern nation-state formation, my own spatial history of western Egypt seeks to examine the inner workings of the territorial ideal in a context in which statesmen and nationalists did not have the advantage of—or seem to even want—a clear-cut mapped image of the nation to serve their larger interests.⁴⁹ Throughout this dissertation, then, I explore the meaning of


⁴⁸ Winichakul, Siam Mapped, 17.

⁴⁹ As Timothy Mitchell has observed, officials of the colonial state in Egypt were focused on a very different sort of mapping. From 1898-1907, the Egyptian Survey Department worked to produce a “great land map of Egypt,” intended to “determine, for every square meter of the country’s agricultural land the owner, the cultivator, the quality of the soil, and the proper rate of tax.” This was a key update on past attempts at cadastral mapping on the part of the state, particularly given that surveyors used trigonometrical survey methods for the first time for this project. The mapping that interested the state was therefore not national mapping (which in any case would be hamstrung in Egypt’s deserts by the difficulties of the terrain); rather, it was mapping in the service of administrative efficiency and revenue collection. The Egyptian locales that mattered were the ones that were productive; the deserts, which had little perceived value, had no place in the great land map. As such, the maps of Egypt that were so sought after in the period of the British occupation ended up reifying a vision of Egyptian space in which what lay beyond the Nile mattered very little. Mitchell, Rule of Experts, 9; 85-94.
an Egyptian nationalism largely bereft of a clear conception of its own geo-body. At the same time, I examine the productive tensions that resulted when various state actors, once finally compelled to invoke the need for bounded space, brushed up against the reality of Egypt’s territorial amorphousness in its western borderland.

In a manner similar to *Siam Mapped*, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet’s *Frontier Fictions* shows for the case of Iran that the emergence of modern nationalism was contingent upon the ability of Iranians to see the nation—that “imagination alone did not account for…[the] endurance or widespread acceptance” of nations.\(^5^0\) At the same time, however, Kashani-Sabet goes deeper than Winichakul in her history of the Iranian geo-body, arguing that Winichakul’s notion of maps as “models for reality” only “tells half the story.” Adopting the idea of Iranian land (*Iranzamin*) as the key bridge between the visual as well as material aspects of the imagined community, Kashani-Sabet argues that “maps were also models of reality, however flawed or improvised, for otherwise such spatial classifications would have proved superfluous and effete. Reality provided some kind of fodder for the mapping imagination.”\(^5^1\)

Kashani-Sabet’s contention here that the reifying potential of maps was immaterial without some deeper assumed sense of the nation’s geography undergirding it is a key insight that I embrace in my own work. After all, a basic conceit of my project is that some profound sense of Egyptian land over time—the unshakeable identification of a political community called Egypt with Cairo and the Nile Valley—is what enabled the more specifically territorial dimension of nationalism to remain buried for so long.

Kashani-Sabet’s study is in fact the closest analog to my own spatial history in several

---


\(^{51}\) Ibid., 8.
key respects, especially since in Iran, too, a “fiction of territorial unity”\textsuperscript{52} since antiquity persisted that masked the fraught and contingent process through which Iran transformed from an abstraction into a modern nation-state.

My dissertation departs from Kashani-Sabet’s analysis, however, by emphasizing not the evolution of nationalist discourse \textit{based on} passionate ideas about land, but rather the complex encounter between such discourse and the land itself. Indeed, what I suggest is missing in Kashani-Sabet’s important study is an attempt to move beyond the realm of discourse and geographical knowledge production in order to consider how the Iranian state actively sought to work out the idea of its national territoriality on the ground—particularly in the various peripheries of the nation-state.\textsuperscript{53} If Kashani-Sabet is right to emphasize Iran’s borderlands as key tropes in a nationalist discourse that derives much of its vigor from the irredentism tied up with the Qajar Empire’s consistent pattern of territorial loss beginning in 1804, her analysis of how “Iran…came into existence as a result of frontier f(r)ictions and fluctuations”\textsuperscript{54} seems incomplete without some consideration of the lived experience of national territoriality in these marginal domains of Iranian sovereignty. As I argue throughout this dissertation, the Egyptian nation-state came into existence in its western borderland not simply through “cultural reinterpretations of the land,”\textsuperscript{55} but rather through the Egyptian and Ottoman states’ complex, interactive process of spatial negotiation with the people who lived on it.

If Raymond Craib’s innovative \textit{Cartographic Mexico} takes a similar point of departure as both \textit{Siam Mapped} and \textit{Frontier Fictions}—the production of a deceptively

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{53} This critique echoes Timothy Mitchell’s call to shift our attention “from the history of nationalism, as it is conventionally written, to the political process…[of] making the nation.” Mitchell, \textit{Rule of Experts}, 182.
\textsuperscript{54} Kashani-Sabet, \textit{Frontier Fictions}, 14.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 10.
complete, “authentic” map of the new (post-independence) Mexican nation-state in the
nineteenth century—the book goes on to posit what is in my view a more satisfying
approach to the construction of nation-state space. Unlike these other two works, Craib’s
spatial history of modern Mexico moves beyond an analysis of the discursive power of
the national map to explore how national territoriality was actually realized on the
ground. Though Craib, too, invokes the theoretical insights and vocabulary of the critical
cartographers to demonstrate how maps—never transparent representations of territory—
actually embed and conceal a range of “material practices of power,” he is most
interested in the set of interactive social processes and negotiations between various
actors that were at the heart of the Mexican state’s projects to map the land.

Although I do not pay the careful attention that Craib does to the particular
experience of surveyors in the service of state-sponsored mapping projects—mainly
because there were none in the Egyptian West during the period prior to the First World
War—I am particularly drawn to Cartographic Mexico as an example of spatial history
for the way that it emphasizes the role of local agency and appropriation in the process of
state- and nation formation. Craib writes,

Villagers in central Veracruz, for example, were not the prescient antecedents of
our contemporary champions of ‘third’ or ‘in-between’ spaces, reveling in anti-
essentialist counternarratives. They proffered their own fixations regarding
property, territory, identity, and history. Indeed, this is precisely why those being
‘mapped’ did not simply ignore or acquiesce and why surveys were so often very
charged encounters…In many instances village officials were the surveyors, a
useful reminder that ‘the state’ and ‘the local’ were hardly mutually exclusive
domains. But even when the surveyors came from without, villagers did not
necessarily either comply with or resist the various projects these individuals had
been charged with completing. At times, of course, they did, but in many
instances they appropriated and rearticulated various aspects of these projects for
their own purposes.57

---

56 Craib, Cartographic Mexico, 7.
57 Ibid., 12-13.
The approach I take throughout this dissertation is quite similar, though the state projects introduced into the Egyptian West that local actors alternately embraced, resisted, negotiated, and appropriated were, crucially, never about mapping or bounded territoriality as such. Rather, the multiplicity of state- and nation-making projects that form the core of my project were consistently oriented towards the projection of different types of sovereignty and authority into the West. Moreover, I also seek to extend Craib’s analysis by describing how, in the case of the Egyptian West, the interactivity that was so fundamental to the process of state formation took place between a surprising array of actors: not only the agents of several different states (British, Egyptian, Italian, Ottoman), but also a range of non-state actors (Bedouin sheikhs, members of the Sanusi brotherhood, local merchants) and even what I call “quasi-state actors”—most notably the Khedive Abbas Hilmi II (r. 1892-1914), whose interests in the region (as I will demonstrate below) were not always in line with those of the rest of the Egyptian Government.

Borderland

If this dissertation is therefore very much about the constitution of Egypt as a modern territorial nation-state, it is also about a region that in key respects remained something other than Egypt throughout much of the period under study. This region was a borderland linking two territorial abstractions: the Ottoman province of Benghazi, and an amorphous political community called Egypt (which remained de jure part of the Ottoman Empire regardless of how much de facto autonomy it had experienced since 1841). The initial part of this dissertation’s title—Between Empire and Nation—is in fact meant to reflect two related aspects of the region’s political and spatial ambiguity prior to
World War I. First, by tracking the Egyptian Government’s engagement with this borderland, we gain a clearer idea of what Egypt as a work-in-progress actually looked like—how fundamental issues of territoriality and sovereignty were being actively worked out on the ground during a period when Egypt was still somewhere on the blurry spectrum between forming part of an empire and existing as its own independent nation. At the same time, the title is meant to convey a sense of the borderland as a place apart—a betwixt-and-between region, with a distinctive cultural, political, and social identity unto its own—that did not really fit easily into either an Egyptian or Ottoman mold.

I use the term “borderland” in two distinct senses. First, drawing on the influential work of Peter Sahlins, Michiel Baud, and Willem Van Schendel, I understand the study of borderlands to offer a necessary counterpoint to the long lineage of studies on nation-building and state-formation that view these processes as emanating solely from the center outward. As Baud and Van Schendel suggest, “Borderland studies offer a way of correcting the distortions inherent in state-centered national histories. They can be powerful exactly because they dispute the territoriality to which modern states lay claim.”58 By taking the perspective of the borderland society itself—a regional approach encompassing the views from both sides of any given border—such histories cast conventional narratives of state incorporation in an entirely new light. They highlight the vital role that local actors in the borderland—oriented away from the center, and embedded in a distinctively regional social and cultural landscape—always played in mediating the territorialization of nation-states at the margins of their domains. Sahlins’s seminal work on the construction of French and Spanish national identities in the

Pyrenees borderland marks perhaps the brightest example of how it is always a “dialectic of local and national interests” that produces “the boundaries of national territory.”

In a similar fashion, I examine the social history of the Egyptian/Libyan borderland in the decades before World War I as a means to highlight the key role that local non-state actors played in accommodating the Egyptian and Ottoman states as they sought to extend their reach, however haltingly, into the region. Unlike the case of the Pyrenees that Sahlins documents, however, the steady pattern of state/society interactions that was established in the Egyptian/Libyan borderland at this time did not produce a definitive boundary line, nor did it yield the emergence of anything approaching two clear-cut national identities. Instead, what I chart throughout this dissertation is the dialectical process through which the interactivity between state and non-state actors produced a sharper sense of “borderedness”—by which I mean a shared spatial awareness of two mutually exclusive zones of political membership—despite the sustained lack of (and thus in lieu of) any clear territorial definition in the region. This process was essentially one of negotiation: state actors found themselves forced to adapt to the distinctive social and spatial practices of the borderland population—most saliently, the constant mobility of various Bedouin tribes across the putative “border”—just as local

---


60 Throughout this dissertation the terms “Libya” and “Libyan” will sometimes be used as a shorthand for the lands west of Egypt that, until 1911, comprised the Ottoman provinces of Benghazi, Tripoli, and Fezzan. There was of course no Libya, properly speaking, until after World War II (though Italy had introduced the idea of “Italian Libya” in 1934 as a means to unite the three provinces nominally).

61 In this way I am adapting Baud and Van Schendel’s definition of “borders” (as opposed to frontiers or borderlands or boundaries) as “political divides” that ultimately become “markers” of the territorial consolidation of states. Baud and Van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History,” 214. See Chapter 5 below for a fuller discussion of the various terms most commonly used in the borderland historiography.
actors adapted to the new political conditions created by the creeping encroachment of the Egyptian, Ottoman, and (later) Italian states in the region.

The second sense in which I employ the term “borderland” in fact stems from this new climate of inter-state (or inter-imperial) interactivity that set in beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. I take my lead here from Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron’s seminal essay on the concept of the borderland in North American historiography. Adelman and Aron argue that the term “borderland”—not to be conflated with “frontier”—must be reserved to refer to the unique spatial configurations that were forged in a context of intense imperial competition over pre-national territory. In other words, a “frontier”—which Adelman and Aron define simply as a “borderless” zone of cultural and geographic intermixing—only emerges as a borderland when the interactivity between various imperial powers transforms the region into one of open political contestation. At the same time, in their view, it is precisely the rivalry between the contesting states in the borderland zone that opens up new political opportunities for the indigenous populations, allowing them “room to maneuver and preserve some element of autonomy.”

In the same spirit, I argue that the period from 1841-1911 witnessed the transformation of the Egyptian West from a nebulous, erstwhile borderless frontier into a contested borderland. If my analysis stops short of detailing the ultimate shift from borderland to two politically ossified “bordered lands,” which Adelman and Aron document for three cases in North America, I still find their framework to be particularly useful for explaining the gradual, fraught, and interactive process through which a

---

general sense of borderedness between two different (if still abstract) political communities was internalized in the social and spatial practices of state and non-state actors alike. I argue that this transformation occurred in two distinct phases.

The first, lasting from 1841 until around the turn of the century, was defined by the interplay and competition between the Ottoman and Egyptian states as they each sought, with varying degrees of success, to extend their sovereign reach into a marginal region that had largely been left to its own devices in the past. As this period wore on, both sides developed a keener awareness of the region as a zone of contested sovereignty that threw the deeper ambiguities inherent in their political relationship ever since the 1841 firman into high relief. Moreover, true to Adelman and Aron’s model, the heightened political activity of both states in the region created new opportunities for local actors in the borderland to play the sides off one another as a means to arrogate more authority and autonomy. It was precisely over the span of this first phase of borderland formation that the Sanusiyya Brotherhood emerged as the predominant power brokers in the region, largely by filling the de facto authority vacuum that had arisen at the margins of Ottoman and Egyptian sovereignty. As I demonstrate throughout the dissertation, the Sanusiyya continued to loom large as major political players in the pre-War period, alternately resisting and accommodating the larger designs of the Ottoman and Egyptian governments to extend their control over the region.

The period from around 1900 until the outbreak of the Ottoman-Italian War in October 1911 witnessed the onset of a new, more critical phase of borderland formation. If the first phase had been defined largely by the interplay between the Ottomans, Egyptians, and the Sanusiyya, the eruption of new players onto the scene after 1900 only
intensified the competition for control over the borderland. On one hand, the Khedive Abbas Hilmi II sought throughout the period to bolster his own personal authority in the Egyptian West by implementing an array of development projects, as well as by cultivating tight political bonds with key local notables in the oasis of Siwa. On the other hand, the Italian Government—setting its sights on an eventual colonial occupation of the Ottoman Libyan provinces—began to assert a stronger presence in the region, which in turn drew the British deeper into the fray. Moreover, this contestation was set against the backdrop of heightened conflict between many of the region’s Bedouin tribes, which forced the various state actors to respond and thus only served to amplify the burgeoning sense of a border crisis in the region. Ultimately, I argue that it was the complex, contested, and multilayered interactivity between all of these different actors, with their own divergent interests and spatial practices—and thus not any clear resolution of the specific territorial questions that arose—that led to the crystallization of a more distinct sense of borderedness in the borderland.

*Sovereignty*

Given both the lack of clear territorial definition in the Egyptian/Libyan borderland throughout the pre-1911 period, as well as the multiplicity of actors and interests that were openly vying for attention as it evolved, then how can we characterize the nature or practice of sovereignty in this region? Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to square such a case with more traditional political theory that clings to an “ideal-type” model equating sovereignty with the state. Although, as I have alluded to above, the Ottoman and Egyptian governments were certainly increasingly concerned with the projection of state sovereignty into this amorphous, interstitial space, this process was
only part of a much broader and more layered political field in which different conceptions and practices of sovereignty were being worked out on the ground. A final objective of this dissertation, then, is to demonstrate how the case of Egypt’s western borderland contributes to a burgeoning body of scholarship on the nature of sovereignty that de-emphasizes the primacy of the state in favor of a much more dynamic and fluid model.

If an older generation of anthropologists already cautioned long ago against fixating too much on static notions of the “sovereign state,” Lauren Benton’s recent study on conceptions of sovereignty and law in European overseas empires has gone much further in pushing the bounds of the scholarly debate. One of the particular strengths of Benton’s work is the way she revisits and revives key theoretical writings on sovereignty from the early modern period, arguing (against the grain) for their continued import well into the nineteenth century. In Benton’s view, these works are indispensable as critical lenses for understanding what for her is the best-kept secret of empires around the globe: the fact that the territorial sovereignty they exercised was always fundamentally uneven, constrained by the specific challenges that disparate, often treacherous geographies and landscapes (as well as the social relations they encapsulated) posed to the unfolding of imperial expansion. This meant in practice that imperial administrators were forced to brook the persistence of what Benton alternately terms “anomalous legal spaces of empire” or “enclave territories”—distinct geographical zones that remained outside the purview of firm imperial rule. What Benton finds so illuminating about the work of early modern theorists such as Hugo Grotius and Jean

---

64 Benton, Search for Sovereignty, 8-23, 222-27.
Bodin, then, is the way they grappled towards a conception of sovereignty completely divorced from the idea of territorial mastery. Under no illusions about the capacity of states to extend their power uniformly over the infinite spaces of the globe, these thinkers found other ways to address the problems that their governments encountered in the messy trenches of empire.  

I am particularly indebted to the recent work of anthropologist Louisa Lombard, who adapts Benton’s analysis of the early modern political-legal theorists in order to develop her own nuanced theory of sovereignty to fit the case of the Central African Republic in the twentieth century. Central to Lombard’s analysis is the older idea first introduced by Grotius that sovereignty has never been some unitary or monolithic charge of the state—defined by its totalizing dominion (in the sense of “ownership”) over space—but was always fundamentally fluid and multivalent, expressed only ever in relational terms. This insight in turn leads Lombard to embrace Bodin’s notion of “marks of sovereignty,” which she defines alternately as “modes of authority exercised in relation to others,” and as “capabilities” allowing different actors “to pursue a project of authority over people, space, or resources.” Lombard argues that such a focus on tracking different “configurations of sovereign capabilities” has a number of advantages:

We should make the constitution of sovereignty an object of empirical analysis by producing cartographies of the semi-autonomous authorities that different governing actors claim for themselves and their institutions. This would have the benefit of letting us see how what qualifies as a ‘mark of sovereignty’ has changed through time in particular places. It would also provide a rubric for incorporating the different modes of territorialization at work in the constellations of governing entities that jump scales from localized projects to global discourses and capital-rich hubs. Further, tracking marks of sovereignty makes visibility an explicit element of study. That is, to refer to marks of sovereignty signals a process of qualification…it has to do with how a governing

---

65 Ibid., 131-7, 288-290.
entity becomes recognized as bearing sovereign capabilities and thus incorporates relationality into sovereignty. 67

Following Lombard’s lead, I suggest that the Egyptian western borderland can in fact be viewed as a crucible of competing or overlapping “sovereign capabilities” harnessed by different types of actors across the region’s different settings. Adopting such an approach enables us to make more sense of the various private projects that the Khedive Abbas Hilmi II pursued in the West, for instance. These activities were not, as colonial officials contended, merely another manifestation of the Khedive’s unfortunate proclivity for greed or power-mongering, and thus wholly out-of-step with the progress of rule of law in the country. Rather, these personal projects constituted a particular mark of sovereignty in a region where the institutional capacity of the Egyptian Government was still extremely uneven. Moreover, the process I document in Chapter 3 whereby the Khedivial mark of sovereignty emerged alongside and often trumped Egyptian institutional marks serves as an apt test case for Lombard’s idea of sovereign “qualification.” What were the different ways in which the local population in Siwa recognized these competing marks as more or less authoritative—or more or less sovereign? 68

67 Ibid., 19.
68 It should be noted that my analysis of the Khedivial mode or mark of sovereignty diverges completely from the way that Samera Esmeir deals with this theme in her recent study of colonial law in Egypt. Esmeir, largely following the theoretical insights of Giorgio Agamben, consistently posits a distinction between “sovereign power” and the colonial “rule of law.” Although Esmeir ultimately tries to collapse the dichotomy by showing how “sovereign” modes persisted and in fact continued to undergird the colonial legal regime (despite discourse to the contrary), she inexplicably still holds onto the idea that “sovereignty” must necessarily refer to one kind of practice of power—that which is personal, patrimonial, even “despotic.” Esmeir’s main example of the “sovereign spaces” that persisted even after 1882 are thus the large landed estates that, no longer the sole province of the Khedive, were owned now by “many sovereigns in Egypt.” While I understand that the aim of Esmeir’s study is wholly different than my own—and that, as a theorist of law, she must hew closely to the key thinkers she is engaging—I still find her deployment of the term “sovereignty” in such a limited way to be clunky and unhelpful, mostly for the way it squeezes out the positive valences of the notion of Khedivial authority, and leaves aside the question of how power is projected over far-reaching space. By expanding the spatial bounds of what we mean by Egypt—and,
Lombard’s work is also extremely useful for the way it posits Benton’s territorial enclaves as sites where we can observe the interplay between “centralizing” and “non-centralizing” marks of sovereignty. In this way, Lombard takes issue with much political science literature that remains locked into a more one-dimensional framework of central state encroachment and local resistance, exemplified most recently by James C. Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed*. In Lombard’s view, adopting a more fluid conception of sovereignty along the lines outlined above allows us to see how the processes of centralization and decentralization “generally occur together. One does not have to go so far as to see them as symbiotic…to recognize that they work in tandem: centralizing leaders may also found their rule in personal capacities, may also play with visibility and invisibility, may also maintain mobility—a all hallmarks of non-centralizing trajectories.”

Likewise, the history of the Egyptian western borderland that I narrate throughout this dissertation exemplifies how local spatial practices such as Bedouin mobility—which

following Lombard, the conceptual bounds of what we mean by sovereignty—I argue that it makes much more sense to see the Khedival or patrimonial mode as but one among many overlapping marks of sovereignty intended to project authority at a historical moment when state power was still fundamentally uneven. Indeed, as I show in Chapter 3, the Egyptian West was home to a constellation of “different actors each bearing ‘marks of sovereignty,’” of which the Khedive was one. See Samera Esmeir, “The Work of Law in the Age of Empire: Production of Humanity in Colonial Egypt” (PhD Diss., New York University, 2005), ch. 4; Lombard, “Raiding Sovereignty,” 4.

By embracing this approach, I actually push back against Benton’s idea that the analysis of corridors and enclaves replaces or “moves us beyond a reliance on the concept of borderlands” as a way to describe contested sovereignty (she explicitly calls out Adelman and Aron here). I see my case study as an effort to mesh the two strands of analysis: the region was both an enclave and a borderland. And so Lombard’s notion of centralizing v. non-centralizing sovereign capabilities provides in my view an apt way to unite the two strands. Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*, 37-9.

Scott’s latest work is of particular relevance given that he, too, is grappling with the idea of geographical enclaves as zones of legal as well as political anomaly. Scott posits the mountainous region known as Zomia as an outpost of resistance to the idea of the sovereign territorial nation-state, and frames his case as a clear example of the age-old human propensity to escape or retreat into such enclaves in the face of state territorialization. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009).

constitute key examples of non-centralizing marks of sovereignty\textsuperscript{72}—were inextricably bound up with the centralizing political projects that various state (or quasi-state) actors introduced into the region. Again, if we hold onto the idea of a mark of sovereignty as a capability—rather than sovereignty as a monolithic black box that states simply either have or don’t have—it becomes possible to transcend the discursive dichotomies that states typically pose (between so-called illegible and legible practices, such as nomadism versus settledness) and focus instead on how state and local practices were always mutually constitutive. In this way, I argue, the various centralizing projects that defined the region in this period—the Egyptian state’s attempt to integrate the Western oases into its reformed legal system; the Egyptian Government’s effort to put its administration of Siwa on firmer footing; the Khedive’s bid for political influence in Siwa; the Ottoman state’s resort to taxing the transport of livestock across the provincial “border”; the Egyptian Coast Guard’s intervention in a series of acute Bedouin conflicts—could only ever be articulated by adapting to and embracing local and regional marks of sovereignty that often worked at cross-purposes. Tracking the interplay between these overlapping marks of sovereignty thus enables us to cultivate a deeper understanding of the inner workings of how “political power over space, goods, and people”\textsuperscript{73} was projected into the borderland, as well as the way these processes evolved over time.

\textbf{Chapter Outline}

This dissertation is not intended as a singular or unified narrative of events, but rather as a set of five discrete essays that explore the themes of nation-state space,

\footnote{\textsuperscript{72} Lombard in fact offers a typology of both centralizing and non-centralizing marks of sovereignty. In her view, the key examples of non-centralizing marks are “mobility,” “invisibility,” and “flexibility.” Lombard, “Raiding Sovereignty,” 34-38.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 25.}
borderland formation, and sovereignty in the context of what ultimately became western Egypt and eastern Libya.

In Chapter 1, I present a broad overview of Egyptian state administration in the domains west of the Nile beginning in the mid-nineteenth century on, paying particular attention to the Government’s efforts to define and devise a policy towards its Bedouin population. To this end, I focus on an emergent discourse of Bedouin alterity that became a token of the broader process of state/society negotiation that underlay Egyptian centralization projects. Additionally, drawing on Lauren Benton’s ideas of legal anomaly, I explore the ways in which the persistence of autonomous local judicial institutions in the Egyptian West challenges conventional notions of sovereignty and legal jurisdiction in this period.

Chapter 2 focuses on another aspect of the Egyptian state’s increasingly active engagement with its western domains in the late-nineteenth century. I offer a detailed account of the Egyptian Government’s attempts to bolster its administration in the oasis of Siwa beginning in the mid-1890s, when the state’s rapidly burgeoning bureaucracy endeavored to streamline its provincial authority across Egypt. I argue against conventional models of straightforward local resistance to central state encroachment in the provinces, suggesting instead that the Egyptian state owed whatever inroads it made in Siwa to mediation on the part of the Sanusiyya.

In Chapter 3, by contrast, I switch gears and focus not on the official organs of the Egyptian state, but rather on the ambiguous role that the so-called “Private Bureau” (Daira Khassa) of the Egyptian Khedive Abbas Hilmi II played in cultivating central authority in and developing the West. Drawing on a rare set of sources that I discovered
in the Khedive’s private papers, I argue that the *Daira Khassa* in fact constituted a bona fide political institution—possessed of its own distinctive mark of sovereignty—that Abbas Hilmi II deployed strategically in order to arrogate authority and pursue his own personal political initiatives in Siwa and beyond. The centerpiece of the chapter is my re-interpretation of a little-known murder case in Siwa in 1909, which I suggest illuminates the extent to which the Khedive managed to harness local political forces and practices to project sovereignty in subtle yet hugely impactful ways.

In Chapter 4, I present the view of the borderland from Ottoman Benghazi, highlighting in particular the local government’s consistent struggle to administer the desert interior of the province. I argue that Ottoman officials’ complex encounter with both the nagging problem of Bedouin mobility across the putative border with Egypt, as well as the growth of Sanusi power, was one of the defining factors driving the transformation of conceptions of political sovereignty in the region over the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. I suggest that such an emphasis on the Ottoman side of the borderland is vital for understanding the broader processes of territorialization (in the sense of a heightened awareness of political borderedness) that transformed the entire region. At the same time, I offer a revision to the literature on Ottoman borderlands and frontiers by positing the idea of *internal* borders within the empire as a fruitful avenue of inquiry, particular given Egypt’s unique status as a semi-autonomous province.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I reconstruct the most critical phase of borderland formation—the period in which the Italians, British, Egyptians, and Ottomans all vied to delineate and protect their spheres of sovereignty despite the continued lack of any precise territorial definition. I argue again that local spatial practices and marks of
sovereignty played a major role in drawing the contending state actors further into the fray and compelling them to crystallize their ideas about political membership in the borderland. The chapter concludes with the outbreak of the Ottoman-Italian War in 1911, which—by removing the Ottomans from the equation—thus brought an end to this critical period of multilayered contestation and paved the way towards the final diplomatic settlement of the border question in 1925.
Chapter 1 – Anomalous Egypt? Law and Sovereignty at the Margins of the State in the Long-Nineteenth Century

On November 19, 1924, a group of young Egyptian nationalists shot and killed Sir Lee Stack—the British Governor-General of the Sudan and *sirdar* of the Egyptian army—as he was processing through the streets of Cairo. The political fallout of the assassination has been amply covered in the standard historiography of the Egyptian nationalist movement and Anglo-Egyptian diplomacy. Among other demands, the British residency used the event as a pretext to withdraw all Egyptian military officers from the Sudan. Moreover, the pressure that the British exerted on the Egyptian government in the aftermath of the shooting compelled Prime Minister Sa’ad Zaghlul to resign, leading to the fall of the popular *Wafd* government. The iconic nationalist hero would never reassume the Premiership, and his party never managed to regain the stature it held prior to the assassination.¹

What has typically been omitted from the conventional narrative of the Stack murder, however, is the spatial dimension of the case—the fact that the plot culminated far away from Cairo, in the legally anomalous territory of the Egyptian West. The eight members of the group who orchestrated the attack had planned their getaway in advance: they would disguise themselves as Bedouins, ride the Maryut Railway² out to Hammam, and then continue by car to Marsa Matruh and Sollum, at which point they could escape

---

¹ For a basic account of the Stack murder, see Malak Badrawi, *Political Violence in Egypt, 1910-1924: Secret Societies, Plots, and Assassinations* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000).
² Beginning in 1899, the Egyptian Khedive Abbas Hilmi II brainstormed and personally financed the construction of a railway that would run along the Mediterranean coastline, connecting the outskirts of Alexandria to the furthest reaches of Egypt’s western domains. The project, which became known as the Maryut Railway, is a crucial example of Egyptian *mise en valeur*—a development scheme to re-appropriate and develop unprofitable, marginal territory. See Chapter 3 for an analysis of the railway project.
to Tripoli “through the help of certain Senussi Arab Sheikhs.” Upon getting wind of this plan, the Egyptian police assigned two undercover agents to accompany the suspects in transit. They then arranged for a Sudanese camel corps patrol to hold the train up near Hammam, at which point the police made their move and apprehended the suspects.

The location of the sting operation actually worked in the prosecution’s favor. As Thomas Russell Pasha—Commandant of the Cairo City Police from 1917 to 1946—later explained, “We were particularly anxious to arrest them out West, i.e. in the Area of the Frontiers Administration where they would be outside the Parquet Jurisdiction and therefore holdable for some time without remand.” Later on, the police brought the suspects back from the desert to the outskirts of Cairo but made sure to leave them “each in separate cells with the Frontiers Administration at their Depot in Khanka, thus still keeping them out of the Parquet jurisdiction.” These agents of the Egyptian justice system, then, understood that a different set of legal norms obtained even just west of Cairo. By apprehending the murder suspects and leaving them imprisoned in territory governed not by the standard jurisdiction of the Parquet, but rather by the Frontier Districts Administration—with its ambiguously defined legal authority—they were able to circumvent Egyptian procedural law and deal with their prisoners however they liked.

More than merely filling in gaps and adding some color to the old story, this augmented narrative of the Stack murder—one of the more notorious events in Egypt’s interwar political history—sheds light on the basic geographical unevenness intrinsic to the administration of justice in Egypt at this time. The response of Egyptian officials to

---

3 Middle East Centre Archive, St. Antony’s College (MEC), Thomas Russell Papers (doc. 1/6—“Report of the Cairo Special Branch”).
4 Ibid. See also MEC: Russell Papers (1/14/7-8: Letter to Sir Francis Moore).
5 MEC: Russell Papers (doc. 1/6—“Report of the Cairo Special Branch”).
this instance of political violence against the British reveals that the spaces of the
Egyptian West continued into the 1920s to fall under some sort of special jurisdiction.
What this meant in practice was that they were still, at this late date, governed by a
different set of legal standards than those prevailing in the Nile Valley.

In this chapter, I focus on the development of such unevenness within the
Egyptian judiciary as a means to speak more broadly about the nature of Egyptian
sovereignty in a context of state reform and centralization during the second half of the
nineteenth century. I pay particular attention to the persistence of local, traditional legal
practices and judicial norms in the Western Desert and oases in order to challenge the
accepted wisdom regarding the unity of the Egyptian state and the standardization of its
governing practices and institutions in this period. Drawing on Lauren Benton’s recent
scholarship on enclaves of legal exceptionalism or “anomaly” within empire, I argue that
the difficulties that the Egyptian Government encountered in its attempt to standardize its
judicial institutions at this time illuminates the more fluid, negotiated process through
which central state sovereignty was introduced into Egypt’s marginal spaces. To this
end, I also suggest that the state’s interactions with Egypt’s Bedouin population in this
same period underscore the degree to which Egyptian centralizing projects were
fundamentally beholden to local non-state actors bearing their own distinct marks of
sovereignty.

At the same time, I demonstrate the limits of the category of “Egyptianness” in
the nineteenth century by showing both how the state consistently resorted to a language
of alterity when dealing with Bedouins and other inhabitants of Egypt’s desert
peripheries, and how local actors in turn often appropriated this recurring trope to their
own advantage. My focus in these sections is not exactly whether or not the Egyptian West was in fact “Egyptian”—it was always assumed to be so by authorities in Cairo—but rather what the Government’s fraught attempt to articulate its relationship to the inhabitants of its marginal zones illustrates about Egypt’s sovereign capabilities and mechanisms of state- and nation-building throughout the period more generally. Given the dearth of a cohesive set of sources on these themes for just the Egyptian West, I also incorporate evidence concerning Bedouin populations from other marginal locales. I hope in this way to provide a more impressionistic portrait of Egyptian sovereignty and governance in the country’s desert peripheries from the era of Mehmed Ali through to the first decade of the twentieth century.6

Before I proceed with my analysis, however, it is necessary first to provide a brief overview of the geography of the Egyptian West, as well as some basic background on how the Egyptian Government sought to administer its western domains over the course of the long-nineteenth century.

Geography and Administration in the Egyptian West

Writing in 1931, retired Egyptian Coast Guard officer Andre von Dumreicher suggested that “The Administration of the Nile Valley has been for years as well organized as that of any European country, but the deserts of Egypt had not been

6 Some of the material for this chapter was first presented at various conferences or workshops over the past two years, as work-in-progress talks. These are as follows: “Egypt’s Wild West? Rethinking the Nation at the Western Frontier” (Cairo, Egypt: presented to the American Research Center in Egypt, May 2010); “Egypt’s Wild West? Maps, the Desert, and the Taming of the Western Frontier, 1890-1925” (San Diego, CA: presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, Nov. 2010); “Egypt’s Wild West? Maps, the Desert, and the Taming of the Western Frontier, 1890-1925” (Edinburgh, UK: presented at a workshop held at the University of Edinburgh’s Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World, entitled “The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance,” May 2011). Material from this chapter will be published as part of a collected volume, forthcoming in 2013: Ellis, Matthew H. “Anomalous Egypt? Rethinking the Egyptian State at its Western Margins in the Long 1890s,” in The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance, edited by Marilyn Booth and Anthony Gorman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, forthcoming 2013).
subjected to any interference by the Government until thirty-five years ago, when the Coast Guard Camel Corps was ordered to penetrate into the remotest parts of these wastes. In light of such a claim, it should come as no surprise that the task of tracing the historical evolution of state administration in Egypt’s peripheral provinces is anything but straightforward. If Dumreicher is right to claim that the Egyptian Coast Guard Administration picked up some of the slack for upholding law and order in the deserts after around 1896, it still remains difficult for the historian to discern how Egypt’s marginal territories were governed and policed prior to that date.

This historiographical problem is driven by two different factors. First is the acute lack of any critical mass of documentation about the more remote Egyptian provinces—the Egyptian National Archives in Cairo contain remarkably little evidence concerning the practice of governance outside Cairo and the Nile Valley and Delta for most of the nineteenth century. Second, up until World War I, the inchoate branches of the provincial administration that extended into the Egyptian West did not constitute a single department, but rather were split among several. In short, although for the purposes of my analysis it is often useful to invoke the idea of the Egyptian West as a broad geographical unit, it was not at all viewed as such by the Egyptian Government prior to the First World War.

The fragmentary nature of Egyptian administration in the region throughout the period stemmed from the basic variation in the discrete geographies and landscapes it comprised. From an administrative point of view, the five western oases—with their

---

8 Dumreicher seems to overstate his case, however. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, the Coast Guard Administration (maslaha khafir al-sawahil) did not really begin to assert a strong presence in the Western Desert until the first decade of the twentieth century, when it responded to an eruption of Bedouin conflicts in the region.
long history of sedentary village life—had little to do with the extensive desert spaces that surrounded them on all sides. Similarly, the 25-mile-wide coastal plateau stretching from Alexandria all the way to the heights of Sollum—a region that was home to a smattering of Bedouin encampments and small trading outposts—would ultimately fall into a separate administrative sphere than the barren desert interior. Even the five western oases—which nowadays are typically viewed together (at least in tourism packages)—fell into different administrative orbits depending on their distance from the Nile Valley. Dakhla and Kharga—relatively closer to the Valley than Bahariya, Farafra, and Siwa—historically experienced closer ties to the social and political life of Upper Egypt and were thus administered accordingly.

We can gain some sense of the Egyptian state’s fragmentary approach to governing its marginal domains from C.S. Jarvis, a British officer who served in a variety of desert posts during his career: “The Coastguards had policed the Western Desert and Red Sea District; and the [Ministry of the] Interior had functioned in the oases of Kharga, Dakhla, Bahariya, and Farafra; whilst the Ministries of Justice, Finance, Health, Education, etc., had all supplied officials to perform their various duties.” Yet Jarvis’s breakdown can be pushed even further. It is clear from Muhammad Ramzi’s well-regarded geographical dictionary (al-Qamus al-Jughrafi l’il Bilad al-Misriyah), for example, that the Interior Ministry actually worked through several different Egyptian

---

9 This plateau is known to the Western Sheheibat Bedouinss as al-Diffa. See Cassandra Vivian, The Western Desert of Egypt: An Explorer’s Handbook (Cairo: AUC Press, 2008), 258.

10 Yet there is even some curious geographical ambiguity concerning the relationship between these two oases. Despite their relative proximity to the Nile Valley, the Arabic meanings of Dakhla and Kharga imply that they were given their names based on their orientation not vis-à-vis the Nile, but rather towards the Western Desert. Dakhla, which means “inside” or “inner,” is in fact further west (meaning, further from the Nile Valley) than Kharga, which means “outside” or “outer.” The oasis that is closest to the Nile is thus the “outermost” one. I am grateful to Humphrey Davies for raising this point to my attention.

governorates (sing.: *mudiriyya*) to administer the various oases. Dakhla and Kharga were governed through the *Mudiriyya* of Asyut,\(^{12}\) whereas the oases of Bahariya and Farafra were governed through the *Mudiriyya* of Minya. And Siwa Oasis, which Jarvis left out altogether—as well as western coastal towns such as Marsa Matruh and Sidi Barrani—were ultimately linked up to the *Mudiriyya* of Buhayra. Ramzi’s dictionary unfortunately omits any information shedding light on when, exactly, the various departments of the Egyptian provincial administration annexed each oasis, since the work largely fails to look beyond a series of oasis legislation passed in the first decade of the twentieth century. Such documentary shortsightedness leads Ramzi to reach some faulty conclusions. He claims, for example, that Siwa was officially annexed to the province of Buhayra only in 1898, whereas several documents from the Egyptian archives (which I will discuss below) suggest that Siwa’s (at least nominal) incorporation into the provincial administration must have occurred earlier.\(^{13}\)

The Egyptian government tolerated this fragmented administrative approach to its various western domains until the First World War, when military developments along both Egypt’s eastern and western frontiers compelled authorities to take immediate action. Under pressure from the Ottomans in Sinai and the Sanusiyya in the Western Desert, the British military establishment in Egypt—now in effective control of the country, and citing wartime exigency—made the unilateral decision to streamline Egypt’s


\(^{13}\) Ramzi, *al-Qamus al-Jughrafi...al-Qism al-Thani, al-Juz’ al-Thani*. I will re-visit the question of Siwa’s incorporation below. Siwa’s political history will also be treated in more depth in Chapters 2 and 3.
desert administration by creating a new, unitary governmental authority to protect the beleaguered frontiers. Towards the end of 1916, British High Commissioner Reginald Wingate announced the formation of the Frontier Districts Administration (FDA), which subsumed into its ambit all former administrative and police units that had anything to do with the Western Desert, including the Coast Guard Administration and its celebrated Camel Corps. The FDA would play a crucial role in managing Egypt’s oasis and desert populations long after the end of the conflict, and its organization into three distinct regional units—the Eastern Desert, Western Desert, and Sinai divisions—forms the rough basis for the system of desert administration that exists today.

Jarvis became a leading figure in the FDA in the years after the First World War, ultimately serving as the Governor of the Sinai division after 1923, and he later reflected extremely favorably on the organization’s work in a handful of books he wrote about his career in Egypt. At the same time, however, Jarvis echoed Dumreicher’s assertion that the Egyptian Government’s attempts at administering its desert and oasis territories before the creation of the FDA was a gross “failure”: “the Egyptian Army looked upon service in the desert as penal servitude; the Coastguards, being hard-boiled anti-contrabandists, saw the Arabs only as potential smugglers, whilst the Interior and other Ministries used the deserts as punishment stations…in those days, they [the Egyptians] cared nothing about anything that happened five miles away from the River Nile.”

Lauren Benton argues that “both law and geography produced ways of structuring understandings of empires as configurations of corridors and enclaves, objects of a

---

disaggregated and uneven sovereignty.”¹⁵ In what follows, then, I attempt to flesh out the barebones sketch I have provided of Egyptian administration in the variegated geographies of the West by charting their emergence as enclaves of legal anomaly and uneven sovereignty along the lines Benton describes. Drawing on new documentary evidence from the Egyptian archives as well as several published memoirs and legal treatises and manuals, I develop two primary themes—the persistence of judicial exceptionalism, and the salience of a discourse of alterity to describe Egypt’s Bedouin population—to illuminate the fraught mechanisms by which the Egyptian Government sought to extend the reach of the centralizing state into its marginal domains. Ultimately, I argue that these two threads provide a window onto how Egypt as a work-in-progress necessarily entailed a process of negotiation with local conceptions and practices of sovereignty.

**The Persistence of Judicial Anomaly**

Beginning in the 1870s, the Egyptian Government sought to reorganize the country’s legal system, standardizing judicial institutions and practices across the country and thereby redefining the scope and nature of the state’s jurisdiction. The consequent emergence of a new, modern Egyptian judiciary in this period, marked by the establishment of two new institutions—the Mixed Tribunals and Native Courts—has been given ample treatment in the historiography of Egyptian law.¹⁶ Much less well known, however, is the story of the fraught application of these reforms to the legal


¹⁶ See, for example, Nathan Brown, *The Rule of Law in the Arab World: Courts in Egypt and the Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997); and Will Hanley, “Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2007). Brown’s account emphasizes the aspects of these reforms that he deems to be “modern” and also focuses on the wrangling between Egyptian and British officials to control these new institutions; he does not, however, deal with the state’s attempts to apply the new judicial reforms outside the state’s main locus of authority.
institutions prevalent in the marginal territories of the state, including the desert and oases of the Egyptian West. Much to its chagrin, the Egyptian Government discovered that it lacked the practical means to implement these judicial reforms in the country’s more remote provinces in any meaningful way, in no small part due to the steady resistance posed by the local Bedouin and oasis-dwelling populations. The upshot of this abortive attempt by the Government to streamline its legal system and shore up the legal grounds for its sovereignty throughout the country was the persistence—well into the twentieth century, in fact—of an uneven Egyptian judicial regime that brooked a significant degree of local autonomy and regional variation in territories outside Egypt’s main population centers.

In June 1883, as part of an “administrative effort to unify and simplify jurisdiction,” the Egyptian Government established the Native Courts (al-mahakim al-ahlīya). Intended in part to “mimic” the Mixed Tribunals that had been operative since 1876, these courts were governed by a new comprehensive legal code; after 1883, they became the destination for all criminal, civil, and commercial cases not involving any non-Egyptian litigants or property. The initial law that established the Native Courts, passed on June 14, 1883, also outlined the jurisdiction of each court. On December 30 of the same year, the Government passed another decree that went even further in defining the authority of the Native Courts, providing guidelines for their redistricting, and extending their jurisdictional reach in certain cases. It is by virtue of these two decrees that the traditional judicial order in Egypt’s oases was fundamentally altered. In Siwa, for example, justice had been administered prior to the 1883 reforms through a local

---

18 Ibid. See also Brown, Rule of Law, 29-33. The Native Courts continue to serve as the cornerstone of Egypt’s contemporary justice system.
court *(majlis Siwa)*, presided over by a quorum of notable *sheikhs*, which in February 1871 the government had officially recognized in its role of “settling local affairs and Bedouin issues.” Article Five of the December law, however, essentially sought to abrogate the authority of the local *majlis* by placing the oasis (along with the entire *Mudiriyya* of Buhayra) under the firm legal jurisdiction of the Alexandria Native Court of First Instance.

The Government’s attempt to incorporate Siwa into a centralized Egyptian judicial framework would prove extremely short-lived. Within a year of legislating the reorganization of the Native Courts, the Egyptian government passed a special law that exempted Siwa from the provisions of the December redistricting law, and thereby removed it from the jurisdiction of the Alexandria court. Instead, jurisdiction in *all* legal cases in Siwa once again passed to the local court, just as had been established in 1871.

Once again, the authors of the new law explicitly mentioned the local court’s special role in “settling Bedouin issues” (*hal masa’il al-Bedw*). A mere nine months after it had passed new legislation that effectively put an end to Siwa’s judicial autonomy, then, the Egyptian government reneged on its decision and restored the old status quo. If this remarkable about-face seems at all mysterious, we can fortunately glimpse the reasoning behind it from a couple illuminating documents on Siwan judicial affairs that have survived in the Egyptian National Archives. It is worth pausing at length over one of

---

19 See *Dar al-Wathaiq al-Qawmiyya* (DWQ): *Majlis al-Nuzzar wa al-Wuzara* (MNW) 0075-042390 for mention of this original 1871 law (#94 of *dhulqada* 1287). Unfortunately I have been unable to access the original version of this decree, having to rely instead on short summaries cited as precedent in later legislation.


21 Indeed, the 1871 law confirming *Majlis Siwa* is explicitly invoked twice in the text of the decree. See DWQ: MNW 0075-042390 (*Amr ʿAli* of Sept. 9, 1884).

22 Ibid.
these—a letter written by the Mudir of Buhayra to an Interior Ministry official in June 1884—which makes abundantly clear some of the immediate pitfalls of applying the redistricting law to Siwa. At the same time, the letter provides remarkable insight into the attitudes of key Egyptian state officials towards the people who inhabited the far-western reaches of the country.

The Mudir opens the letter by confirming that Siwa is in fact considered “among the dependent territories of the Province” (min dimna mulhakat bilad al-mudiriyya), but he then immediately qualifies this statement by launching into a discourse of difference in order to describe the basic situation of the oasis: “The town is far from Egypt (al-diyar al-Misriyya) by a distance of approximately 20 days traveling by camel...It falls in the middle of the desert, and its people have different customs and (linguistic) conventions (istilahat), and tastes (masharib) that diverge completely from those of the Egyptians, by virtue of the fact that they are pure Arabs (‘urban sirfan”). It is for these reasons, he suggests, that a separate court had been officially established in Siwa in 1871 to begin with.

The Mudir’s main impetus for writing the letter, however, was to address a petition that the Interior Ministry had recently received from a Siwan, complaining about the harsh sentence imposed upon him by the local court, which had forced him to surrender 100 Riyals to the Government as compensation for his rebellious activity against the Egyptian ma’mur (local governor) stationed there. It so happened that the Mudir had just recently received the transcript of this particular case (among others) from

---

23 Indeed, this is one of the aforementioned archival documents that calls into question some of the data that Ramzi compiled for his geographical dictionary.
24 DWQ: MNW 0075-003444.
25 The Mudir invokes here the aforementioned Law #94 of Dhulqada 1287.
the authorities at Siwa, given that—owing to its extreme distance—the Siwan court sent its judicial records to the central authorities only once every six months. Upon examining the case, the Mudir concluded that the Siwa court’s ruling was wholly just, executed in a manner faithful both to the customs of the Siwan people, and to religious injunction (al-amr al-karim).\textsuperscript{26}

The Mudir then returns to his initial invocation of Siwa’s fundamental alterity—its distance from Egypt, and the otherness of its people—to buttress his argument to the Interior Ministry that the Government should reconsider its decision to apply the judicial reforms of 1883 to Siwa. Again, given the Siwans’ “distance from civilization, their all being of Bedouin descent, and [the fact that] their morals and customs are so completely different” [\textit{bu’adihim min al-hadara wa kawnihim jami’an min al-bedawiyya wa akhlaqihim wa ‘adatihim mukhalifatan b’il-kulliyya}], he recommends that the Siwans should still be permitted to abide by their own [legal] customs, in line with the above-mentioned decree of 1871, for this would be the best way to promote their continued “stability, security, and obedience.”\textsuperscript{27}

At this point, the Mudir turns his attention to the recent judicial redistricting law of the previous December, which he laments naturally disrupted the old system of arbitrating legal disputes and thus technically annulled the local Siwan ruling he had only just read and found favorable. He thus argues strongly, once again, that implementing the new law in Siwa would be wholly unwise. Aside from Siwa’s location “at such a distance from Egypt,” the Mudir argues, “it is very difficult to change its customs and principles,” as well as the affinity of the people for “the law of the local civil courts.” The

\textsuperscript{26} DWQ: MNW 0075-003444.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
Mudir also cites a more practical reason for reneging on the redistricting law—namely, the fact that the extreme distance between Siwa and Alexandria rendered it impossible to ensure that Siwan litigants would show up in court in the latter locale.\textsuperscript{28} It is impossible, given the dearth of extant documentary evidence on this issue, to prove a direct link between the Mudir’s letter and the Egyptian Government’s final decision to overturn the application of the redistricting law to Siwa with a new Khedival decree in September 1884. Yet this in no way mitigates the more significant point that both basic arguments the Mudir adduced to make his case to the Interior Ministry—the excessive distance of the oasis (from the Alexandria court as well as from “Egypt” writ large) as well as the basic difference (meaning, non-Egyptianness) of its inhabitants\textsuperscript{29}—would consistently crop up in debates and correspondence concerning not just the anomalous judicial status of Siwa, but more generally the limits of Egyptian legal jurisdiction outside the Nile Valley, for decades to come.

In March 1885, for example, the Egyptian Ministry of Justice decided to adopt the new law restoring the authority of the local court in Siwa as a precedent for dealing with a similarly far-off desert town called al-Wajh, which had not been successfully incorporated into the jurisdiction of the new civil courts. According to Boutros Ghali, the Minister of Justice at the time, al-Wajh was tantamount to Siwa in terms of its “distance” from Egypt proper (\textit{al-qutr al-Misri}). The Siwa analogy was also apt, he believed, given the way that the return to local jurisdiction in that oasis had served to “facilitate and

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} It is, of course, very curious that the Egyptian officials refer to Siwans as ‘Urban (Bedouin Arabs), given that the Siwans—marked by their Berber lineage and language, as well as their historically sedentary, agricultural lifestyle—rendered them decidedly \textit{not} Bedouin. Moreover, Siwans then as now would never identify themselves as such. I will return to this theme of the slipperiness of these terms “Egyptian” and “Arab Bedouin” later in the chapter.
approve legal cases” (tashil wa injaz al-qadaya) and prevent “the suffering of those liable to endure the hardships and expenses of travel” (takabbud dhawi al-sh’an mashaq al-safr wa al-masarif fi al-dhahab wa al-ayab). Ghali thus sought formal approval from the Egyptian Council of Ministers for the continuation of a separate local court in al-Wajh (the de facto judicial institution there before the 1883 law) to try both civil and criminal cases, along the lines of what had just been implemented in Siwa.30

At the same time, a similar pattern of jurisdictional wrangling between the state and local authorities in response to the 1883 Native Court laws emerged in the western oases of Dakhla, Kharga, and Bahariya. The documentary evidence shedding light on this process is, once again, unfortunately somewhat spotty; but by reading the texts of key legislation against a narrative of law and justice in Kharga provided in the memoirs of Ahmad Shafiq Pasha—a lifelong politician and state official who, after the First World War, became the Director-General of the FDA—we can piece together at least its basic contours.31

According to Shafiq, the Romans established a precedent for legal autonomy in Kharga that would be consistently renewed by successive ruling regimes throughout Egypt’s Islamic era. Over the centuries, the implementation of justice in Kharga was entrusted to local “men who knew the customs and traditional laws [‘urf] of the people.”32 The Mamluks made a slight innovation by creating, alongside the local shari‘a officials, the position of kashif, who would collect fiscal taxes and be responsible for

---

30 DWQ: MNW 0075-042391.
31 Ahmad Shafiq, Mudhakirat ‘an Wahat Misr wa al-Sahra al-Gharbiyah (Cairo: al-Matba‘ah al-Amiriyah, 1929).
32 Shafiq, Mudhakirat ‘an Wahat Misr, 10.
public order in the oasis; aside from this, they left the ancient legal regime untouched.\textsuperscript{33} Even Mehmed Ali, so bent on creating a robust central state, ostensibly acknowledged the importance of preserving local legal autonomy in Kharga. Shafiq presents a decree that the Mehmed Ali issued, dealing with the salaries of various local judges, as an example of how he “affirmed for the people of Kharga all of the rights they had gained…which had become tantamount to custom for them.”\textsuperscript{34} To Shafiq’s mind, at least, this decree demonstrated “the extent to which he [Mehmed Ali] respected their customs and ‘urf,” as well as his “utmost tolerance, and the vastness of his heart.”\textsuperscript{35}

Similar to what we saw in the case of Siwa, the Native Court laws of 1883 disrupted Kharga’s long-standing \textit{de facto} judicial autonomy.\textsuperscript{36} As a function of the particular legal institutions and customs that the Government encountered in Kharga, however, its attempt to incorporate the oasis into Egypt’s new judicial regime played out somewhat differently than it did in Siwa, and over a longer time-frame. First, the new redistricting legislation in 1883 stripped Kharga’s \textit{shari’a} representative of most of his previously wide-ranging powers. At the same time, the law mandated that \textit{shari’a} agents and judges would, from that point forward, be sent from the Nile Valley, rather than being appointed from among the residents of Kharga. The law also deprived the local \textit{mu‘awin al-tahsil} (the successor to the administrative position of \textit{kashif} that the Mamluks had established) of all his judicial authority, rendering him powerless to do much more than edit and sign (along with the \textit{qadi}, ‘umda, and sheikhs of the oasis) “memoranda”

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{36} It appears from the text of one document that it was the initial law passed on June 14, 1883 that altered the jurisdiction of Kharga and Dakhla, and not the December law that ultimately affected Siwa. See DWQ: MNW 0075-041460.
(mazagit) and send them to Kharga’s new locus of power in the Nile Valley (first Girga, then Asyut).\textsuperscript{37} Shafiq writes that “it is astonishing that this mu‘awin was deprived even of the power to investigate crimes,” a function of his exclusion from the ranks of the “judicial officers” (al-dabtiyya al-qada‘iyya) who had been authorized in 1883 to perform this function. The result of all these changes, according to Shafiq, was the “deterioration of security, disruption of work, and loss of rights” on the part of all litigants in court, a circumstance which “forced the Government to remedy the situation” by passing new legislation.\textsuperscript{38}

Shafiq points directly to a significant new decree passed in February 1890\textsuperscript{39} that initiated a gradual process of rolling back the sweeping judicial reforms of 1883. Other evidence suggests that this process actually began in 1888, with two short consecutive laws that granted the mu‘awins in both Dakhla and Kharga—as well as the mulahidh of Bahariya—the privileges (ikhtisasat) accorded to district supervisors (nudhar al-aqsam) “in criminal and jurisdictional matters” (al-mawad al-jina‘iyya wa al-mawad al-huquqiyya).\textsuperscript{40} The 1890 law that Shafiq cites went even further along these lines, stipulating that these same local oasis officials (the mulahidh of Bahariya; the mu‘awins of Dakhla and Kharga) were now to be counted as members of the same corps of “judicial officers” from which the 1883 law had excluded them. Furthermore, the law provided these officials with the right to adjudicate minor infraction cases (mukhalifat), and the privilege of final arbitration (al-hukm intiha‘ian) in civil cases whose value does

\textsuperscript{37} Shafiq, Mudhakirat ‘an Wahat Misr, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Shafiq says the law was passed on February 22; according to DWQ: MNW 0075-041460, the correct date is Feb. 20, 1890.
\textsuperscript{40} See Decree (Amr ‘Ali) #93 and #95 of 1888 (Accessed through the Tashre‘aat database).
not exceed 1,500 qurush.\(^{41}\) The Government tweaked its oasis policy further by passing yet another law a year later, granting these same local officials in all three oases the right to final arbitration in infraction cases; Shafiq interprets this as an indication of the Government’s realization that the 1890 law “had been insufficient.”\(^{42}\)

The most significant change, however, came in June 1900, when the Government finally overturned the application of the Native Court redistricting law to Kharga, Dakhla, and Bahariya, and officially sanctioned the restoration of local tribunals in each locale. These local oasis courts would once again be presided over by a local governing official—the mu‘awin in the case of Kharga, the ma‘mur for the other two oases—as well as two local notables in each place, though these figures all had to be appointed by the Ministry of Justice and approved by the Ministry of the Interior. The law—which would lead legal scholar Henri Lamba to designate these three oases, alongside Siwa, as zones of “special jurisdiction” in a compilation of Egyptian public and administrative law that he published in 1909\(^{43}\)—accorded the local oasis courts with the authority of final judgment in all infraction cases, as well as jurisdiction in all misdemeanors (junah al-mu‘aaqab), and commercial and civil cases.\(^{44}\)

If this analysis of the stepwise trajectory of judicial reform in these three Western oases goes far in illuminating the persistence of legal anomaly at the western margins of the Egyptian state, Shafiq’s account of why the Government felt change was needed in

\(^{41}\) DWQ: MNW 0075-041460 (Amr ‘Ali #10 of 1890).
\(^{42}\) Shafiq, Mudhakirat ‘an Wahat Misr, 13; See Amr ‘Ali #75 of 1891 (Accessed through the Tashre’aat database).
\(^{44}\) See Decree of June 29, 1900 (Accessed through the Tashre’aat database). Some of the text of this decree is provided in Lamba’s legal manual. Shafiq also summarizes it on p. 13 of Mudhakirat ‘an Wahat Misr. At the same time that the local oasis courts were granted these renewed authorities, it remained the case—similar to what we saw in Siwa—that all appeals continued to be handled in the district centers—meaning Beni Suef for Bahariya, and Asyut for Dakhla and Kharga.
the case of Kharga is particularly significant. Again, the rationale hinges on the notion of
distance—in this case the distance between Kharga and its corresponding administrative
capital of Asyut—which created practical obstacles to the proper administration of justice
in the oasis. Even after the Government passed its first few amendments to the 1883 law,
Shafiq writes, it still realized that the prevailing system “did not serve the well-being of
the people, since they still groaned from the harm done by the [initial] legislation as well
as the distance of the locale” to which they needed to travel in order to settle their cases.
The law re-establishing the local court, however, “relieved the people from the burden of
long travel,” which had previously “denied them from obtaining their legal
rights.”

Although Shafiq does not explicitly provide a similar narrative for Bahariya and Dakhla,
which we have seen were typically grouped together with Kharga by the Government in
matters concerning legal reform, he adds at the end of this section that his analysis of “the
stages through which legislation passed in Kharga Oasis” can similarly “be applied to the
rest of the oases in the Egyptian Kingdom.”

Thus far in this section, I have attempted to demonstrate the problems that the
Egyptian government encountered in its drive to extend the standardizing judicial reforms
of 1883 into territory outside the Nile Valley—in this case, four different Western Desert
oases. I have argued that the two primary tropes that pervaded debates and
correspondence about jurisdiction in the oases were the impractical distance of these
locales from the physical and cultural center of the burgeoning nation-state, as well as the
fundamental difference of the people who inhabited them from Egyptians. Although the
pejorative overtones of this language of alterity cannot be denied, what seems most

---

45 Shafiq, Mudhakirat 'an Wahat Misr, 13.
46 Ibid.
important about its invocation in this particular context is the way it presented the Egyptian Government with a conceptual way out of the bind it now found itself in. Confronted with the basic constraints that the realities of Egyptian geography imposed on its centralizing sovereign capabilities, Egyptian lawmakers—like so many of the administrators that Benton describes finding their way through the complex legal environments of various imperial enclaves—fell back on this posture as a makeshift solution. The processes of centralization and decentralization thus developed hand-in-hand in these cases: in order for the Government to exercise greater central sovereignty in these oasis domains—to extend the scope of its legal jurisdiction, and inscribe these oases in its newly standardized lawbooks—it was necessary to allow them to continue to be different by preserving their local judicial practices and institutions.

In the same vein, these very same tropes of distance and difference could at times become useful to local non-state actors living in the West, who appropriated them in order to register their own claims to the Egyptian state. We can gain a sense of this practice from a few choice documents that have survived concerning affairs around the Maryut region (the desert territory just beyond the western settled edge of Alexandria and Buhayra). In 1887, for instance, a local notable from Abu Hummus named Mansour Isma‘il sent petitions to four different branches of the Egyptian bureaucracy, renouncing all responsibility for administering affairs in Maryut and Abu Khadiga due to the fact that “these places are far from my village, I do not know them well, and they are inhabited by Bedouins.” In this case, Isma‘il felt that basing a claim on the distance of the lands and alterity of people beyond the edge of the cultivation would allow him to wipe his hands clean of unwanted administrative duties.

47 DWQ: MNW 0075-027157.
Another particularly instructive case from Maryut returns us to the specific theme of judicial anomaly. In 1910, upon receiving the news that the Government was about to force the local qadi of the shari’a court of Maryut named Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad al-Najari into retirement, “the Umdas, Sheikhs, notables, and people” of Dakhila (a village in Maryut) sent a petition to the Egyptian Council of Ministers imploring them to reverse their decision. In doing so, they adopted the same discourse of alterity that we saw the Mudir of Buhayra using to discuss the local population of Siwa: “Maryut is one of the districts that is far from civilization [al-ʿumran], containing people possessed of different morals and character [al-tibaa’], who require someone who will provide them with the utmost refinement [al-tahdhib], such as His Honor, who knew our morals and understood our character.” And given the way he was able to treat “each tribe, regardless of its disposition [mashrab] with the utmost care, zeal, trustworthiness, piety, and supreme virtue”—as well as the fact that he “adhered to religious orthodoxy in all his rulings”—the petitioners requested “with one voice” that the Council of Ministers accept their plea and allow him to remain in his post.48 Although we cannot know for certain that the petitioners were indeed motivated by a desire to preserve some semblance of legal autonomy for their tribes by preventing the appointment of a new qadi, this document nonetheless provides a clear example of how Bedouins could mobilize the discourse of difference (in this case even attesting to their need for “refinement”) to serve their own particular interests. Once again, it seems almost as if the language of otherness became standard currency in the negotiations over sovereignty that arose between the state and

48 DWQ: MNW 0075-029853. The Qadi, for his part, also petitioned the Council of Ministers not to force him into retirement.
local society in the West in this period, as the state tentatively sought to extend its centralizing reach into the variegated spaces of the emergent political community.

In the second half of this chapter, I will further explore this theme of Bedouin alterity as one of the defining features of the Egyptian state’s engagement with its desert and oasis-dwelling populations over the course of the long-nineteenth century.

**The Bedouin and the State in the Long-Nineteenth Century**

*Introduction: Who or What is a ‘Bedouin’?*

The Egyptian state’s shifting relationship with its many different Bedouin tribes in the modern period is a massive, complex topic that merits far more attention than I can give it in this dissertation.\(^49\) It is nonetheless crucial for our purposes to summarize the basic contours of the Egyptian government’s Bedouin policy starting from the early-nineteenth century, particularly since the sweeping changes that Mehmed Ali introduced in the sphere of Bedouin administration would have major repercussions well into the twentieth century.

One major caveat to any such general overview that has typically been overlooked in the few accounts of the Egyptian tribes that do exist, however, is the fact that it was by

---

no means a straightforward proposition identifying who in the country was actually a
Bedouin, or even defining exactly what was meant by the word. In a comprehensive
study of the Egyptian tribes published in 1935, G.W. Murray argued that the term
Bedouin “should be reserved for one who travels or resides in the ‘true desert’ itself,
while all those numerous gypsy-like vagabonds who hang round the outskirts of the
cultivation and live by blackmailing the peasants or stealing from them, should be looked
down upon as longshoremen…anything you please except the real article.”50 He also
suggested that the term Bedouin should be seen to connote one’s “profession or trade,”
and thus “has nothing to do with race, and is by no means synonymous with ‘Arab.’”51
This crude, overly romantic notion of Bedouin identity obscures the basic fact that the
Egyptian Government itself made absolutely no semantic distinction between Bedouins
and Arabs, consistently referring to its tribes as ‘arab or (more typically) ‘urban in
official correspondence throughout the nineteenth century.52 Murray’s narrow view also
belie the demographic reality that a significant portion of Egypt’s ‘urban population not
only hung around the “outskirts of the cultivation,” but also had settled in various rural
locales in the Delta and Nile Valley and thus had been mixing with the native fellahin
population for centuries.53 Indeed, as Murray himself readily admits, western Bedouin

50 Murray, Sons of Ishmael, 1.
51 Ibid.
53 See ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Amir, al-‘Urban wa Dawruhum, 33-46, for an attempt to classify the different
types of ‘urban and outline the extent to which different tribes embraced agricultural life in the Delta and
Nile Valley. To this day, in fact, many denizens of Egypt’s rural areas continue to self-identify as ‘urban
and thus signal their divergent origins from their fellah neighbors. Some communities of settled rural
‘urban have intermarried with the fellahin; others have refused to do so. Unfortunately data on this subject
is nearly impossible to come by, given that the ethnic composition of the Egyptian population is considered
by census officials to be politically sensitive and thus top-secret information; if it is collected at all, this
data is never released publicly. The main authority for the collection of demographic data in Egypt—the
Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS)—thus reserves the right to vet all survey
questionnaires that social scientists wish to use, and is run by former military officers, not demographers or
statisticians.
from various locales in Ottoman Benghazi (Cyrenaica) had for centuries been migrating to the settled parts of Egypt: “The present-day population of Upper Egypt, and especially the Fayyum, has largely been reinforced in modern times [by Bedouin] from Cyrenaica.”\textsuperscript{54} Later in this section, I will demonstrate how, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Egyptian government responded to this confused situation by attempting to render its Bedouin population significantly more legible.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{Mehmed Ali and the Egyptian Tribes}

Although they might not always have played the regenerative role in Egyptian society that Ibn Khaldun famously ascribed to them, the Bedouin tribes did constitute a major force to be reckoned with throughout the course of Egypt’s history—alternately comprising a dangerous fifth column, on one hand, or a potentially useful mercenary force, on the other. According to Michael Winter, Bedouin authority in the Ottoman period in Egypt was inversely correlated with the strength of the state, and the eighteenth century can actually be viewed as the “zenith of Arab power.”\textsuperscript{56} Upon his accession to rule in 1805, then, Mehmed Ali did not fail to notice that the tribes represented something of a wild card in his bid for absolute state control—a conviction that would only harden as the Pasha took increasing strides towards building the rudiments of a modern state in Egypt. If, as a means to this end, Mehmed Ali necessarily focused on consolidating his personal authority over city and countryside and harnessing the productive capacity of the Delta and Nile Valley, he also devoted significant attention to various Bedouin tribes.

\textsuperscript{54} Murray, \textit{Sons of Ishmael}, 284. See also Baer, \textit{Studies in the Social History}, 5.

\textsuperscript{55} The idea that a population’s “legibility” is a basic goal of modern statecraft hails from James C. Scott, \textit{Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed} (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998). Indeed, Scott’s starting point in that book is actually an analysis of the sedentarization of nomadic populations.

\textsuperscript{56} Winter, \textit{Egyptian Society}, ch. 3.
residing in different parts of Egypt—a fact that has often been overlooked in the prevailing historiography of the period.

The Pasha learned an important lesson regarding Bedouin power early in his reign, when his forces clashed with a segment of the Awlad ‘Ali around 1810. The Awlad ‘Ali had been moving steadily eastward into Egypt from their long-standing homeland in Cyrenaica’s Jebel Akhdar region since the last decades of the eighteenth century, as a result of their defeat at the hands of the Harabi (who allegedly benefited from Ottoman assistance). At the same time, as Awlad ‘Ali oral historians are keen to assert, the tribe had been called over by the neighboring Jume‘at to assist in their struggles against the Hanadi, which had been ongoing since before the French invasion in 1798. By 1808, according to celebrated chronicler ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, the Awlad ‘Ali had succeeded in routing the Hanadi and forcing them out of their expansive territory all along the Mediterranean coast and into Buhayra; the Hanadi, in turn, appealed to Mehmed Ali to help restore their lands to them (and even purportedly offered the Pasha a vast sum of money to this end). Yet the Awlad ‘Ali overwhelmingly defeated a joint force of Mehmed Ali’s soldiers and Hanadi tribesmen at a decisive battle near Hosh ‘Isa.

The Pasha’s defeat by the Awlad ‘Ali was a key turning point that Western Desert ethnographer Gerald Obermeyer suggests “set the stage for a transformation of Bedouin society.” Convinced of the need to appease this one powerful tribe, which now enjoyed

57 Obermeyer, *Structure and Authority*, 8. Obermeyer suggests that, for obvious reasons, Awlad ‘Ali whom he interviewed during his fieldwork overemphasized the extent to which the Harabi needed Ottoman intervention to win the tribal war.
60 Obermeyer, *Structure and Authority*, 8.
de facto control over a huge swath of territory in the West, Mehmed Ali relocated the Hanadi to Sharqiyya and then proceeded to broker a special deal with the Awlad ‘Ali sheikhs. Obermeyer provides a useful summary of the agreement’s upshot:

After the defeat of the Hanadi and the Pasha’s troops, the Awlad Ali were given preferential treatment by Mehmed Ali...he granted the Awlad Ali, by right of usufruct, the territory of the whole western desert. They were also exempted from land taxes, military duty, and forced labor on the irrigation projects of the Nile River. In return for these privileges, the Bedouins were expected to guard the frontiers of Egypt and to furnish warriors for the expeditionary forces of Mehmed Ali [emphasis added].

This deal between Mehmed Ali and the Awlad ‘Ali would actually form the cornerstone of the Egyptian Government’s broader Bedouin policy throughout the nineteenth century. According to Re’uven Aharoni, Mehmed Ali always viewed the Bedouin writ large “as a population with special characteristics” and thus pursued unique policies “to win [their] sympathy and loyalty.” As such, Mehmed Ali pledged to exclude tribes from the corvée—which they found to be degrading work suitable only for fellahin (peasants)—and issued an edict officially exempting all Bedouin from military service in exchange for their promise to serve as irregulars in Egypt’s foreign wars.

Indeed, evidence suggests that Bedouin troops from various Western tribes played important roles in the Pasha’s military campaigns in Syria, Arabia, and the Sudan, used not only in combat, but also often to police and discipline the regular fellah conscripts. Over the course of the century, the Bedouins were relieved of their duty to provide

---

61 Ibid., 8-9.
62 Aharoni, Pasha’s Bedouin, 167.
63 Ibid., 190.
64 Ibid., 190-1.
65 According to Aharoni, some 15,000 Bedouins saw action in the Hijaz. Murray, for his part, mentions that a large cavalry of Western Bedouins, accompanied by some 700 ‘Ababda on dromedaries, were instrumental in the Sudan expedition. Aharoni adds that a major function of the Bedouin irregulars was to prevent desertion among conscripted soldiers. Murray, Sons of Ishmael, 31; Aharoni, Pasha’s Bedouin, 195-201.
special martial services to the regime, yet their general exemption from military
conscription remained intact. Indeed, it was not until a new conscription law was passed
in 1947 that the Bedouins’ privilege of exemption was abrogated; and even then,
tribesmen were not regularly recruited into the Egyptian army until after the revolution
five years later.\textsuperscript{66}

Military exemption was tied to another aspect of Mehmed Ali’s tribal policy,
already mentioned above: the decision to grant the Bedouin tax-free usufruct rights
throughout the desert territories. On one hand, as Donald Cole and Soraya Altorki
suggest, this move can actually be read as an “assertion by Mehmed Ali that these
territories fell within his domain of formal authority”—the land was his alone to give and
thus belonged to the emergent Egyptian state, not to the Bedouin.\textsuperscript{67} As such, the Bedouin
had absolutely no formal or legal rights to—and thus never owned—the lands they
worked. Yet the flipside of this usufruct arrangement was, of course, that the Bedouins
were excused from paying any taxes to the state—something that set them apart from
Egyptians settled in the Nile Valley who were obliged to pay land taxes and, accordingly,
at least “benefited from the state’s vast irrigation network and land reclamation
projects.”\textsuperscript{68} Obermeyer actually suggests that the tribes’ tax-free usufruct rights were so
central to their identity that “the term ‘Bedouin’ came to mean, as it was defined by the
government of Egypt, one who did not legally own land and hence was not subject to
forced labor or military service.”\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{66} Cole and Altorki emphasize that, to this day, Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin understand this long-standing tradition
of military exemption, though initially welcomed by their forebears, to have done their tribe a huge
disservice. This is mainly due to the fact that it essentially “fostered marginalization of the Bedouin from
Egypt’s modernizing political economy.” Cole and Altorki, \textit{Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers}, 71-2.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{69} Obermeyer, \textit{Structure and Authority}, 9-10.
A third prong of Mehmed Ali’s Bedouin policy was his government’s concerted effort to co-opt tribal elites and convert them into *de facto* state functionaries. Though the evidence documenting this development is somewhat thin, two general patterns can be discerned. First, as Gabriel Baer first demonstrated in his pioneering series of studies on nineteenth-century Egyptian social history, Mehmed Ali sought to cultivate a new prosperous class of settled tribal elites by offering them large-scale land grants in the rich Nile Valley and thus giving them key roles in the burgeoning agricultural economy. Though Baer perhaps overstates the extent to which Mehmed Ali’s policies led seamlessly to the full-fledged sedentarization of Egypt’s Bedouin population, there is no doubt that the Pasha did succeed in tying key tribal notables closer to the political and economic life of the state, offering them *'uhda* and *'ibadiyya* territory and allowing them to make further direct land purchases. According to Baer, this maneuver served to disrupt the traditional social fabric of Bedouin tribes by engendering a new sort of class consciousness among these elite landowning sheikhs that alienated them from the rank and file of their tribes.\(^70\)

Second, aside from buying the loyalty of tribal notables through land grants, Mehmed Ali attempted to formalize their political relationship to the state both by offering them key administrative posts and creating new intermediary positions for them to fill. According to Baer, 1833 marked a turning point upon which Egyptians (as opposed to “Turks”) and Bedouin notables now began to receive appointments as local

---

\(^70\) Baer, *Studies in the Social History*, 6-12. Cole and Altorki provide oral testimony from Awlad ‘Ali demonstrating how tribesmen consider their *'umdas* and *sheikhs* to be both a “blessing and curse to the tribe”—seen as “Government men, not ours” in light of their accumulation of wealth and property, and their move towards a settled life in the Nile Valley and ensuing absenteeism. See Cole and Altorki, *Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers*, 70-1.
ma’murs; years later, they also assumed even higher posts (for example, as mudirs). Obermeyer suggests that these officials were intended to “provide a liaison between the Pasha and the tribes,” but that they ultimately became Mehmed Ali’s “hostages.” Moreover, evidence suggests that Mehmed Ali was instrumental in introducing the position of the ‘umda to the tribes in the first place—a major transformation in light of the fact that the position of ‘umda—the traditional authority figure in the Egyptian countryside—was not at all indigenous to Bedouin society.72 According to one contemporary European traveler, Mehmed Ali even purportedly attempted to woo the new Awlad ‘Ali ‘umdas by conferring them official robes of honor, though these became an object of ridicule in the eyes of the tribesmen.73 The responsibilities of these newly appointed Bedouin ‘umdas for the Awlad ‘Ali, at least, included assisting “the state in regional administration, the maintenance of law and order in the desert, and the guarding of Egypt’s western border.”74 Obermeyer curiously adds that the state beefed up its administration of the tribes by introducing another non-indigenous political role—that of the tribal sheikh—into the Bedouin authority system around 1910, to act as a sort of “vice- ‘umda”,75 yet this claim makes little sense in light of ample documentation I have seen referring to tribal sheikhs throughout the nineteenth century, as well as Evans-Pritchard’s ethnographic account of a tribal system in the Western Desert whereby “each

71 Baer, Studies in the Social History, 5-6. Aharoni gives 1838 as the date of this shift. According to Aharoni, it was by virtue of this newfound opening up of the Egyptian bureaucracy to elites of Bedouin extraction that the well-known Abaza family was able to rise to prominence. Suleiman Abaza later served as the Egyptian Minister of Education. Aharoni, Pasha’s Bedouin, 157.
72 Indeed, as Obermeyer and Cole and Altorki suggest, for the Awlad ‘Ali, at least, that role belonged historically to the ‘aqila. Obermeyer, Structure and Authority, 14-15; Cole and Altorki, Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers, 68-69.
73 This was from the testimony of J.R. Pacho, quoted in E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Sanusi of Cyrenaica (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 60.
74 Cole and Altorki, Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers, 69.
75 Obermeyer, Structure and Authority, 14-15.
section of a tribe, from the smallest to the largest, has its Sheikh or Sheikhs.”

It is possible that Obermeyer is referring here to the position of *wekil 'umda* confirmed in its authority as part of a new Bedouin registration law passed in 1905 (see below).

The final major thrust of Mehmed Ali’s Bedouin policy was the formal acceptance of legal autonomy among the Bedouin, which meant in practice the preservation of traditional tribal law based on local ‘*urf*. The experience of legal and judicial anomaly is unfortunately far more difficult to trace in the tribal domains than in the several western oases analyzed above, which are much better documented. Yet it is important here to note that it was Mehmed Ali who put into place the policy of legal and judicial distinctiveness among the Bedouin that would persist well into the twentieth century. According to Safia Mohsen, an anthropologist who studied the Awlad ‘Ali, the Pasha officially acknowledged at least that one tribe’s legal autonomy with a decree in 1832, thereby creating an important precedent that would obtain throughout Egypt’s deserts. Cole and Altorki, citing Mohsen, summarize the net effect of the Pasha’s legal policy for the tribes by suggesting that “The state’s toleration of one set of laws among Bedouin in the desert and its enactment of formal codes to be applied among people in the rest of the country obviously differentiated the Bedouin from the majority of Egyptians. Moreover, the state’s acknowledgement of ‘*urf* was not motivated by a concern to protect the Bedouin’s indigenous legal system, but reflects the state’s relative neglect of the desert compared to the Nile Valley.”

---

78 Cole and Altorki, *Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers*, 73.
Marginal Lands, Marginal Identities

In light of the foregoing analysis, there can be no doubt that Mehmed Ali’s reign marked a significant shift in relations between the Egyptian state and the Bedouin tribes. And at least some evidence that I have considered, culled mainly from the relevant secondary literature, demonstrates how key aspects of Mehmed Ali’s Bedouin initiatives affected the Awlad ‘Ali, the tribe that occupied the lion’s share of the Egyptian West from the early-nineteenth century on. Yet at the same time, it is important to bear in mind the caveat that most of the materials scholars have used to write about the Bedouin in this period ostensibly focus on those tribes living in and immediately around the cultivation. Put somewhat differently, it is conceivable that only those tribes who, as a function of their inhabiting territory closer to the core of state power, ended up falling largely under Mehmed Ali’s control have shown up at all consistently in the records from the period. Indeed, even documents mentioning the Awlad ‘Ali might simply be referring to those tribal segments living in the immediate vicinity of Alexandria and Maryut, and thus not those in the far reaches of the Western Desert.

Re’uven Aharoni—whose recent study of Mehmed Ali’s Bedouin policies offers the most comprehensive overview of the issue to date—even concedes as much at various points throughout his work. On one hand, by virtue of his meticulous survey of sources from the Egyptian National Archives, Aharoni is able to offer a detailed account of how the Pasha innovated “a different conception of the relationships between the state and the tribes,” marked by the newfound ability of the central authorities to deal “with the nomad population by means of special machinery created for the purpose.”79 In Aharoni’s estimation, Mehmed Ali’s government set two basic processes in motion that deeply

79 Aharoni, *Pasha’s Bedouin*, 4-5.
impacted Bedouin society: first, the “reduction in their power as a strong, independent element” (unlike they had been in the eighteenth century, as Winter reminds us); and, second, the “crystallization and consolidation of clans based on households and dynasties, headed by dominant sheikhs.”\(^{80}\) In making these arguments, Aharoni echoes the older accounts of the Bedouin in this period we have considered such as Baer’s, even if Aharoni insists that he diverges from these works in both his conception of how state power works, and his insistence on some fundamental continuities from the Ottoman period.\(^{81}\)

Yet at the same time, Aharoni readily concedes that his analysis does not obtain for all of Egypt’s Bedouin population, which he urges us to acknowledge never constituted a homogeneous group.\(^{82}\) Indeed, Aharoni observes that “there were several tribes with which he [Mehmed Ali] had no contact, and their way of life within their own territory remained unchanged.”\(^{83}\) Later in the work, Aharoni argues that although the Pasha’s administration “intervened actively in the internal management of the tribes…the Bedouin were still organized more ‘authentically’ only in the more distant desert areas and in Sinai.”\(^{84}\) And in the book’s conclusion, Aharoni again makes it clear that the bulk of his material does not necessarily pertain to those tribes in the Egyptian border areas, which “were always far from the centers of power and from the great cities. They were marginal territories,” over which Mehmed Ali’s “administration did not impose its authority to a significant degree”; the Bedouin who inhabited these parts therefore

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 174.
enjoyed “freedom of action.”\textsuperscript{85} Aharoni’s sweeping analysis, in short, certainly does get us much closer to an accurate portrayal of the transformations in Bedouin society and administration that took place in the era of Mehmed Ali; but as Aharoni readily admits, we still know relatively little about those tribes living at the margins of state control.

Aharoni also points to another related caveat that further complicates the picture for the historian seeking to grasp the Bedouins’ changing relationship to the emergent Egyptian state: if we easily lose sight of those tribes living at the margins of state authority, we also have great difficulty pinpointing where in fact those margins lay in terms of actual physical space. In a suggestive aside, Aharoni writes that “The principal reason for the Bedouins’ importance in Egypt was the conspicuous lack of a clear border between the ‘desert’ and the ‘sown’ regions.”\textsuperscript{86} This claim in fact echoes the earlier work of historian Iman Muhammad ‘Abdel Mun’im ‘Amir, who noted how “Throughout history, the borders between agricultural and desert (or pastoral) land were not fixed, owing to the fluctuation of the [annual Nile] flood”—a fact that led to the creation of an unstable and fluid “borderland of geographic and social intermixing between peasants and pastoral Bedouins.”\textsuperscript{87} Not only do such fluid geographical conceptions of the desert edge raise important questions about the extent and location of state authority; by offering insight into the degree of social mixing that took place in these zones over time, they also unsettle any easy dichotomies between settled and Bedouin populations that have typically dominated sociologies of the Arab world, and thus render the tribes even less legible in the eyes of both the central state and the historian. With these caveats in mind, it is instructive to consider a few cases in which different segments of the tribal

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 213.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 159-60.
population exploited these ambiguities in the nature of Bedouin-ness—alternately asserting their sameness or difference from Egyptians, depending on their particular interests at the moment—and actively made claims to the Government based on their relative distance from the seat of power.

Although, as we will see, Bedouins typically fell back on a discourse of alterity to bolster their claims to autonomy, it was not always in their interest to do so. In 1881, for instance, several sheikhs from the Awlad ‘Ali and Jume’at tribes co-authored a petition to the Interior and Justice ministries, complaining about a Khedival decree from 1282 Hijri (approximately 1866 A.D.) stipulating that all Bedouins posing a threat with either a firearm or sharp weapon would be immediately exiled to the Mediterranean or to Fazoghli.88 The decree had apparently been issued after the completion of an investigation in Lower Egypt, which suggests that the tribal sections in question were those living right along the edge of the cultivation, and not those (their kinsmen) inhabiting territory much further west. According to the authors of the petition, this decree had given the Egyptian authorities free rein to persecute their tribesmen, doling out inordinate punishments even “upon the slightest suspicion of their motives.” In light of serious harm done to their tribes as a result of this unjust treatment, the petitioners demanded the abrogation of the 1282 decree. They also claimed that their legal cases should be tried “in accordance with local laws, the same as citizens” (bi-muqtada al-qawanin al-mahalliyya aswat al-muwatinin).89 The language of this provocative document is undoubtedly somewhat slippery. First, what do the sheikhs mean by “local

88 DWQ: MNW 0075-031195. The Arabic original, as best as I could read it, mentions the Mediterranean (al-bahr al-abyad) as one of the sites of exile; but the French translation included in the document interprets this as the White Nile.
89 Ibid.
laws” here? Are they actually referring to Egyptian law, as implemented throughout Lower Egypt, or something more akin to their traditional law? Even more striking is their invocation of the language of citizenship, though it is unclear whether they are claiming it for themselves here, or rather simply articulating their expectation of similarly just treatment in the legal realm as if they were Egyptian citizens. Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, these remain open questions. At the same time, though, it is undeniable that—in this case, at least—the Bedouin leaders were reacting against being singled out by the state for their difference, since this had led directly to their persecution. Instead, in order to stake a claim for the equitable implementation of justice, it was in their interest here to argue for their sameness—an argument that one imagines had more force behind it given that these Bedouins were ostensibly living among Egyptian fellahin in the Delta.

If the Bedouin tribes who lived closer to the Nile Valley thus came under increasing scrutiny by the authorities, those inhabiting the far-away desert regions continued to enjoy a great deal of autonomy and accordingly played this distance to their advantage. Indeed, the Government had for centuries relied upon the tribes in both the Eastern and Western deserts to serve as guardsmen (khafir, pl. khufara), charged with protecting the border zones. 90 One document from 1885 suggests how—even at this late stage—the Interior Ministry was reluctant to take away any local authority from the Sheikhs of the tribes serving as khufara. In this particular case, the Muhafiz of the Suez Canal region petitioned the Interior Ministry to respond to certain deficiencies in the

90 'Abd al-Mun'im ‘Amir, al-‘Urban wa Dawruhum, 10. Cole and Altorki, Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers, 26. The limited evidence I have seen, however, emphasizes this role for the Bedouin tribes of the Eastern desert (as opposed to the Western Desert), given the Sinai region’s historical strategic importance as a crossroads between Egypt and the Mashriq (and locales further East), and its place on the pilgrimage route to Mecca.
guardsmen system (for instance, the tribesmen not showing up on time, or in sufficient numbers) both by punishing the tribal *sheikhs* in charge of the guardsmen more severely, and by standardizing the system across the country so that the *sheikhs* would become more subservient to the Government. The Ministry, in turn, formed a commission to consider the matter but ultimately decided to reject the *Muḥafiz*’s appeal for several different reasons. First, the commission reminded the *Muḥafiz* that the Bedouin are “people of the desert” with different customs and conditions than those of villages and town dwellers; as such, they required special treatment. Additionally, the commission asserted that taking punitive measures against the *sheikhs* in charge would not at all deter the deficient guardsmen from wrongdoing, since they would have no problem seeing someone else punished for their own indifference. Perhaps most suggestive, however, is the commission’s concluding argument that every region in the country had its own particular circumstances that must not be tinkered with, and that it would thus be hugely detrimental to the guards system to try to alter the conditions in the Suez region for the sake of one disgruntled government servant. As such, the Ministry officials concluded that they would not change the rules or punish the Bedouin *sheikhs* in the region; instead, they agreed to continue to allow the *sheikhs* to act autonomously and take punitive measures against intransigent guardsman as they saw fit.91

A decade later, in 1895, the Egyptian Government undertook a comprehensive reorganization of the Interior Ministry. As Cromer would boast in his annual report the following year, the Ministry succeeded in streamlining its provincial governance (in the Nile Valley, at least), creating a tight new administrative hierarchy that tied the ‘*umdas* and *sheikhs* of even the smallest Egyptian villages directly to the Interior Minister in

---

91 DWQ: MNW 0075-003447.
Although the major aim of these reforms was ostensibly to establish public order and stability in the countryside, the Interior Ministry around this time also attempted to revamp its Bedouin guards system—something we have just seen it was reluctant to do ten years prior. First, the new regulations stipulated that every town and village must have a guard, and that guardsmen would from now on be chosen by government employees along with local ‘umdas, and thus not by the tribal sheikhs. They also reorganized the process through which the guards were compensated, fixing their salary at 60 qurush and requiring that the funds, though raised locally by village sheikhs, must pass first through the Government treasury before being distributed. The upshot of this intervention was to challenge the autonomy of the tribal leaders, who had until that point largely enjoyed a free hand in selecting and compensating the guardsmen.

A choice article from the Egyptian daily *al-Mu’ayyad* from July 1896—the only source I have been able to find shedding light on this particular episode—richly documents the extent to which a wide cross-section of tribes vehemently opposed this attempt by the Interior Ministry to rejig the system and thereby deprive them of their autonomy. Although the article’s author mentions that opposition to the government spread widely throughout the country, he focuses primarily on the various tribes settled in the two Lower Egyptian provinces of Gharbiyya and Sharqiyya; it again remains an open question how, precisely, the 1895 administrative reforms affected those tribal guardsmen.

---


inhabiting domains in the far western provinces, as well as the Eastern Desert and Sinai. The story that the article reconstructs nonetheless remains a fascinating example of Egypt’s shifting Bedouin policy and thus deserves to be treated in some detail.

According to the author, it was unsurprising that the Bedouins opted to resist the Ministry’s reforms. After all, the nearly one million Bedouins living in Egypt were “among the fiercest defenders of their customs and privileges” and had “no patience for any injustice or inequity against their personal conditions and public interests.” They had enjoyed a number of “special privileges” since the time of Mehmed Ali, having become “tantamount to guards and fortresses over the Egyptian frontiers” (bi-mathaba khufara wa husun ‘ala al-hudud al-Misriyya). The author continues by citing many instances in the course of the nineteenth century in which the Government had tried to deprive the Bedouins of some of these privileges, yet each time the tribes had “fought heroically to resist [their] subservience and emerged victorious.”

And so the Bedouin leaders once again mobilized in opposition to this new round of Government intervention. A few different concerns led to this decision. On one hand, the tribal sheikhs argued that they were best equipped to choose the individual guardsmen and settle their salaries; they feared that if the Government now stepped in to select and compensate the guards, the tribes would no longer have any guarantees of the guards’ loyalty and would thus lose much of their authority. On the other hand, the tribal leaders saw the intervention as an unprecedented step by the state towards their subjugation. As the author put it, the Bedouin leaders “realized that this was a scheme by the Interior

---

95 Ibid.
Ministry to incorporate them gradually into the body politic (silk abna’ al-bilad),”\(^96\) and thus deprive them of the “rights and privileges they had enjoyed until now.”\(^97\)

The sheikhs and ‘umdas of many different tribes in Gharbiyya and Sharqiyya thus assembled to draft a series of petitions. First, they sent one to the “Government”—the author remains vague here—demanding the preservation of their traditional rights and privileges. They also sent a petition to the Interior Ministry but received no reply. At this point, the article’s author goes on, the tribal leaders sent a third petition to the Khedive complaining about their treatment at the hands of the Interior Ministry and giving him a curious ultimatum: he must either provide them with the relief they seek, or else grant them permission for them to leave Egypt for another country in which they can make a living. The Khedive apparently responded to this petition with some blanket promises, for which the Bedouin leaders praised him, but they did not stop there: they also drafted and sealed a memorandum to the Ottoman Sultan on behalf of all the sheikhs and ‘umdas of the many tribes of the aforementioned two provinces. Although they ultimately decided against sending the memo to the Sultan—choosing instead to send it to the Khedive, to underscore their earlier demands and ostensibly test whether they could get what they wanted without taking the drastic measure of directly petitioning Istanbul—it is still worth pausing over the document’s surprising contents.

First, the Bedouin leaders asked the Sultan for 100,000 feddans of land in the Hawran province of Syria to exploit and harvest. By their estimation, the çiftlik (farm) of “Bisan” had over a million feddans of extremely fertile land, which they could begin to cultivate with minimal hassle, since only a few local ‘urban lived in the area, most of

\(^96\) “Body politic” is a liberal translation of “silk abna’ al-bilad.” One could also translate this as something like “body of national citizens,” or even just “political community.”

whom were pastoralists. They thus suggested making the Hawran a “second homeland.”

They also reported in this document that they delegated a courier to go to the sons of the Algerian rebel ‘Abdel Qader, who now lived in Damascus, since they would be able to guide and help him inspect these lands in the Hawran. Finally, they underscored the seriousness of their demands: “The sheikhs and ‘umdas made a firm oath to one another that, if they did not obtain the satisfaction they were seeking, then they would leave Egypt.”

When the article’s author asked one Bedouin representative how they could be serious about this proposition when they actually had property of their own and fairly good dealings with the Egyptian state, he responded by saying that they would remain determined as long as they saw that their “rights and privileges were being deprived from us…even if this costs us gravely.” Besides, he continued, they could give their property to foreigners to manage on their behalf; and they would be close enough to Egypt in the Hawran that they could always come back at any time. Unfortunately I have not been able to find any more information indicating how this episode was resolved; and again, the article focuses primarily on settled agricultural ‘urban in Lower Egypt, even though it initially mentions the border guardsmen. Despite these limitations, however, this document remains an extremely provocative example of how the Bedouin population attempted to negotiate with the state (threatening to leave the political community altogether) in order to preserve their special privileges and autonomy. They were willing to brook state involvement only if they could dictate its terms.

---

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
Legislatizing Legibility

A decade later, the state continued its attempts to streamline governmental authority over its various Bedouin tribes, passing laws in 1905 and again in 1908 that outlined a comprehensive code for their administrative organization. In several key respects, the new laws served to flesh out some of the key policy changes we saw were initiated by Mehmed Ali, and record them in the lawbooks of the revamped state bureaucracy. Yet the new legislation can also be read as a reaction to a lingering problem the government faced in dealing with its tribal population, mentioned above: namely, the difficulty in discerning who in fact counted as a Bedouin. What seems to have made this issue particularly pressing was the fact that—according to some evidence I have seen, at least—many Egyptian citizens were claiming Bedouin descent in order to qualify for the privilege of exemption from military service that Mehmed Ali had conferred on the tribes. Social historian Gabriel Baer argued, for example, that the number of Bedouin counted in the 1897 Egyptian census was significantly inflated since “many fellahs claimed to be ‘Arab in order to be exempted from military service” (an increase of over 300,000, or more than double). This certainly would explain what Cromer himself acknowledged was an inordinately large jump in the number of recorded Bedouins in the fifteen years since the previous census. According to G.W. Murray, the artificially high number of Bedouins “terribly complicates the task of the recruiting authorities” and

100 Baer, Studies in the Social History, Ch. 1.
101 According to Cromer’s Annual Report for 1898, there had been 247,000 Bedouins counted in the 1882 census, and a “somewhat remarkable” figure of 574,000 counted in the 1897 census. Cromer was led to conclude that “during the last fifteen years large numbers of Bedouins have been absorbed into the settled inhabitants of the Nile Valley,” Lord Cromer, Report by Her Majesty’s Agent and Consul-General on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of Egypt and the Soudan in 1898 (London: House of Commons Parliamentary Papers [C.9231], 1899).
compelled an Egyptian official in charge of recruitment to conduct a special census in 1904.\textsuperscript{102}

Another piece of evidence comes from an unpublished memoir written by British desert traveler and officer Wilfred Jennings-Bramly, in which he disparages a member of his caravan to Siwa named ‘Abdullah by labeling him “one of those sham Bedawee [sic] to be met with in every village near the desert—men who have been enrolled in a tribe and pay tribute for the privilege which confers with it freedom from military service.”\textsuperscript{103} In fact, similar to how Aharoni and ‘Abdel-Mun‘im ‘Amir construed the boundary between desert and cultivation to be amorphous and ever shifting, Jennings-Bramly paints a picture of the desert edge as a slippery liminal space where identities often changed and overlapped. It was a place, for example, where his trusted Bedouin guide named Dow was forced to dwell upon losing his fortune after spending half his life as a merchant conducting trade between Kufra and Cairo. And it was a place where men like ‘Abdullah—though “every inch of him a fellah—could come to know “every ‘umda of the desert country along the edge of the cultivation” and acquire “some few Bedawee habits from constantly meeting them in his wanderings.”\textsuperscript{104} Although more evidence would be necessary to corroborate this analysis, it seems very plausible that the desert edge became a crucial space for the contestation and negotiation of identities—and a place where Egyptian fellahin could mingle with tribesmen and broker special deals with them in order to get inscribed in the books as badawi and thus falsely claim their military

\textsuperscript{102} Murray, Sons of Ishmael, 31. According to a footnote in Murray’s study, the Director of Recruiting reported the “following inflated totals of different ‘Bedouin’ tribes” in 1904—290,095 settled and living in their own farm colonies; 240,880 living among the fellahin; and 70,472 “real Bedouins or nomads. This made for a grand total of 601,447—a quite substantial figure (even if significantly lower than the estimate of one million offered by the Mu’ayyad article’s author.

\textsuperscript{103} MEC: Jennings-Bramly papers (File 2/2, “Western Badawins,” 7).

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
exemption. Paradoxically, then, the policies first undertaken by Mehmed Ali to neutralize the Bedouin threat and increase their legibility by settling them in and around the cultivation actually had the opposite effect—the sedentarization and further integration of the tribes made it extremely difficult to parse who was in fact a Bedouin, and consequently gave tribesmen and fellahin alike increased room for maneuver.

It should thus come as no surprise that the Egyptian government sought to pass sweeping legislation to deal with this confusing situation in the countryside, and along the margin of the cultivation, and attempt once again to render the Bedouin population in these areas significantly more legible. The first Decree—passed on December 28, 1905—provided a complete set of regulations for Bedouin administration, seeking, according to one observer, to “organize [the tribes] in an administrative fashion approaching the organization of towns and villages.”105 First, the law stipulated that each tribe must have a headquarters (markaz) in each province or governorate, to be appointed by the Minister of the Interior. Additionally, the law ordered the creation within each province or governorate of a local Commission for Bedouin affairs, which would be presided over by the respective mudir or muhafiz along with an agent from the Interior Ministry; a representative from the Public Parquet; and finally four Bedouin ‘umdas chosen by the mudir or muhafiz. These commissions could be convened at any time by the respective mudir or muhafiz to look into any issues concerning the tribal leaders or those raised by the Minister of the Interior.106

105 As transcribed in Lamba, Droit Public et Administratif.
The 1905 law also laid out regulations for the appointment and responsibilities of tribal notables, thereby in essence developing the strategy initiated by Mehmed Ali of converting the Bedouin ‘umdas—which, we said, was an invented leadership position not organic to the traditional tribal structure—into de facto agents of the state administration. Section Two of the law mandated that each tribe must be led by one or more ‘umdas who would be primarily responsible for the tribe’s welfare, and that their appointment would be selected by the local commission for Bedouin affairs and approved by the Interior Ministry. Another article required that each ‘umda have a representative (wakil ‘umda) in each province or governorate in which at least fifty members of his tribe reside. Additionally, the state officials of each province or governorate would appoint local sheikhs to serve under the ‘umdas, thus completing the tribal hierarchy. The primarily duty of the tribal leaders, according to Article 15 of the law, was to arrest any tribesman wanted by the authorities and turn him over to them within a reasonable timeframe. The law even went so far as to lay out regulations for where the ‘umdas and their agents could reside: ‘umdas were free to live wherever they pleased, as long as they dutifully traveled to their respective provincial headquarters whenever their presence was required; the wakil ‘umdas, however, were required to live within the domains of the province or governorate to which they were attached.107

If the 1905 law circumscribed the basic provisions of the administrative organization of the Bedouin tribes, the second law passed three years later addressed the issue of military evasion more directly, laying out a new system for Bedouin

107 DWQ: MNW 0075-003562.
registration. The initiative for the new legislation at this time seems to have come from the Minister of War, who argued in a memo that, “Since the Bedouin ['urban'] census carried out in 1264 Hijri has become obsolete, it no longer serves its purpose and cannot be relied upon for implementing military conscription.”

Once again, however, the lawmakers were forced to cede significant authority to the local tribal leaders in enforcing the new legislation. Article 1 of the 1908 law required a register to be kept at the Ministry of War of “all persons of Bedouin extraction in the male line of descent, resident or settled in any part of Egypt in which recruiting operations are carried on,” yet stipulated that the register would be kept primarily by the tribes themselves, rather than by the mudiriyas. The language of this clause is also somewhat vague in its delineation of enforceable territory: would the law pertain only to settled Bedouins in or near the Nile Valley, or would recruiting operations extend further into the desert? Additionally, the new law responded to the War Minister’s charge by establishing a new Bedouin census, though this too would be undertaken by a commission composed of eight ‘umdas (five of whom would be appointed by the Ministry of War, the other three of whom would be appointed from among each Mudiriyaa’s Bedouin ‘Umdas Commission (as per the 1905 law). Despite the state authorities’ necessary continued reliance on local Bedouin leadership, the intent of the new law was quite clear: to clamp down on Bedouin impostors and thus help the recruitment office’s cause. Article 3 thus mandated that, upon the completion of the new census, “no person shall be exempt from military service…unless his name is entered in

108 Law #6 of 1908, printed in full in Wathelet and Brunton, Codes Égyptiens, 100-102. Also, for drafts and deliberations concerning the law, see DWQ: MNW 0075-014962, 0075-016044, 0075-014961.
109 DWQ: MNW 0075-014961 (Memo from Minister of War to Council of Ministers, Feb. 25, 1908). I have unfortunately been unable to find any more information on the earlier Bedouin census to which the Minister refers.
the said register.” At the same time, though, the law included a sort of grandfather clause for the earlier census from 1264 Hijri, no matter how imperfect or obsolete the authorities found it: “Every person who is descended in the male line from some person whose name is included in the Beduin [sic] Census of 1264 A.H. or who proves that he is of Beduin extraction shall be treated as if he were of Beduin extraction in the male line” (Article 2).\textsuperscript{110} Given the law’s underlying ambiguity, then, it remains unclear to what extent it actually managed to achieve its goal of increasing the legibility of the population in and around the Nile Valley by clarifying who was a true Bedouin.

The law must have made at least some impact, however, for just as we saw in the case of the guardsmen reorganization of 1896, key representatives of the Bedouin population construed it as a threat to their autonomy and strongly opposed its implementation. Leaders of twelve separate tribes sent a petition to the Khedive, once again complaining that the new legislation was “detrimental to Bedouin privileges,” and demanded that he set up a special council to meet with the Bedouin ‘umdas to discuss the law’s most problematic provisions.\textsuperscript{111} Additionally, according to a report submitted to the Majlis al-Shura by Ismail Abaza Pasha—President of the special commission formed to draft the ‘urban law—several Bedouin ‘umdas explicitly demanded (among other complaints) that the law be amended to remove all references to slavery, so that it would “consider their slaves as Bedouin” (‘itibar raqiqihim min dimna al-‘urban).\textsuperscript{112}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this chapter, I have explored the utility of applying Lauren Benton’s analysis of geographical and legal anomaly within empire to the case of the Egyptian West (as well

\textsuperscript{110} DWQ: MNW 0075-014962.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} DWQ: MNW 0075-016044.
as other peripheral regions) in the long-nineteenth century. I argued—based primarily on the persistence of local, traditional judicial institutions in various deserts and oases; the Egyptian state’s policy, going back to the time of Mehmed Ali, of condoning and even at times accentuating Bedouin difference; and the weakness that local state officials on the spot felt in the face of major breaches of law and order in these marginal locales—that the region emerged throughout this period as a particular enclave of territorial and legal anomaly within the broader emergent modern nation-state of Egypt. I have also demonstrated how certain projects of Egyptian state centralization in the West (and elsewhere) depended fundamentally on a process of negotiation with the traditional institutions and practices of local society in these regions. In this way, I suggest, the language of difference and distance became a tool that state and non-state actors alike could wield to pursue their interests in a fluid political field where different centralizing and non-centralizing marks of sovereignty increasingly overlapped and vied for primacy.

Benton’s analysis, of course, is limited to a treatment of European overseas empires: the primary sites of her analysis are consequently enclaves within those empires such as the princely states or hill stations in the Indian Raj that enjoyed a separate status in British colonial law, or the Atlantic riverine regions that Portuguese and Spanish colonists struggled to traverse.113 By virtue of Benton’s focus on the longer durée evolution of uneven legal regimes within different imperial contexts, her work typically refrains from examining how one might pursue the study of anomalous territorial enclaves within an emergent nation-state still struggling to work through the challenges of extending uniform rule over its disparate domains.

113 Benton, Search for Sovereignty, Ch. 5, Ch. 2.
It might therefore be fruitful to place Benton’s new work in dialogue with Eugen Weber’s classic study of nation-building at the time of the French Third Republic, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), which does in fact deal with a modernizing central state’s efforts to incorporate its own so-called “savage” peripheries—in France’s case, the non-French-speaking rural regions to be found in all directions out from Paris. Although Weber’s focus on notions of civilization and acculturation in a context of nation-making certainly puts him at odds with Benton, I suggest that both modes of analysis can be useful for framing the Egyptian West as a lens through which to view crucial broader processes underpinning the fraught constitution of the Egyptian nation-state in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Weber begins his story in *Peasants into Frenchmen* by describing a situation in France at the onset of the Third Republic that resonates strongly with the portrait of Egypt I have been attempting to paint: France, boasting a strong center, was defined by a taken-for-granted myth of “essential unity,” but the reality of its fundamental diversity was inescapable.\(^{114}\) Indeed, as Weber evocatively narrates—similar to how government officials in Cairo conceived of the Bedouin tribes in the far-off deserts of Egypt—when Parisians looked out at the peripheries of their state, “references to savagery abound, applied equally to the landscape, the conditions, and the population.”\(^{115}\) The deep fundamental question underpinning Weber’s account is thus *how* the central state responded when this basic diversity in Frenchness all of a sudden became untenable—

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 3. Later on, Weber even mentions the Landes region being considered a French desert—the “African Sahara” of France).
when it became “imperfection, injustice, failure, something to be noted and to be remedied.”

The answer, for Weber, was to deploy a series of key centralizing mechanisms—compulsory national schooling, military conscription, the expansion of roads and railroads, and the consolidation of nation-wide markets—in what was a “determined assault against provincialism.” It was in the new, well-provisioned schools of the Third Republic—which the government made both free and compulsory—that students in rural regions cultivated an alternate set of values, gained a sense of national unity by seeing maps of the French hexagon, and learned the basic requirements of being a good modern citizen. Service in the military was where people from all over the country learned to speak French, and it would ultimately serve as “an agency for emigration, acculturation, and in the final analysis, civilization.” And, finally, the integration of city and countryside could never have taken place without the large-scale expansion of transportation networks that took place in the middle of the nineteenth century, fostering a new type of national market for goods (as well as culture), and facilitating migration.

*Egypt at fin-de-siecle* makes for a suggestive counterpoint to the France of the Third Republic that Weber describes. If the Egyptian state did undoubtedly conceive of its desert regions as fundamentally different—indeed, as backwards and savage—it either could not or chose not to incorporate the West in the late-nineteenth century in the same way that the French state did its rural and mountainous provinces. Instead, as we have seen throughout this chapter, the centralizing mechanisms of the inchoate Egyptian

---

116 Ibid., 9.
117 Ibid., 334.
118 Ibid., 336-338.
119 Ibid., 302.
nation-state at this time confronted the challenges of difference and distance in the desert and oasis peripheries by working through local practices and institutions. In this way, the state adopted a *de facto* posture of centralization that allowed room for the persistence of distinct territorial enclaves of legal anomaly. It is in fact this idea that centralizing projects always involve a fundamentally interactive process of negotiation between different institutions with distinctive sovereign capabilities that Weber consistently misses in his analysis.

The oasis of Siwa makes for an interesting case in point. In Siwa, the national schools that loom so large in Weber’s account were largely absent; as late as 1900, according to an Interior Ministry report, the Sanusiyya Brotherhood\(^{120}\) operated three of the five schools in the oasis (their rival sect, the Madaniyya, ran another, and the final one was presided over by the local *qadi*).\(^ {121}\) As for Weber’s point about the army being a crucial agent of change: Siwans—like all Bedouins and oasis-dwellers, as we saw above—remained exempt from military conscription. Finally, Siwa—like the Western Desert on the whole—did not witness any real development in transportation infrastructure until much later on, remaining throughout the prewar period a node along several camel-borne caravan routes. The Khedivial railway that I will examine in Chapter 3 never made it further west than Hammam; and the construction of new paved roads would not really begin until the decade after World War I. Additionally—in light of Weber’s focus on learning French as a national language—it might be noted that it is an open question to what extent most Siwans knew any Arabic before the 1920s.

\(^{120}\) The special role that the Sanusiyya played in facilitating the onset of the Egyptian state’s broader engagement with the oasis of Siwa in the late-nineteenth century will be the main subject of the following chapter.

\(^{121}\) T.B. Hohler, *Report on the Oasis of Siva* (Cairo, 1900), 22.
Whereas the author of the aforementioned Interior Ministry report contends that most Siwans did learn Arabic in the period between around 1860 and his visit in 1900, other travelers such as Grunau and Steindorf (who visited the oasis in 1899 and 1904, respectively) wrote that most did not.\(^{122}\)

In light of this short comparison—though bearing in mind all the other evidence I have adduced in this chapter to depict the persistence of the Egyptian West as a zone of legal anomaly—it is worth considering whether it is the Egyptian or the French case—with its strong articulation of a national civilizing mission—that represents the real aberration in how national sovereignty was actually practiced throughout the nineteenth century. As Benton describes was so typical of the imperial experience, the Egyptian Government adapted to the particular challenges posed by its geography and diversity by working through local society—even if this meant conceding a great deal of autonomy to oasis and Bedouin populations in the West. The idea of embarking on large-scale projects to bring these populations Egyptian national culture and civilization would come much later.\(^{123}\)

Even if we cannot extend Weber’s analysis to describe a similar process of turning “Bedouins into Egyptians” in the concomitant period, this does not mitigate the fact that Weber’s framework is an extremely useful means for “thinking” the Egyptian state in our period. Most fundamentally, for our purposes, Weber concludes that the process of forging a seamless one-to-one relationship between state and nation is always

---


\(^{123}\) For example, both Omnia El Shakry’s recent *The Great Social Laboratory* and Timothy Mitchell’s *Rule of Experts* provide close readings of various state projects to study, measure, and civilize Egypt’s “backwards” populations in the mid-twentieth century (though these works pay particular attention to the rural fellahin, not the Bedouins). Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
painfully slow and uneven, and that nations are never “a given reality” but rather a
“work-in-progress, a model of something at once to be built and to be treated for political
reasons as already in existence.\textsuperscript{124} What we have seen throughout this chapter is the
Egyptian nation-state very much a work-in-progress. As such, we have seen how the
Egyptian state consistently articulated a policy of legal anomaly and alterity in the
Egyptian West and other marginal domains, reflecting a formative stage in the nation-
making process when the basic underlying diversity of Egypt had not yet become a
measure of imperfection, or a source of national embarrassment.

Chapter 2 – Siwa, the Sanusiyya, and the Nature of Egyptian Sovereignty

In the winter of 1897, the celebrated English traveler and poet Wilfred Scawen Blunt undertook a private journey across the Egyptian Western Desert to the oasis of Siwa. Shortly after his arrival, Blunt’s camp was besieged by a large force of around three hundred Siwans, commanded by Osman Habun, a powerful Siwan notable and the local agent of the Sanusiyya Brotherhood. Blunt’s entire camp was pillaged, and he just narrowly made it out of Siwa alive.¹

Upon his return to Cairo, Blunt appealed to British Consul-General Lord Cromer in hopes of mobilizing the full force of the Egyptian Government to bring the Siwan attackers to justice. Cromer replied, however, that it would be impossible to prosecute the orchestrators of the attack given that such legal action might “incur a possible quarrel with the Senussia brotherhood.”² A few months later, Blunt sent another scathing letter to Cromer arguing that, as a British subject, he had a basic right to demand government intervention in the pursuit of justice, which Cromer had flouted. After all, Blunt chided Cromer:

> Siwah is an Egyptian town, paying its taxes to the Government, and the Egyptian Government is responsible there as elsewhere for law and order. These may be difficult to enforce, but the responsibility remains.³

Cromer’s unsympathetic response is extremely illuminating: “You started for this remote region, which is notoriously inhabited by a very turbulent and fanatical population, and over which the Egyptian Government has, for a long time past, exercised

¹ For an account of the episode, see NA: FO 78/4956 (Blunt to Cromer, Mar. 3, 1898). Blunt also dealt with this episode in his entries on Siwa in his now published diaries. Wilfred Scawen Blunt, My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events, 1888-1914 (New York: Knopf, 1932), 241-76.
² NA: FO 78/4956 (Blunt to Cromer, Mar. 3, 1898).
³ Ibid.
little more than a nominal control, without, so far as I am aware, warning any one in Egypt of your intentions” (emphasis added). At the same time, Cromer suggested that Siwa was hardly the secure “Government town” Blunt claimed it was: “To any one who has been so long acquainted with this country as yourself, I need not insist on the point that, for the purposes of the argument, Siwa cannot, with any degree of reason, be assimilated to the rest of Egypt.”

This little-known correspondence over Blunt’s hostile treatment in Siwa—much like the story of the Stack murder case with which I began the preceding chapter—offers another crucial window into just how tentative Egyptian authority, administration, and legal jurisdiction in the western provinces remained throughout the nineteenth century. What exactly was at stake in Cromer’s assertion that the state had only “nominal” control of the oasis as late as 1897, or that it could not be assimilated into Egypt? The Blunt affair also raises several important questions about how the Egyptian Government viewed the people who inhabited this remote territory: what was the political role of the “fanatical” Sanusiyya in Siwa, and why was Cromer so fearful of antagonizing them?

In this chapter, I continue my investigation of the nature of Egyptian sovereignty by focusing on the key role that various local non-state actors played in mediating the Egyptian Government’s attempt to incorporate Siwa in the 1890s—the period in which the state ramped up its efforts to solidify its base of authority over Egypt’s marginal

---

4 NA: FO 78/4956 (Cromer to Blunt, Mar. 7, 1898).
5 Ibid.
6 Cromer was by no means the first colonial official to refer to use the pejorative term “fanatical” to refer to the Sanusiyya. Indeed, this had become a recurrent meme in European discourse ever since the very first French studies had been published about the Order, beginning with Henri Duveyrier’s La Confrérie Musulmane de Sidi Mohammed Ben ‘Ali Es-Senousi et Son Domaine Géographique (Paris: Société de Géographie, 1886). For an analysis of the chain of colonial thought that ultimately produced the stable “fanatic” label, see Michel Le Gall, “The Ottoman Government and the Sanusiyya: A Reappraisal,” IJMES 21 (1989), 91-3.
domains across the board. Foremost among these mediating agents in Siwa were local leaders of the Sanusi Brotherhood. Having first established a presence in the vast Libyan Desert in the mid-1800s, the Sanusiyya managed over a mere half-century to become the predominant local power brokers in the region, counting among their ranks the lion’s share of the Bedouin tribesmen and oasis dwellers inhabiting both sides of the putative Libyan/Egyptian border. And yet, despite this extensive reach of the Sanusiyya beyond Libya, the Egyptian dimension of the movement has been completely overlooked in most scholarship.  

My objective for this chapter is thus twofold. On one hand, I wish to look very closely at the local political dynamics over a fairly narrow period in one particular locale in the Egyptian West—the Oasis of Siwa—in order to observe what Egyptian sovereignty in the region looked like in practice. To this end, I investigate the ways in which the Sanusiyya as well as Siwa’s traditional notable sheikhs (many of whom were, of course, Sanusi brethren) adapted to the new challenges of Egyptian state intervention in this period. On the other hand, I aim to revise our understanding of the nascent political and social formations in both Eastern Libya and Western Egypt in this period by highlighting the interactivity between them that was made possible by the region-wide political and sacred authority of the Sanusiyya. In short, this chapter aims to embed modern Siwan history in a fundamentally regional context, viewing the dynamics of Egyptian state centralization at this moment as a key instance in which we can track several overlapping 

---

7 The Sanusiyya have typically been considered (in what scholarly literature treats them at all) to be a strictly Libyan phenomenon. Indeed, the Sanusiyya are most familiar to scholars for their key role in galvanizing opposition to the Italian occupying forces throughout the 1920s, and for the Sanusi monarchy that was ultimately established in Libya on the heels of Italian decolonization after World War II. See E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); Claudia Gazzini, “Jihad in Exile: Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi, 1918-33” (M.A. Thesis, Princeton University, 2004); Ahmad Dajani, *al-Harakah al-Sanusiyyah, Nasha’atuha wa-Namu’uha fi al-Qarn al-Tashi ‘Ashar* (Beirut: Dar Lubnan, 1967); Nicola Ziadeh, *Sanusiyah: a Study of a Revivalist Movement in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958).
and competing marks of sovereignty in the oasis. If Cairo had in fact succeeded in securing a firmer foothold in Siwa by the turn of the century, as the conventional story goes, I argue that it achieved this only by recognizing the need to defer to local authority and accept the persistence of customary rule in several important respects.

Although I would suggest that such an analysis—conceiving Egyptian sovereignty as a process of negotiation between a tentative state and a powerful set of local political actors and social groups—could be extended to all of Egypt’s desert and oasis territories in this period, Siwa is a particularly apt case study given how strongly this interpretation chafes against the conventional narrative of Siwa that is widely touted in Egyptian nationalist historiography and repeated in popular lore. The place of Siwa in the nationalist imagination is directly proportional to the oasis’s image as a sort of final Egyptian frontier. Its reputation as not only the fiercest defender of its autonomy among Egypt’s oases, but also historically the most dangerous, unruly, and ungovernable, has meant that Cairo’s so-called “conquest” of Siwa—the result of an approximately eighty-year-long struggle ending around 1900—stands out in standard accounts of nation-building, centralization, and state power (at least those that take Egypt’s peripheral territories under consideration at all). A reconsideration of how various agents of the Egyptian state in Siwa found themselves powerless to manage some of the most basic tasks of governance—such as collecting taxes or enforcing law and order—without the

---

8 Egyptian novelist Baha’a Taher has recently tapped into much of this lore surrounding nineteenth-century Siwa in his novel Wahat al-Ghurub (“Sunset Oasis”). Baha’a Taher, Wahat al-Ghurub (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2007).
assistance of key local actors thus already marks a significant departure from the one-
dimensional triumphalist historiography that has gone unchallenged to this day.⁹

Beyond unsettling this typical story of Siwa’s inevitable incorporation, my
analysis of state/society relations in 1890s Siwa in this chapter also aims to address a
broader literature concerning the local appropriation of nation-state legitimacy, and the
formalization of traditional local authority. In his seminal work on the making of the
French and Spanish frontier, Peter Sahlins argues for the salience of local agency and
local interests in accommodating the onset of nation-state identity in the borderlands. He
writes, for example, that national identity “appeared less as a result of state intentions
than from the local process of adopting and appropriating the nation without abandoning
local interests, a local sense of place, or a local identity. At once opposing and using the
state for its own ends, local society brought the nation into the village.”¹⁰ A similar
framework emerges from the work of a slightly older generation of colonial historians,
such as Terence Ranger, who have suggested that the onset of policies of indirect rule by
the British and French in Africa actually invited local notables to appropriate the
trappings of legitimacy and authority provided by the imperial states to serve their own

⁹ Ariel Salzmann’s work on decentralization and “outsourcing” in the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire has sparked a lively debate about whether or not indirect rule through devolved provincial authority was a sign of imperial weakness, or else a deliberate strategy of a savvy state grappling with new geopolitical realities. Ariel Salzmann, Toqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State (Leiden: Brill, 2004). See Baki Teczan’s recent Second Ottoman Empire for a recent intervention in this debate. Baki Tezcan, The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010). Like much else in the Ottoman historiography, this discussion of “indirect rule” and the devolution of authority has not typically been extended to the case of Egypt in the nineteenth century. In this chapter—similar to my invocation of Lauren Benton’s work in Chapter 1—I am essentially exploring the utility of applying conceptual vocabulary that is now commonplace in the study of imperialism to the case of vast, jurisdictionally differentiated nation-states. I will pick up this theme in the conclusion to this chapter.

local interests and entrench their power base at home.\textsuperscript{11} I argue in this chapter that similar local political processes were at play in Siwa in the nineteenth century. Rather than exhibiting all-out resistance to rule by outsiders, savvy Siwan notables adapted to the new political space created by the gradual intervention of the Egyptian Government, and consequently brought the state into Siwa largely on their own terms, while embracing the new mechanisms of governance in Siwa provided by the ma’mur’s presence to formalize their customary authority and serve their own local political interests.

In what follows, I begin by laying out the basic contours of mid-nineteenth-century Siwan history, paying particular attention to areas where the typical narrative of Siwan autonomy and resistance to the Egyptian state can be challenged along the lines I have just sketched out. I will then switch gears by providing a brief historical overview of the Sanusiyya as well as a general analysis of its social and political structure, placing special emphasis on the Brotherhood’s power base in western Egypt. In the remainder of the chapter, I will reconstruct a series of seminal events that occurred in Siwa beginning in the mid-1890s in order to challenge prevailing conceptions of how Egyptian sovereignty actually functioned in the marginal domains. Ultimately I argue against conventional models of straightforward local resistance to central state encroachment in the remote provinces, suggesting instead that the Egyptian state owed whatever gains it made in Siwa to the willing accommodation of the Sanusiyya and other local notables.

who actually stood to gain a great deal by working to some extent with the Government and condoning its nominal sovereignty.  

**Siwa’s Struggle for Autonomy Reconsidered**

Siwan history in the nineteenth century, as best as it can be gleansed from the very spotty extant historical literature on the oasis, is dominated by one overarching narrative: the Siwans’ dogged resistance to the sporadic efforts of the Egyptian state to conquer it and exact an annual tribute, and the state’s successful incorporation of the oasis by the turn of the century. This narrative is certainly an accurate enough depiction of the earliest phase of the conflict, which began in February 1820 when Mehmed Ali sent somewhere between 1000 and 2000 troops, under the command of Hussein Bey Shamasherghy, to conquer Siwa and bring its long centuries of autonomy to an end.

The Siwans countered Shamasherghy’s campaign with fierce resistance, but ultimately

---

12 Some of the material for this chapter was first presented at various conferences or workshops over the past two years, as work-in-progress talks. These are as follows: “Power, Piety, and Political Identity at the Margins of the Egyptian and Ottoman State: The Case of the Sanusiyya” (Providence, RI: presented at the Brown University Graduate Student Conference, “Borderlands and Meeting Points,” April 2011); “Power, Piety, and Political Identity at the Margins: The Case of the Sanusiyya” (Washington, DC: presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, Dec. 2011).

13 Siwa in the modern period has received strikingly little scholarly treatment by historians, and what little historiography does exist suffers from an over-reliance on a very limited and flimsy source base. In light of the unfortunate dearth of extant written materials from or about the oasis before the twentieth century—and given the absence (or inaccessibility) of the so-called “great written record” of Siwa, a centuries-old compilation of local history and lore that was last seen in the possession of a local notable named Sheikh ‘Omar Musellem over a century ago—various authors have inevitably accepted and uncritically repeated many of the same dubious claims—though oftentimes quite carelessly. In some cases, perusing various narrative accounts of Siwa, I encountered examples of wholesale plagiarism (indeed, Rif’at Gawhari’s historical section matches Hohler’s report from 1902 almost word for word). In others, the authors misrepresent or perhaps even purposely distort the history they have borrowed, so that the already thin body of literature about Siwan history ends up muddled and full of internal contradictions. See: T.B. Hohler, *Report on the Oasis of Siva* (Cairo, 1900); Rif’at Gawhari, *Jannat al-Sahra, Siwah wa Wahat Amun* (Cairo: al-Dar al-Qawmiyah lil-Tiba’ah wa-al-Nashr, 1962); Husayn ‘Ali Rifa‘i, *Wahat Siwah min al-Nawahi al-Tarikhiyah wa-al-Jughrajfiyah wa-al-Ijtima‘iyah wa-al-Iqtiyadiyah* (Cairo: al-Matba‘ah al-Amiriyyah, 1932); Ahmed Fakhry, *Siwa Oasis* (Cairo: AUC Press, 1990); Muhammad Fu‘ad, *Wahat Misr al-Shahirah: Murshid lil-Mudarrisin.* ([Egypt: s.n. ], n.d.); Charles Dalrymple Belgrave, *Siwa, the Oasis of Jupiter Ammon* (London: John Lane, 1923).

14 According to Rifa‘i, Dalrymple Belgrave, and Federico Bonola Bey, Shamasherghy had 1,300 troops at his side; Fu‘ad and Vivian put the number at 2000. Hohler’s number is lower: 1000-1200 troops.
succumbed to Egyptian forces after a purported three hours of fighting. The consequences of defeat were severe for the oasis: Shamasherghy executed sixty Siwan notables, introduced a steep tax that was to be paid annually, and then installed a sheikh from the oasis’s western faction named ‘Ali Balli as the first government-appointed ‘umda of the oasis.

In spite of the Egyptian Government’s initial show of strength during this first campaign, it lacked the power to enforce its new regime in Siwa with any consistency. The Siwans immediately flouted Balli’s authority and refused to pay their taxes to Cairo. For whatever reason, Mehmed Ali’s response came only seven years later: in 1827, he sent Shamasherghy back to Siwa, along with a force of around 800 men, to re-occupy the oasis and coerce the Siwans into resuming the payment of their taxes. The Siwans once again countered with armed resistance, but the Egyptian force prevailed. Shamasherghy again opted to take extreme punitive measures against the oasis, ordering the execution of a large number of Siwan notables; he banished twenty more to “Egypt.” The Bey also increased the already steep annual tribute and allegedly introduced an additional tax on each Siwan date-palm.

If the available historical sources more or less coalesce around a consistent narrative of Shamasherghy’s two expeditions to Siwa, it unfortunately becomes much

---

15 Hohler, *Report*, 23; Rifa’i, *Wahat Siwah*, 23-5, Dalrymple Belgrave, *Siwa*, 102-3. According to Rifa’i, the 1820 campaign was yet another development in Siwa’s factional conflict, for it was actually the Westerners of Siwa who had spurred the Egyptian government to intervene, and thus the Easterners who resisted them. This interpretation does not appear in any of the other standard accounts, however.

16 Although the precise origins of the conflict remain murky, Siwa was divided into two hostile factions known as “easterners” and “westerners.”

17 According to Hohler, the tribute was 1,000 “dollars”; Rifa’i says it was worth 10,000 riyals.

18 Rifa’i, *Wahat Siwah*, 24-5. He adds that this campaign included a section of Bedouin troops from the Hijaz. Also, according to Fakhry, the campaign arrived in 1829, with a force of only 600 men. Fakhry, *Siwa Oasis*, 106.

19 Hohler and Fakhry put the number at eighteen; Rifa’i claims it was actually eighty.

20 Hohler, *Report*, 23-4. This number is repeated in the texts of both Fakhry and Rifa’i, as well.

more difficult to parse even the most basic details of Siwa’s political history in the decades following these formative events. A couple key themes do emerge from the muddled, often contradictory historical record, however. First, even despite Mehmed Ali’s formidable show of strength in Siwa in the 1820s, the Egyptian Government’s authority over the oasis would actually be characterized by long fits of absence or absent-mindedness throughout most of the century. The state’s inconsistent presence in Siwa manifested in a number of different ways. For example—for reasons that are not entirely clear—the Government could not or chose not to enforce the Siwan tax with any degree of regularity. Thus when the Siwans stopped paying their taxes almost immediately after Shamasherghy’s second campaign, it took another eight years for Mehmed Ali’s state to respond by dispatching another military expedition to the oasis around 1835. Undeterred by this latest round of punishment and coercion, the Siwans revolted yet again and refused to pay any taxes to Cairo; this state of affairs went on for five years, until Mehmed Ali decided to send a fourth punitive campaign to Siwa in 1840, led by an officer named Khalil Bey.

Much of the trouble that the Government faced enforcing its rule in Siwa stemmed from the difficulty of finding reliable local governors, as well as ensuring their safety. Egyptian officials stationed in the oasis were never really secure; many of them were murdered or forced into retreat. ‘Ali Balli, the aforementioned first government-sanctioned ‘umda of Siwa, was murdered by local rivals in 1838, in what was the first of several such crimes committed against Siwan governors in the nineteenth century. Other governors were run out of the oasis, such as an official named Yunus Effendi, who had

---

22 Ibid., 24-5.
23 Ibid., 24-5; Hohler, Report, 24.
been left in charge in Siwa after the Khalil campaign. According to one government report, Yunus’s departure resulted in Siwa being once again “left to itself and its assembly of Sheikhs” for what seems to be nearly two decades.\textsuperscript{24} It was not until around 1857 that the Egyptian Government attempted anew to set its authority in the oasis on firmer footing, creating the permanent post of \textit{Ma’mur Siwa}.\textsuperscript{25} Yet an assignment in Siwa remained extremely dangerous even after this reform, and it is therefore unsurprising that the post of \textit{ma’mur Siwa} continued to be deeply unpopular among Egyptian officials, considered “both by the Government and its employees as a form of banishment.”\textsuperscript{26}

Another symptom of the state’s tentative presence in Siwa in these middle decades of the nineteenth century was the central government’s ostensible lack of interest in exploiting Siwa’s lucrative natural resources at this time. This theme emerges clearly from one of two reports on the oases of Siwa and Jaghbub written in the early 1890s by Muhammad Makki, a former \textit{qadi} of Siwa. In addition to the information these reports contain regarding the local authority of the Sanusiyya—a theme to which I will return below—they are particularly provocative for their insinuation that the Egyptian Government remained only a very distant presence in the West, even despite the efforts of its men on the spot to grab the attention of its officials. In one case, according to Makki:

The Ma’mur [of Siwa] told me that he wrote at the time to the Buhayra Mudirieh (to which the oasis is attached), asking permission to sell the ground around it to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{24}Hohler, \textit{Report}, 24. According to Fakhry, when British traveler Bayle St. John arrived in the oasis in 1847, he reported that there was “neither a Ma’mur nor ‘Umda in Siwa.” Fakhry, \textit{Siwa Oasis}, 107.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{25}The Government also purportedly embarked on a short-lived experiment to coopt local notables by simultaneously appointing two ‘Um\textsuperscript{a}das—one Eastern, one Western (See Dalrymple Belgrave, \textit{Siwa}, 109; Hohler, \textit{Report}, 24). The details here are once again somewhat fuzzy: Rifa‘i postulates that the new post of \textit{ma’mur} was intended to replace the ‘Umda system once and for all. Rifa‘i, \textit{Wahat Siwah}, 25-6.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{26}Hohler, \textit{Report}, 24. Dalrymple Belgrave has a similar passage about the position being seen as “exile.” Dalrymple Belgrave, \textit{Siwa}, 109.}
\end{footnotes}
natives so that both parties benefit by it; and the Mudirieh gave no answer. The people, however, do cultivate the land, but on what terms I cannot tell.  

Further down, Makki adds: “There are in Siwa some 1000 Feddans of cultivable lands which the natives are using without any benefit to the Government.” In these examples, at least, the branch of the Egyptian Government directly responsible for affairs in Siwa—the Mudiriyya of Buhayra Province—remained visibly absent from, or unconcerned with, the business of administration in and around Siwa, even despite of the local ma’mur’s attempt to flag a potentially promising future source of revenue for the state.

The second related theme that can be parsed from the otherwise spotty historiography of nineteenth-century Siwa is the manner in which local Siwan notables actively sought to exploit the uncertain political situation in the oasis to shore up their own personal authority and serve their own communal interests. It is here that we can begin to poke some holes in the conventional one-dimensional narrative of Siwan resistance to the Egyptian state, for it seems that at least some Siwan notables—though certainly no friends of the central regime in Cairo—sought to harness the legitimacy and authority of the state for their own local political purposes. Two examples serve to demonstrate this point. First, after ‘Ali Balli was murdered in 1838, his son Yusuf petitioned the Egyptian government to appoint him as the logical successor. He ultimately staged a ruse whereby he convinced a large group of Siwans to murder a hapless British traveler, James Hamilton, but then arranged for Hamilton’s escape in order to curry favor with the government authorities. Ultimately Balli got his way: Hamilton persuaded the Egyptian Khedive ‘Abbas I (r. 1848-54) that Balli alone could

---

27 Durham University Library (DUL): Wingate Papers, Box 131/2 (Sheets 1-48—“Statement of Muhammad Makki, late Qadi of Siwa, on the Oasis of Siwa”).
28 Ibid.
restore order in Siwa, and ‘Abbas in turn granted him full governing authority as the new ‘umda of the oasis and imprisoned many of the orchestrators of the attack on Hamilton.

Balli’s tenure would not last long, however. Two years later, the new Egyptian Khedive, Sa‘id I (r. 1854-63), pardoned and freed many prisoners of the state on the occasion of his accession; included among these were many of the Siwan sheikhs who Balli had betrayed. After a short war between the Eastern and Western factions, Balli was murdered, and Siwa once again entered a period of autonomy, without any government-sanctioned ruler. A similar episode occurred around 1883, when various Siwan notables took advantage of another authority vacuum in the oasis to convince the Egyptian government to recall a ma‘mur who was hostile to the Sanusiyya. Indeed, according to Dalrymple Belgrave, by this time the Sanusiyya were already the “ultimate arbitrators in any disputes which arose among the people” of Siwa.

Before going into more depth about the particular political role that the Sanusiyya played in Siwa in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, it is important first to give a general portrait of the Brotherhood’s origins and rise to prominence in the vast desert territory comprising the Egyptian/Libyan borderland region.

**Commanding the Libyan Desert: The Rise and Spread of the Sanusiyya**

The Sanusi Brotherhood was founded by Muhammad bin ‘Ali al-Sanusi, an Algerian-born religious scholar who had traveled widely across the Arab world, studying the Islamic sciences under prominent teachers in Fez, Cairo, and Mecca. If al-Sanusi developed his Sufi leanings from the mystical Islamic tradition of his home milieu in North Africa, it was in Mecca where he came under the spell of the salafi Islamic revival

---

movement—particularly the teachings of Sayyid Ahmad bin Idris (“al-Fasi”), head of a relatively new branch of the Shadhli order. Upon the latter’s death, al-Sanusi established his own order in 1837 and managed to galvanize a large number of Bedouins in the Hijaz to become its first followers. Around 1840, for reasons that are not entirely clear, al-Sanusi headed back west, across Egypt to Siwa, where he spent several months and began to attract a sizeable following. He ultimately settled in the region of northeastern Libya historically known as Cyrenaica (Barqa in Arabic), under Ottoman rule at the time, after being invited by the notables of several different tribes in the region to settle among them. In 1843, al-Sanusi and his followers completed the construction of the Brotherhood’s first “lodge” (Arabic: zawiya) on the central Cyrenaican plateau in the Jebel al-Akhdar region, which became known as the “White Lodge” (al-zawiya al-bayda). A decade later, al-Sanusi set up a headquarters for the Brotherhood as well as a university complex in the remote, uninhabited oasis of Jaghbub, approximately 160 kilometers from the Mediterranean coast and only about 100 kilometers west of Siwa. Jaghbub would remain the spiritual and de facto administrative center of the Order for over four decades.

32 The conventional narrative in much European writing stresses al-Sanusi’s political differences with the established authorities and ‘ulema in Mecca, suggesting his need to flee. Knut Vikør has recently offered a reinterpretation of al-Sanusi’s migration, refuting the idea that he was forced to leave and positing instead that al-Sanusi was actively searching for a particular environment such as he would find in the Sahara to implement new organizational ideas for his Islamic brotherhood. See Knut S. Vikør, Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge: Muhammad B. ‘Ali al-Sanusi and His Brotherhood (London: Hurst & Company, 1995).
33 According to some sources, al-Sanusi actually founded the first zawiya in North Africa at Siwa. See, for example, Ahmed Hassanein, The Lost Oases (Cairo: AUC Press, 2006), 59.
34 In 1895, Sayyid Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi moved the headquarters of the brotherhood to Kufra oasis. Interpretations of his motives differ, but they alternately stress Muhammad al-Mahdi’s desire to move further from both the encroachment of European power and from the increasingly active and bothersome presence of the Ottoman state in the province of Benghazi. This latter account is somewhat questionable in light of evidence I have seen suggesting that the Ottoman officials in Benghazi later felt it necessary to ask Sayyid al-Mahdi for permission to establish a qaimaqamlik in Kufra, which he then granted. See NA: FO 195/2093.
The *zawiya* was the fundamental building block of the Sanusi system. In its formative years, the Sanusiyya in the Cyrenaican border region was primarily a missionary organization, and the erection of new *zawiyas*—always at the behest of local tribal leaders who sought out the religious guidance of al-Sanusi for their kinsmen—was the primary means of spreading the word and solidifying new outposts of Sanusi allegiance. Though *zawiyas* across the Sanusi sphere were never entirely uniform— lodges in very remote villages could be quite rudimentary, in fact—they all shared certain unifying features, including a schoolroom for the instruction of local children; a guest-house where travelers could rest for up to three days, free of charge; living quarters for the *sheikh* (head) of the *zawiya* and the other brothers who lived there full-time as teachers and administrators; and a mosque. The central *zawiya* at Jaghbub was built on a grander scale, boasting a mosque that could hold 600 worshipers, a large library with over 8,000 volumes, and—interesting for our purposes—a special boarding room for students from Siwa.\(^\text{35}\)

In the decade and a half between the founding of the White Lodge and the death of Muhammad bin ‘Ali al-Sanusi at Jaghbub in 1859, the Brotherhood had already expanded by leaps and bounds. According to one scholar, about sixty lodges were built during the lifetime of the founder, of which twenty-five were in Cyrenaica proper and nine within Egyptian territory.\(^\text{37}\) Yet under al-Sanusi’s successor—his son, Sayyid al-Mahdi al-Sanusi—the Brotherhood continued to expand at breakneck speed. According to renowned Sanusi ethnographer E.E. Evans-Pritchard, by the time Sayyid al-Mahdi died in 1902, the Sanusi order had grown to encompass approximately 150 *zawiyas* across

\(^{35}\) Hassanein, *Lost Oases*, 57-8; Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 189-90.

\(^{36}\) Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 198.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 184.
North Africa and in the Hijaz, of which 31 were on Egyptian soil (with seventeen of those alone belonging to tribal sections of the Awlad ‘Ali). This latter number is especially notable given how often the Egyptian/Sanusi connection has been ignored in much scholarship. French explorer and travel writer Henri Duveyrier estimated that the Sanusi order comprised some three million followers; the Egyptian notable and explorer Ahmed Hassanein quoted a similar figure of between one and a half and three million people who owed spiritual allegiance to the Sanusi leader during Sayyid al-Mahdi’s era. Such lofty figures are, of course, impossible to verify with any degree of accuracy. But the scope of Sanusi authority did not fail to impress at least some British authorities: in one intelligence report from 1902, for example, the author states that “Practically the whole of the oases and the nomad population between Egypt and the Sudan on the east and the Tuareg country on the west are Senussites to a man.” And in the eyes of Arthur Silva White, a British traveler who visited Siwa in the 1890s, “The Senussi [sic] rule the Sahara, and no power can touch them there.”

The most compelling analysis of the administrative organization and structure of the Sanusi order remains that of Evans-Pritchard, even if parts of his classic ethnography are now clearly somewhat dated. For our purposes here, it must suffice to highlight several key points. First, the Sanusi order thrived to the extent it did because it carefully

---

38 Evans-Pritchard, Sanusi of Cyrenaica, 24-5.
39 Ibid., 72.
40 Certain British officials, for their part, did not seem to understand the connection either and underestimated al-Sanusi’s authority on the Egyptian side of the “border.” See, for example, NA: FO 101/79 (various writings of British proconsul in Benghazi Donald Cameron).
41 Quoted in Arthur Silva White, From Sphinx to Oracle; Through the Libyan Desert to the Oasis of Jupiter Ammon (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1899), 122.
42 Hassanein, Lost Oases, 63.
44 Silva White, Sphinx to Oracle, 128.
grafted itself atop the preexisting tribal system in Cyrenaica and western Egypt. The 
zawiyas were fundamentally “tribal institutions,” actively sought, built, and maintained 
by the leaders of each of the many tribes and sub-tribes in the region, all seeking the 
baraka of the Sanusi leader for their kinsmen.\textsuperscript{45} The zawiyas were built on lands specially 
allocated by each tribe, and Bedouins were expected to pay a tithe to their respective 
zawiya at the harvest. At the same time, the Sanusi order strategically “seeded itself in 
the crevasses between tribes and between tribal sections”\textsuperscript{46}: for example, the monumental 
White Lodge was built at the intersection point of four tribal zones, thus setting a 
precedent of tribal cooperation at the same time that al-Sanusi could avoid showing any 
undue allegiance to any of his adherents.\textsuperscript{47} Similarly, Jaghbub was chosen to be the 
Order’s headquarters partly due to its opportune location as a main locus for tribal groups 
in all directions in the Sanusi sphere; it also fell along both a major north/south caravan 
route as well as the main Hajj route from the west.\textsuperscript{48} The Sanusi Brotherhood operated as 
a sort of federal system: even as each zawiya lived off its own revenues and arbitrated 
local disputes typically without recourse to the central authority in Jaghbub, each zawiya 
sheikh was appointed by and responsible to the Sanusi leader in Jaghbub; in fact, all of 
the Sanusi sheikhs from around the region normally congregated once a year in Jaghbub 
to convene a “council of the order,” where they were required to give detailed reports on 
their respective lodges.\textsuperscript{49} Each lodge was also expected to pay annual tribute (often 
payments in kind) to Jaghbub.

\textsuperscript{45} Evans-Pritchard, \textit{Sanusi of Cyrenaica}, 82. 
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 73. 
\textsuperscript{47} Vikør, \textit{Sufi and Scholar}, 150. 
\textsuperscript{48} Evans-Pritchard, \textit{Sanusi of Cyrenaica}, 15-6; Vikør, 179. 
\textsuperscript{49} Vikør, \textit{Sufi and Scholar}, 197-8.
I have been suggesting that the zawiyas—which functioned not only as sacred prayer spaces but also as “schools, caravanserais, commercial centers, social centers, forts, courts of law, banks, store-houses, poor houses…and burial grounds”50—were the basic building blocks of the Sanusi system. In turn, the elaborate patchwork of Sanusi zawiyas that proliferated across the Eastern Sahara in the second half of the nineteenth century ultimately came, I argue, to constitute the defining “spatial logic” of the Egyptian/Libyan borderlands.51

One key area where we can see this Sanusi spatial logic at work is in the way that the zawiyas served as internal channels of long-distance communication. One unique function of this information network was to carefully vet any pilgrims intending to visit the Sanusi leader in Jaghbub in order to identify impostors, and thus preserve the sanctity and secrecy of the Order. Any potential pilgrims from the East had to pass through the gauntlet of zawiyas along the Mediterranean coast west of Alexandria, spaced about one day apart from one another by camel. Upon sizing up each traveler with a series of questions about his background, loyalties to the Order, and reasons for the journey, the officials at each zawiya would send a report to the next lodge along the route ahead of the traveler’s arrival there.52 In this way, all visitors making their way to the seat of Sanusi authority would be cross-questioned, to ensure that their narrative never wavered. Reports would also be forwarded to Jaghbub, whereupon visitors who arrived there

50 Evans-Pritchard, Sanusi of Cyrenaica, 79-80.
51 This language of alternative spatial logics comes from political scientist Joel Migdal’s work on borderlands and marginal identities. Migdal suggests that states and nations “have constantly been defined and reconstructed by the other spatial logics put forth by the groups that they claim or with which they interact.” See Migdal, “Mental Maps and Virtual Checkpoints: Struggles to Construct and Maintain State and Social Boundaries” in Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices, edited by Joel Migdal (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 12.
52 DUL: Wingate Papers, Box 131/2 (Sheets 51-71—“Qadi’s Visit to Jaghbub”).
would be carefully vetted once again before they were accepted to see the Mahdi.\textsuperscript{53} The Sanusi \textit{zawiyas}, in their function as guest-houses and caravanserais, also became the most efficient means of information-gathering for merchants to pass on and receive news about commercial conditions at the ends of far-flung caravan routes. In the case of the lengthy caravan route from Wadai (in modern-day Chad) to the port of Benghazi, the Sanusiyya even established a regular postal system.\textsuperscript{54} Finally, alongside the \textit{zawiya} network, the Sanusi leadership had a string of agents posted strategically in key nodal cities such as Alexandria and Suez, who would take care of forwarding important letters and documents to and from key locales further inland, or from across the Red Sea in the Hijaz.\textsuperscript{55}

We can also observe the distinctive spatial logic that the Sanusiyya helped crystallize by examining the cross-border practice of politics and the implementation of justice in the Libyan Desert and Egyptian oases, the best evidence for which centers around Siwa. In the following section, I wish to tie together the two main threads of my analysis thus far: by carefully reconstructing a series of critical events in Siwa beginning in the mid-1890s, I aim to show how the oasis is in fact a vital part of the story of the Sanusiyya, and how the Sanusiyya in turn played a fundamental role in the story of Egyptian sovereignty. To ignore this interactivity between the Sanusiyya and the local political scene in Siwa is to overlook one fundamental mechanism governing the constitution of the Egyptian nation-state in its marginal provinces.

\textsuperscript{53} See, for example, DUL: Wingate Papers, Box 131/2 (Sheets 73-81—Wingate intelligence report, June 1889). This was based on the testimony of an unnamed Sudanese agent who was a Sanusi follower.


\textsuperscript{55} DUL: Wingate Papers, Box 131/2 (Sheets 73-81).
1896 was a significant year in Siwan history. In February, tensions between the two main factions—Easterners and Westerners—once again erupted into a “prolonged and bloody struggle” that persisted throughout the year. The situation deteriorated to the point that no Siwan sheikh or notable would leave his house unarmed or attended; at the same time, raids on crops and cattle became a “daily occurrence,” and the “administration of justice was at a standstill.” 1896 also marked the third consecutive year in which the Siwans had neglected to pay their taxes to the state, so that their arrears now totaled 4,970 pounds. In light of the lingering state of disorder in the oasis—and likely part and parcel of the general restructuring of the Interior Ministry that had been underway since the previous year—the Egyptian Government sent the Governor of Buhayra, Mustafa Maher Bey (accompanied by a force of 50 soldiers) to Siwa in September, in order to investigate the roots of these disturbances, restore law and order, and resume the collection of taxes.

The work of the Maher commission began rather inauspiciously. According to an important government report on Siwan affairs published in 1900 after an Interior Ministry official’s visit to the oasis, “Mustafa Bey was received with considerable distrust. Neither by his assurances, nor by the smallness of his escort, was he able to impress upon the people the peaceful nature of his mission.” Historian Rif’at Gawhari, whose account

---

56 Hohler, Report, 18.
57 Ibid., 25.
58 Ibid., 25.
60 Hohler, Report, 25. This report by Hohler—based on the visit by Dakhliyya official P.W. Machell—became the foundational link in a long isnad of basic information about Siwa and its relationship to the Egyptian state, which would, at different moments, be both repeated almost verbatim or slightly distorted in later published works on the oasis. See, for example, Dalrymple Belgrave’s Siwa: Oasis of Jupiter Ammon
of Siwa hews quite closely to the Ministry’s report, added that Maher was “unable to influence the thinking” of the Siwan notability. At the same time, many of Maher’s military men were hamstrung by illness.\(^{61}\)

More evidence of the tenuous position in which Maher found himself in Siwa at this time emerges from a couple brief publications and unpublished diary entries of a British functionary named Wilfred Jennings-Bramly.\(^{62}\) Shortly after the onset of the Maher Commission, Jennings-Bramly arrived in the oasis on a private expedition accompanied only by his Bedouin guide, whom he called Dau, and a servant named ‘Abdullah (who he denigrated as one of the “Sham Bedouin” mentioned in Chapter 1).\(^{63}\) Upon entering the main square of the oasis, where he saw “some dozen Egyptian police…strolling about,” Jennings-Bramly came upon “a grave assemblage of sheiks, sitting in conclave,” in the center of which “sat a man in European clothes” who he recognized instantly to be Maher Bey.\(^{64}\) The two struck up a conversation in English, at which point Maher decided that Jennings-Bramly’s fortuitous arrival in Siwa “might be turned to some use”—that the unsuspecting traveler could be passed off as a military official on government business.\(^{65}\) Jennings-Bramly played his part well, handing over his official-looking passport (printed on parchment) to Maher and the Siwan Sheikhs for inspection.

---

\(^{61}\) Gawhari, \textit{Jannat al-Sahra} (1946); and Fakhry’s \textit{Siwa Oasis} (1973) for examples of how Hohler’s basic narrative was unquestioningly adopted wholesale by the authors whose works have come to be considered \textit{de rigueur} for Siwan history. I will cite from Hohler when relevant, since it is the earliest articulation of this narrative.

\(^{62}\) According to Fakhry, Jennings-Bramly—who would later serve in the Frontier Districts Administration—founded the settlement of Burj al-‘Arab in the Maryut region, where he built himself a stone castle. See Fakhry, \textit{Siwa Oasis}, 11 [f.n. 1].

\(^{63}\) MEC: Jennings-Bramly papers (File 2/2, “Western Badawins,” 7).


\(^{65}\) Ibid., 600.
Later on, Maher filled Jennings-Bramly in on the full details of the ruse:

He told me afterwards it had struck him then what to say about me...[he]
informed me that I had become a colonel in the British army. The Government,
he had told the sheikhs, tired of waiting for the payment of the taxes, three years
overdue, had sent me to see what answer they were giving to his demands. I had
hurried along alone, not wishing, unless absolutely forced to do so, to alarm Siwa
by bringing my armed escort with me.\textsuperscript{66}

Maher lost no opportunity to milk Jennings-Bramly’s prestige: as Jennings-
Bramly recalls, “Maha Bey [sic] was not slow to make what capital he could out of the
military romance he had wound around me by pointing out now and then that the
Government would not leave him unaided, and that they had best decide and pay, and not
force me to return with an army.”\textsuperscript{67} According to Jennings-Bramly, his participation in
this act of deception—performing the role of a special government envoy bent on
enforcing tax collection—produced the desired results: “It all passed off satisfactorily.
They decided the taxes should be paid if time were given them.”\textsuperscript{68}

If Jennings-Bramly’s visit to Siwa ultimately helped Maher’s cause, the
expedition by no means turned out in the way the traveler had hoped. Although he and
Maher did receive an invitation to attend a lavish feast hosted by Osman Habun (the
aforementioned local Sanusi agent in Siwa who allegedly orchestrated the attack on
Blunt), he never felt truly welcome or comfortable with the Siwans, who insisted on
speaking only in “Berber” amongst themselves. Jennings-Bramly was also forbidden
from entering Shali—the sacred inner town of Siwa—which had been one of the primary
objectives of his voyage. He felt as if he was under suspicion at every moment and thus
decided to leave Siwa the very next morning after his day of arrival, in order to avoid the

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 600.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 603.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 603.
threat of “constant questionings.” Like so many European travelers before him, then, Jennings-Bramly left Siwa hastily out of at least some fear for his safety, without having ascertained much new knowledge of the oasis. The mixed results of the voyage prompted another British traveler, Arthur Silva White, to remark a few years later that Jennings-Bramly was merely “used as a stalking horse by the Egyptian official, Maher Bey, in order to obtain the unpaid taxes” and that he had to “leave precipitately on the second day.”

At this point, Jennings-Bramly’s account of his assistance to the Maher Commission links up to the narrative provided by T.B. Hohler—the author of an Interior Ministry report on Siwa written and published in 1900, which provides much of the best evidence from this critical period—as well as by later historians. On or around October 3, the sheikhs and notables of Siwa—having awaited the return to the oasis of several Sanusi elders, who had been in Jaghbub when Maher first arrived—approached Maher and promised to pay a portion of their back-taxes within a week. On October 10, they presented him with approximately 220 Egyptian pounds, claiming that they could not pay their arrears in full “on the ground that the crops were not yet gathered, the merchants had not yet arrived, and that the harvest was indifferent.” Hohler adds that the Sanusi leadership in Jaghbub, as well as Sheikh Zafer Madani in Istanbul, wrote letters to their respective constituencies in Siwa urging them to obey the Government’s orders. At the same time, Maher managed to gain approval for a new criminal law for the oasis that he

---

69 Ibid., 606.
70 Silva White, Sphinx to Oracle, 11.
71 Hohler, Report, 26; Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 100-1.
72 Hohler, Report, 26.
73 Ibid.
had drafted and then read aloud to an assembly of sheikhs. The terms of this new penal code are fairly straightforward, but two provisions stand out, both related to the Government’s prohibition of firearms in the oasis: first, the Government had the right to punish by death any Siwan who took up arms to “fight the Government, fight against other inhabitants, or destroy part of the town”; second, government officials reserved the right to inspect the houses of any suspects to look for weapons, upon any news of a murder, attack, or theft. Of course, the mere act of recording these provisions in the law books did not necessarily mean that they were at all enforceable.

Maher’s assertion of authority at this particular moment was met with fierce opposition, spearheaded by a Western notable named Hassuna Mansour. Mansour—who apparently had harbored a grudge against the Egyptian government since 1883, when Cairo officials ignored his adamant request to replace the Siwan ma’mur at that time—refused to go along with Maher’s efforts to collect taxes and sequestered himself, along with an armed force of slaves and supporters, in his large fortress-like house on the outskirts of town. He met all attempts at arrest with armed resistance, and he rejected his brother’s attempts to appease him. Some Siwans ordered to apprehend him ended up joining his ranks. According to Hohler, “the whole town was in an uproar.”

Maher, finding himself completely powerless to pacify the unruly Mansour and restore order, submitted to the entreaties of both Eastern and Western sheikhs to summon the Sanusi brethren from Jaghbub. Within ten days, a close relative of Sayyid al-Mahdi

---

74 Gawhari says that this assembly took place on the 28th of Rabi’-al-Thani, 1314, which is equivalent to June 10, 1896. This date seems impossible, however, given that no sources make mention of Maher’s presence in Siwa prior to September 1896.
75 Article 1 of 1896 Criminal Law. Transcribed in Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 122.
76 Article 33 of 1896 Criminal Law. Transcribed in Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 131.
77 Hohler, Report, 26.
78 Ibid., 26.
al-Sanusi, named Sheikh Ahmad ibn Idris, arrived in Siwa, and Mansour and his followers “at once surrendered to him.”\(^79\) In light of this abrupt turn of events, Maher would later refer back to this moment as “a striking instance of the implicit trust and absolute obedience rendered to the authority of the Senoussi [sic].”\(^80\)

The acute need of the Egyptian authorities to turn to the Sanusiyya for basic assistance in governance—even after the arrival of Maher with his force of fifty troops—was actually nothing new. The begrudging reliance of Egyptian government men on Sanusi authority in the years before the Maher Commission is a central theme in the two reports of Muhammad Makki from 1892, cited above. Makki’s testimony evokes a world in which the Sanusiyya—poised comfortably between the Egyptian state authorities, on one hand, and the Ottomans (represented through their provincial governor in Benghazi), on the other—played the role of chief local power broker for the Egyptian government. For example, he writes:

> When a Government official goes to Siwa, he is supposed to go to Jaghbub and make a visit to the Senussi, especially if he were the Qadi, so as to be able to live peacefully and respectably with the Senussis of Siwa. Ahmad Abdulla, the late Mamur of Siwa, could not live peacefully with the Senussis there as he refused to make a visit to the Senussi; and they repeatedly accused him to the Buhayra Mudiriye for misgovernment until they succeeded in changing him.\(^81\)

The British traveler Arthur Silva White also marveled at the impressive power that the Sanusiyya wielded in the oasis at the time of his visit in 1898. Echoing the frustration that many previous European travelers had faced about their inability to reach the sacred oasis of Jaghbub, for instance, Silva White observed how many Siwan notables took extreme measures to protect the routes to Jaghbub in order to keep

\(^79\) Hohler, Report, 27; Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 101; Dalrymple Belgrave, Siwa, 111.

\(^80\) Hohler, Report, 27.

\(^81\) DUL: Wingate Papers, Box 131/2 (Sheets 51-71: “Qadi’s Visit to Jaghbub”).
unwanted travelers from trespassing: “Six of the chiefs in Siwa town are held responsible for the protection of the northern road; and on the southern road there are people…whose special duty is to keep watch and ward over the caravans.” Silva White was particularly nonplussed by the fact that not only European travelers but also Mahmud ‘Azmi—the ma’mur of Siwa at the time—was likewise at the mercy of Sanusi authority when it came to his freedom of movement: “Here are you, the Mamur of Siwa, with 25 policemen; and you cannot go for more than a day’s excursion [westward] without permission of the Senussi.” Finally, Silva White made it clear in his memoir that Osman Habun—the chief Sanusi agent among Siwa’s notability—was really in charge. This “dominant sheikh” of the Westerners was “the representative of Senussi-ism, the imperium in imperio of Siwa…the autocrat who gave me permission to go everywhere, without let or hindrance.” As such, he enjoyed “absolute and uncontrolled authority.”

In the decade leading up to the First World War, the Egyptian government would never be able to transcend both its fear of—and reliance upon—Sanusi authority. The new tax law that the Maher Commission introduced to Siwa in April 1897 is a clear case in point. As far back as 1873, Sheikh Sanusi had enjoyed exemption from paying taxes on his abundant land-holdings in Siwa, which were worth approximately 35 Egyptian Pounds. Yet even later on—at the crucial moment at which the Government (via Maher) attempted to streamline all the oasis’s legal, financial, and political affairs—the Egyptian officials ended up inscribing in law their continued reliance on the Sanusiyya in order to manage the basic issue of tax collection. Again, as the former qadi Muhammad

---

83 Ibid., 179.
84 Ibid., 193.
Makki reminds us in his testimony, this was by no means unprecedented. By his account, the Sanusiyya had been reliably called upon by Egyptian officials to assist in the collection of taxes even a decade before the Maher Commission:

The Senussi wishes to be in peace with the Egyptian as well as with the Turkish [sic] Government. He stays quiet in his Zawia and avoids all that displeased either Government. When his followers refused to pay Government taxes at Siwa, he wrote to them as soon as he knew it officially to obey the Government and pay up the taxes, the same as he did with the Bara’sa for the Turkish Government.  

Looking ahead, Maher and other Egyptian officials in Buhayra and Cairo knew they needed to handle the issue of taxation in Siwa with utmost caution. As I outlined above, tax collection had in fact been one of the primary sources of the lingering hostility between Siwans and the Egyptian Government as far back as Mehmed Ali’s first expedition to the oasis in 1820. And if collecting the annual tribute was a consistent problem for the Government throughout the nineteenth century, Egyptian officials had an equally difficult time conducting censuses of Siwan date and olive trees (the only sources of revenue the Government was interested in), in order to be able to calculate a suitable tax assessment. As late as 1910, it seems, the Government was still relying on a tree census conducted between 1869 and 1871, even though the total number of fruiting trees had actually increased by some 25% in the intervening years. One memo from the Mudir of Buhayra to the Council of Ministers in July 1895 conveyed the Siwa ma’mur’s

---

86 DUL: Wingate Papers, Box 131/2 (Sheets 51-71: “Qadi’s Visit to Jaghbub”).
87 C.V.B. Stanley, A Report on the Oasis of Siwa (Cairo: Government Press, 1912), 44. See also Rifa’i, Wahat Siwah, Ch. 5. The 1869 census put the number of taxable trees in Siwa at 89,000; the tax was thus assessed at a rate of 20 milliemes per tree, which Stanley held to be much too high given the limited resources of the Siwans. Hohler’s report suggests that Maher made his own rough estimate of date and olive trees in 1896, but his count is not reflected anywhere in the ensuing tax legislation. See Hohler, Report, 33.
opinion that any new inventory of the oasis’s date and olive trees would be impossible to implement “except by great force.”

Accordingly, even after the Siwan sheikhs decided (after Jennings-Bramly’s visit), to cooperate with Maher up to a certain point, the revised tax code that ultimately became law in the oasis reflected the Government’s continued tentativeness in the matter of taxation, and its unwillingness to antagonize the Sanusiyya. The decree issued by the Finance Ministry on April 20, 1897—again, only after Maher had read a draft aloud to an assembly of Siwan notables and sheikhs, in order to win their approval—contained four basic provisions. First, the tax burden for Siwa was reduced from 1998 to 1750 Egyptian pounds annually (twenty of which were to come from the Oasis of Gara, which was attached to the markaz of Siwa); second, Sheikh Sanusi as well as his rival, Sheikh Madani, were both given yearly allowances in exchange for their “support for the government,” while other sheikhs of the oasis were to be given a small yearly bonus for their assistance in tax collection; third, collection of taxes would now occur in three installments throughout the year, based on the harvest season of the three taxable date varieties; and finally, the Siwans were given a full reprieve for their unpaid taxes from 1896, “out of consideration for their condition of poverty.”

The way that Hohler describes the “new” procedure for tax collection in his Interior Ministry report underscores the fact that it remained in many key respects a

---

88 DWQ: MNW 0075-011307.
89 Gara, also known as Umm al-Saghir, is located approximately eighty miles northeast of Siwa.
90 Sheikh Sanusi’s allowance was 20 L.E. annually, whereas Sheikh al-Madani’s was 10 L.E. annually. See Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 138-9; Hohler, Report, 35.
91 Every sheikh was entitled to 2% of the tax revenue he helped collect. In addition, every sheikh serving on the notable council received L.E. 2 annually. Hohler, Report, 36; Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 138.
92 Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 139.
strictly local matter, oversen by the traditional notability, and over which the state still exercised little control:

The method adopted by the Sheikhs for the distribution of taxation is to hold, from time to time, a public examination into the ownership of taxed trees; they enter the changes effected by sale or succession against the entries in the original register made on the occasion of the census of 1871. The revised list is read out to the assembled people, so that complaints may be presented and examined; and the Sheikhs apportion to each family, in accordance with the new register, the share of taxation for which they are liable. Trees planted since 1871 do not appear in the old register, and so escape payment; they are consequently of a higher value. The time would almost seem to have come when it would be desirable to effect a new census. Each family hands the amount for which it is responsible to its Sheikh, and when all have done so, the Sheikhs proceed in a body to the Maamourieh, and deliver the money to the Maamour in exchange for a receipt.93

Taxation in Siwa would continue to be a vexing issue for the Egyptian Government for decades to come, even despite these modest reforms. In April 1921, the Egyptian finance committee considered abolishing the date-palm tax in Siwa altogether, in light of the oasis’s exemptions from all other property and land taxes.94 In 1922 and again in 1925, the Government significantly reduced the tax burden on Siwans in light of the oasis’s financial hardships; and in 1929, they Government granted them a reprieve for two years of taxes.95

**Jurisdiction in Siwa Revisited: Local Notables and the Formalization of Customary Authority**

If the Maher Commission’s primary objectives were to investigate the tax situation and restore public order in Siwa, it also sought to articulate a clear policy regarding legal jurisdiction for the oasis. At the beginning of 1897, the Egyptian Government, acting through Maher, revisited the issue of jurisdiction and ultimately

94 See DWQ: MNW 0075-022582 (Note from the Finance Committee to the Council of Ministers, Apr. 30, 1921).
95 Rifa’i, 80-1.
passed new legislation that directly affected the administration of justice in the Siwa court (*Majlis Siwa*). If the perpetuation and basic legal authority of *Majlis Siwa* were finally no longer in question (the upshot of the abortive legal reforms analyzed in Chapter 1), the Government still sought to strike the proper balance between local and state jurisdiction. The results were, again, mixed. The new jurisdictional laws passed in 1897—though intended to bolster the state’s legitimacy and institutional reach at the western edge of its domains—actually had the ultimate effect of inscribing the Government’s need to defer to the authority of Siwan notables, and the local court over which many of them presided.

Before analyzing the content of these 1897 laws, however, it is important to turn briefly to an earlier piece of legislation that addressed the jurisdiction of the local Siwan court, passed in 1893. The immediate pretext behind the Government’s decision to reconsider Siwan judicial affairs at this time was the trial of two murder suspects by *Majlis Siwa*. Although the Government—again citing the “difficulties” involved in “obliging the people” of Siwa to turn up for court dates in Alexandria—upheld the overall local authority of the *Majlis*, it nonetheless considered murder offenses to lie outside the court’s jurisdiction, which it argued should be confined to “day-to-day matters.” The Khedive thus established a special commission to investigate the Siwa court’s handling of the two murder cases, as well as to draft a new law that would more precisely define its jurisdictional rights. The resultant decree—submitted to the Khedive for approval in August 1893—conceded that *Majlis Siwa* would continue to serve as the court of first instance for civil, commercial, and criminal cases, whereas all *appeals* cases would revert to the Alexandria Native Court. At the same time, it mandated that the Siwa

---

96 DWQ: MNW 0075-040666.
Court must apply the “civil, commercial, and penal codes in use among the Native Courts” in all its judgments—a provision that was ostensibly intended to sap the court of much of its clout—though with the caveat that these same judgments must “take into account the established usages” in Siwa and refrain from being “contrary to public order and morality.”

This curious language of “established usage” of local legal codes, as well as Siwan “public morality,” reflected the Government’s continued tentativeness in its handling of the local court in Siwa in the early 1890s. The set of judicial and jurisdictional reforms that the Government enacted in 1897 through Maher—though ostensibly intended to tie the oasis’s affairs more closely to the state—actually made very little difference, and once again underscored the Government’s deference to local custom and authority. The contents of the three discrete laws that Gawhari seems to conflate in terming the “1897 law” are far too extensive to treat in full in this chapter; instead, it must suffice to list some of the most striking provisions of the Siwan legislation that Maher oversaw—the sections of the revised code that are most illustrative of Siwa’s persistence as an enclave of legal anomaly.

The Khedivial Decree #25 of May 25, 1897—which legal scholar Henri Lamba designated as the Siwan counterpoint to the laws of “special jurisdiction” passed in 1900 for the other Western oases—is the most straightforward of the laws, seeking to define the scope of the local Siwan court’s authority and to codify its procedure and protocol.

\[97\] Ibid.

\[98\] The legislation that Gawhari calls the “1897 Law” seems, from the texts he himself included in the 1946 edition of Jannat al-Sahra, to comprise three separate laws from that year: one decree dealing specifically with the jurisdiction and protocol of Majlis Siwa, passed on May 25; one outlining the particular privileges and rights of Siwan sheikhs, approved orally by a notable assembly on February 13; and, finally, a law regulating tax collection in Siwa, passed on April 20.

\[99\] Lamba, **Droit Public & Administratif de l’Égypte** (Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909). This law was analyzed in Chapter 1.
The first articles of the decree thus spell out the extent of the court’s geographical jurisdiction—comprising the whole town of Siwa (including Aghormi) as well as the neighboring Oasis of Gara—as well as some basic requirements for the eight sheikhs who will serve as members of the court, such as their minimum age. The Government also asserts a strong hand in some clauses: in Article 6, for example, members of the Majlis are required to take an oath before the Egyptian Ma’mur;\(^\text{100}\) Article 14 mandates that the language of the court must be Arabic (and thus not Siwan).\(^\text{101}\) But when it comes to describing the various functions and protocol of the court, the language of the decree becomes strikingly vague: for instance, Article 3 of the law stipulates that Majlis Siwa will have jurisdiction in various levels of criminal cases (mukhalifat, junah, and jinayat), but that it must “rule in accordance with customs and norms followed in that locale.”\(^\text{102}\) The ensuing clause is equally ambiguous, providing that all claims concerning civil or commercial rights will continue to be resolved through a process called “arbitration” (tahkim), and that cases of this type should be judged “according to norms of justice, in accordance with the customs of that region.”\(^\text{103}\)

Other provisions of the May 1897 law are noteworthy for the wide-ranging powers they granted the Siwan notability. Article 11, for example, dictated that Siwan sheikhs were to be held responsible not only for locating and arresting perpetrators of crimes, but also for collecting evidence, performing preliminary investigations, and detaining perpetrators. And Article 12 established that the sheikhs were primarily

\(^{100}\) Transcribed in Gawhari, \textit{Jannat al-Sahra}, 108.
\(^{101}\) Ibid., 110.
\(^{102}\) See Gawhari, \textit{Jannat al-Sahra}, 108.
\(^{103}\) Ibid.
responsible for entering suspects’ homes to search for weapons (though they could seek assistance from officers of the ma’muriyya).  

The list of prerogatives (ikhtisasat) granted to the Siwan sheikhs—which an assembly of notables approved on February 13, after Maher read it aloud to them—struck a similarly odd balance, underlining the ultimate authority of the Egyptian Government, on one hand, but then upholding all the specific rights and responsibilities of the sheikhs, on the other. Article 4, for example, made it clear that all sheikhs appointed to the Siwan governing council (majlis al-shuyukh) must be approved by the Interior Ministry in order to make the elections final. Article 12 gave the ma’mur the power to vet every ruling issued by a Sheikh, and Article 6 required the sheikhs to implement all the orders that reached Siwa from the Government via the ma’mur. At the same time, though, the document accorded the sheikhs far-reaching authority to manage the day-to-day maintenance of law and order in the oasis: sheikhs retained, for example, the power to punish criminals in minor offenses and impose fines (Article 11); to deal with “all the tasks pertaining to public security” (Article 6); and to help arrange the Guardsmen (Article 16). Moreover, the law stipulated that “the sheikhs of Siwa are to be given the same treatment as employees of the Government,” in terms of the “respect shown them by the people,” and the right to bring to trial “those who challenge them in the fulfillment of their job.”

104 Ibid., 108-9.  
105 Ibid., 114  
106 Ibid., 117.  
107 Ibid., 115.  
108 Ibid., 112-21.  
109 Ibid., 115.
One gets the sense when reading the provisions of these laws that the sheikhs of Siwa were essentially being coerced into accepting the rights and responsibilities for governing and implementing justice in the oasis that they had always held prior to the Maher Commission’s arrival. Indeed, it was precisely this arrangement, whereby the Egyptian officials stationed in Siwa essentially took a backseat to the traditional notables in the oasis in matters of law and order, that Blunt found so reprehensible in the aftermath of his failed visit to Siwa. Blunt simply could not abide the current form of devolved authority under which Siwa operated at the time—particularly since, by virtue of the 1897 legislation, his alleged attackers were also his de facto protectors: “The attack made upon me was not made by a few hotheaded or suspicious men but by the whole armed force of Siwa deliberately brought out and led by the recognized Sheiks of the town, the same that the Egyptian Government had entrusted and still entrusts with judicial authority there.”

Epilogue: Assessing Sovereignty in Siwa at the Turn of the Century

The new legislation that I analyzed in the previous section is typically adduced in the conventional historiography of Siwa as one of the key factors contributing to the final pacification and incorporation of the oasis by the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, as I have sought to demonstrate, the net result of the reforms was by no means a conclusive triumph of state centralization; in fact, a close-up look at some of the individual provisions of these laws reveals how the Government actually sought to codify its continued deference to the local notability for much of the day-to-day work of

---

110 NA: FO 78/4956 (Blunt to Cromer, Mar. 3, 1898).
111 For example, Gawhari includes the full text of the 1897 laws in the middle of his book’s historical section. The effect of such placement of the laws in his text is to buttress the teleology laid out at the beginning of the work: by around 1900, in his view, the state’s conquest of Siwa was complete, and the once recalcitrant and fanatical population of the oasis had finally been rendered docile.
administration and governance in the oasis. The upshot of this process was actually the legal formalization by the state of the customary authority that the Siwan notables had traditionally wielded in the oasis. This is another example of how forces of centralization and decentralization in Egypt not only could co-exist, but fundamentally emerged hand-in-hand, through a negotiation between competing marks of sovereignty. The new legislation of exceptionalism was but another makeshift solution to the problem of territorial unevenness that the Government encountered as it sought to extend its rule into new, more remote reaches of the nascent political community.

What, then, had actually changed in the way Siwa was governed? In at least several important respects, the Egyptian Government had finally established itself as a permanent fixture in Siwa. First, the institutions of the Government were now inscribed in the physical landscape of the oasis: by the turn of the century, Siwa boasted a new government office on the central square of the town—providing accommodation for the ma’mur, qadi, two police officers, and the clerk of the markaz—as well as several other government buildings, such as a prison, dispensary, and post office. Additionally, from the time of the Maher Commission forward, Siwans were forced to tolerate an augmented police and military presence. The population of Siwa was officially counted, for the first time, in the Egyptian census of 1897. And, after negotiating with Maher for the new tax code and gaining a reprieve for the arrears owed from 1896, Siwans resumed the payment of their taxes, even if—as Hohler describes—the Egyptian authorities outsourced the responsibility for collecting them to the local sheikhs.

112 Hohler, Report, 11. The mail was delivered twice a month, via Marsa Matruh.
113 Hohler, Report, 30. From what I can gather, the Siwan ma’mur had resort to a police force of 20-30 officers.
114 According to this census, Siwa’s population was 5,200 in 1897.
It is undeniable, then, that Siwa had ceased to be the bastion of autonomy that it had been throughout much of its history. Yet this does not mean that the triumphalist interpretation of the state’s “conquest” of Siwa is actually vindicated. Indeed, this typical nationalist narrative remains strikingly one-dimensional and incomplete—no doubt a function of the fact that, as told by authors such as Gawhari and Fakhry, it plays directly into the development and modernization paradigm that gripped the Egyptian intelligentsia and political classes from at least the 1940s onward. Again, contemporary accounts from Siwa around 1900 paint a more complicated picture of the nature of Egyptian incorporation and the practice of sovereignty in the oasis even after the seminal events of 1896-8.

The invaluable Interior Ministry Report from 1900 that I have been drawing on throughout the chapter underscores this point. Even after Hohler fastidiously details the improvements in the spheres of law, public order, and taxation that had taken hold in the oasis after the arrival of the Maher Commission, he reminds his readers that the Egyptian ma’mur’s authority in Siwa remained tenuous at best. He writes, for example:

The power of the Government is very much curtailed by the fact that, although a law court, a Mehkemeh Shari’a, a dispensary, &c., exist, for the most part the people refuse to have anything to do with them,” a fact that “shows sufficiently to how great an extent Siwa is autonomous; it has been administered for centuries past by the head men of its component tribes, and its people are extremely jealous of interference from outside.\textsuperscript{115}

Another passage in the report clearly demonstrates how the ma’mur remained completely beholden to local political dynamics beyond his control:

The task of Mamour, supported by his force of some twenty police who are weakened by the local fever, is no light one. He must exercise the greatest tact to hold the balance evenly between the contending factions, using his escort only as a preponderating weight in critical moments; and, while taking advantage of every opportunity to assert the authority, and to heighten the prestige of the

\textsuperscript{115} Hohler, Report, 29.
Government, he must be scrupulously careful to show no trace whether of hostility or favour to either party. Thus the Maamour for the past year never witnessed a dance of the Westerns without being present on the next occasion when the Easterns performed: he and the other Egyptian officials made their prayer in the mosque of the Sanusi and in that of the Madani on alternate Fridays.\textsuperscript{116}

Arthur Silva White’s memoir recollecting his visit to Siwa in 1898 also sheds much light on the question of what it meant for Siwa to be construed now as a “government town,” as Blunt would have it, under straightforward Egyptian state sovereignty. On one hand, Silva White credits the Egyptian ma’mur at the time of the visit, Mahmud ‘Azmi,\textsuperscript{117} with pursuing a “conciliatory and wise policy” towards the Siwans that succeeded in fostering the stability and security in Siwa that allowed him to have such an auspicious visit.\textsuperscript{118} He adds,

\begin{quote}
The efforts of the Mamur appear to be meeting with success. He informed me that he had largely succeeded in inducing the men to go about the oasis unarmed. Up to a year or so ago, no man was ever seen without a gun…The tribes having been pacified, at least for a period of time, many families are building houses for themselves in the oasis. Though savage and fanatical, they submit to the overlordship of Egypt, and even pay their taxes…altogether, the Mamur…is doing a lot of good.\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

Elsewhere, when discussing the Siwan Majlis al-Shuyukh, Silva White mentions that “now that the oasis is becoming more and more subject to Egypt, the Mamur presides over the deliberations of the council,” though he exercises his influence only “within certain limits.”\textsuperscript{120}

Despite his acknowledgement of these clear improvements, Silva White balks at portraying Siwa as anything approaching a “government town,” and his account clearly

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 29-30.
\textsuperscript{117} ‘Azmi is in fact the historical personality upon whom Baha’a Taher based his protagonist in Wahat al-Ghurub.
\textsuperscript{118} Silva White, Sphinx to Oracle, 150; 199. Silva White felt safe throughout his stay in Siwa and is ostensibly the first European to succeed in visiting the sacred inner town.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 152.
\end{footnotes}
contradicts the interpretation of later authors such as Fakhry and Gawhari that the local Egyptian authorities Siwans could easily pacify the Siwans in times of strife after the events surrounding the Maher Commission. Indeed, in his view, “The mere handful of Egyptian police that occupies the oasis, as a symbol of sovereignty, cannot be expected to afford travelers any adequate assistance against the fanaticism of a turbulent and warlike population,” since “law and order in the oasis are upheld by prestige rather than police protection.” When addressing the system of governance in the oasis, Silva White writes that “The Siwans enjoy Home Rule,” led by some twenty or twenty-five sheikhs who have administrative powers.\textsuperscript{121} Elsewhere, Silva White signals that the Egyptian government would still be powerless to deal with the nagging issue of slavery in the oasis: “It is clear that Egypt could not enforce the strict letter of the law in an oasis so remote and so lightly held as Siwa, without raising serious political issues.”\textsuperscript{122}

Similarly, the typical story of the cessation of factional violence in Siwa by around 1900 must be revised. As much of the standard literature on Siwa would have it, the resolution of the Hassuna Mansour incident marked a new dawn in the oasis: not only did Easterners and Westerners now manage to coexist without any real issues, but also Siwans were from this moment forward now much more docile and willing to brook an augmented Egyptian police presence. Gawhari writes, for example, that since the events of 1897, “the situation has become stable and has gone from good to even better.”\textsuperscript{123} Fakhry goes even further, arguing that “the authority of the \textit{Ma’mur} had increased and the oasis was essentially as secure as any place of its size in Upper Egypt at the

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 158.
\textsuperscript{123} Gawhari, \textit{Jannat al-Sahra}, 102.
time…Thereafter Siwa remained quiet, and the wars between the Westerners and Easterners became stories of the past.”

This interpretation is remarkably shortsighted. The upheaval surrounding the arrival of the Maher Commission as well as the attack on Blunt’s encampment with which I began the chapter were by no means the last incidences of violence in the oasis in this pivotal period. Shortly after Maher introduced the Government’s legal and jurisdictional reforms, the oasis erupted in a steady stream of factional warfare that left somewhere between 90 and 180 Siwans dead, including Hassuna Mansour as well as several other important local notables. It is extremely difficult to piece together the exact narrative of these tumultuous and impactful events, given the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of the evidence that emerges in various written accounts. From what I have been able to discern, however, it seems as if what some authors have conflated as one major conflict between the Easterners and Westerners actually consisted of at least two separate conflicts—one arising from the theft of crops and livestock, and the other concerning a unique request for intermarriage between the widow of a Siwan sheikh and an Eastern man, which ultimately implicated Osman Habun (what Dalrymple Belgrave must be referring to as the “Widow’s War,” despite his impossible dating of the event).

Though it is extremely baffling that such a seminal period of strife in Siwan history can remain so poorly represented in the relevant historiography, what must

124 Fakhry, *Siwa Oasis*, 112.
125 The numbers vary according to the particular account. Stanley, citing the oral history of ‘Omar Musellem, says that seven Sheikhs including Mansour were killed, along with 180 rank and file (Stanley, “The Oasis of Siwa,” 315). Hohler also mentions that seven sheikhs were killed in the tumult, though his figure of the total casualties is on the low end of the spectrum, at around 90 (Hohler, *Report*, 28).
concern us here is the upshot of these events, which—as best as I can gather—was
twofold. First, the local authorities called for backup, summoning a larger force of
around 100 soldiers to help keep the peace and dole out punishment.\textsuperscript{127} Second, the
ultimate resolution of the conflict once again underscored the deep-seated authority and
influence of the Sanusiyya in the oasis. According to Hohler, brethren from Jaghbub
returned to Siwa after an initial armistice in order to reach a conclusive settlement.\textsuperscript{128}
Moreover, the Sanusiyya decided after this latest surge of violence to work towards
securing a more lasting peace between East and West, for example by arranging
marriages between the two factions.\textsuperscript{129} Finally, according to Fakhry, “The two groups
agreed that whenever a misunderstanding developed they would send to Jaghbub; one of
the Brethren would come and settle the quarrel without the use of weapons.”\textsuperscript{130} In short
then, any reduction in sectarian violence at this time had very little to do with the
Egyptian Government or the amplified police presence in the oasis; the settlement came
on very local terms, and it was Sanusi authority that ultimately kept the peace.

At the same time, it was an uneasy peace at best. Even after the Sanusi
settlement, the Easterners and Westerners remained stuck in a sort of cold war, keeping
their affairs as well as their living quarters separate. Hohler, for example, mentioned that
each section of the town maintained separate facilities (such as markets, wells, and
storehouses), and also that “to this day, no Eastern can live, or purchase property, on the

\textsuperscript{128} Hohler, \textit{Report}, 28.
\textsuperscript{129} Fakhry, \textit{Siwa Oasis}, 112; Dalrymple Belgrave, \textit{Siwa}, 114.
\textsuperscript{130} Fakhry, \textit{Siwa Oasis}, 112. The unique “siyaha” festival celebrated annually in Siwa is said to
commemorate (at least in part) the reconciliation between Easterners and Westerners fostered by the
Sanusiyya at this time. Sources for this event are hard to come by, however, and the oral testimony of
some contemporary Siwan sheikhs captured on video makes it seem as if the festival has lost much of its
original spiritual significance. See: \url{http://vimeo.com/18056058}. 
Western side, and vice versa.”

Silva White adds that—even as late as 1898—the Westerners of Aghormi did not allow Easterners within their walls. Indeed, as I will show in some detail in the next chapter, Siwa’s age-old factionalism would continue to rear its ugly head in the next decade, playing a key underlying role in a series of events culminating in the murder of a Siwan *ma’mur* in 1909.

The Egyptian Government might have claimed formal “sovereignty” over Siwa by 1900, but what that actually meant in practice was that it governed only by continuing to depend heavily on a coterie of local notables—as well as the regional authority of an Islamic Brotherhood based across the border in Ottoman Libya—to carry out even the most basic tasks of rule and governance, and to administer justice. The centralizing authority represented by the Government man in Siwa—the *ma’mur*—continued to overlap with the sovereignty exercised by the local notables upon whom he relied, who managed to convert this moment of intensified intervention by the Egyptian state into an opportunity to formalize their age-old authority and bolster their legitimacy in the oasis (oftentimes in order to serve the factional interests that the state was ostensibly so intent on eradicating). Siwa might have been an oasis in transition by the end of the nineteenth century, but the directional arrow by no means pointed the way that almost all the prevailing historiography would have it. Instead, even after the intervention of the Maher Commission and the establishment of new, permanent government institutions in the oasis, Siwa still essentially operated as an anomalous political enclave where centralization went hand-in-hand with the persistence of non-centralizing marks of sovereignty that often worked at cross-purposes.

---

The layered political field in Siwa would only become more complicated by the onset of a new era of Khedivial interest and investment in the oasis. It is to this theme that I now turn.
Chapter 3 – Western Promises: Abbas Hilmi II, Siwan Politics, and the Khedivial Mark of Sovereignty

“I felt very strongly that, if he [Khedive Abbas Hilmi II] were allowed to pursue his way unchecked, the civilising work which Great Britain had undertaken in Egypt would be gradually undermined, that corruption of various sorts would again become rampant, and that there was even some risk that, as in the days of Ismail Pasha, Egypt would again degenerate into being the happy hunting-ground of the political and financial adventurer.”¹ – Lord Cromer

On August 5, 1907, Hussein Effendi Fahmy—the Ma’mur of Siwa—sent a detailed report to Cairo documenting various recent happenings in the oasis. Among the issues discussed in the report was Lord Cromer’s resignation from office that past April, an event that by the Ma’mur’s account had taken on a strange life of its own in Siwa. According to Fahmy, the relatively late arrival of the news there—which could be chalked up to the great distance and slow communications between Cairo and the oasis—provided the local authorities with a unique opportunity to spin the event in such a way as to aggrandize the prestige of the Khedive. Fahmy writes, “We spread the rumor that His Excellency the Khedive, having witnessed the poor behavior of the Lord, actually had dismissed him, [and] that it was not a resignation.”² This fallacious account of politics in the distant capital was intended partly to counter the pronouncements of Siwa’s notoriously recalcitrant Shari’a judge (qadi), who reacted to the news from Cairo by demonstrating “in front of the people his strong regret for the Lord’s resignation.” The Ma’mur and his men had the last word, however; as Fahmy recounts, “By virtue of good planning, Sheikh Sa’udi returned from Alexandria and informed the Siwans that the Lord

² DUL: Abbas Hilmi II Papers (AHII) File 165/578-80—Hussein Effendi Fahmy to Ahmad Sadeq, Aug. 5, 1907).
had been dismissed, and all the people believed our rumor (‘umum al-ahali sadaqu ishaa ‘atna’).”

Later in his report, Fahmy details another moment in which the Khedive’s personal authority and prestige in Siwa seemed to be similarly at stake. While out walking with the town doctor and scribe (two of the mere handful of government officials posted in the oasis), the Ma’mur found himself in an awkward encounter with the qadi. “Fortunately,” in Fahmy’s telling, at that moment they happened to run into the aforementioned Sheikh Sa’udi and Osman Habun (the powerful local notable who served as the local Sanusi agent in Siwa, introduced in Chapter 2). Habun defused the tension by inviting everyone to his home for tea. Over the course of what one can imagine were several rounds of sweet Siwan tea, the conversation turned to the future of the oasis and the Khedive’s role in it. Habun and Sa’ud expressed their hope that their “town would be blessed with peace,” to which Fahmy responded by assuring the group that “The Khedive gives generously to the loyal and the upright.” The qadi took umbrage at this line, exclaiming “Fine, you get [his] gifts, and what do I get? It would have been appropriate for him to give me a cashmere scarf or clothing!” This outburst prompted a lengthy discussion among the tea-drinkers about whether the decorative watch and chain that the Khedive had previously bestowed upon Habun were made of silver or gold. The

---

3 Ibid.
4 Several documents from the Daira Khassa files examined in this chapter mention a Sheikh Sa’udi, though from the context of all these documents, it seems as if they are actually referring to Sheikh Sa’ud Muhammad Sa’ud Tawia, the Special Agent of the Khedive’s Daira Khassa in Siwa. I do not know for certain that there is not, in fact, another sheikh known by Sa’udi. But having seen reports and letters signed only by a sheikh named Sa’ud (not Sa’udi)—and having seen no indication of a Sheikh Sa’udi in the few extant official documents that compile lists of Siwan notables—I must assume that the Sa’udi mentioned here is actually Sheikh Sa’ud, and that all uses of Sa’udi indicate some sort of colloquialization or else a repeated transcription error. Certainly the implied relationship in this particular document between Sa’ud and Habun accords with other evidence I have seen. For the sake of consistency, then, I will assume that Sa’ud and Sa’udi are indeed one and the same, and use the name Sa’ud for the duration of the chapter.
qadi had apparently been trying to persuade Habun for a considerable length of time that the gifted items were silver, but—upon examining them up close—the rest of the men concurred that they were indisputably gold and of very fine quality, to boot. Thus emboldened, Habun pointed his finger at the qadi: “You are always telling me that the watch is silver; but does it befit someone like His Excellency the Khedive to give something of so little value, like you say?” The qadi, seeing that his game was up, fell silent at this point; but Fahmy still thought it necessary to convey in his report how this was yet another instance in which the meddlesome qadi had threatened to undermine the ruling regime’s local authority by “disparaging the gifts of the Khedive” in the eyes of the Siwans.5

If the refreshing intimacy with which Fahmy recollects these events in his written report is striking, so, perhaps, is his intended audience. The recipient was not, as might be expected, an advisor at the Interior Ministry (Nizaret al-Dakhliya)—the arm of the government bureaucracy responsible for overseeing provincial administration and thus appointing and monitoring local officials such as Fahmy—but rather one Ahmad Sadeq, a senior administrator of the Khedive’s Daira Khassa, or Private Bureau. The Daira Khassa of Abbas Hilmi II is not a subject that has been given any serious scholarly treatment in the relevant literature on Egypt in this period. Where it is mentioned it all, it is typically construed as a metonym for the Khedive’s corruption or his bumbling finances, but never as a serious channel of governmental authority with any real political import. There may be several reasons for this oversight. First, as I suggested in the Introduction, Egyptian historiography for the entire period after the British occupation suffers from an acute Cairo-centric myopia; if, as I will argue in this chapter, the political

5 DUL: AHII 165/578-80 (Fahmy to Sadeq, Aug. 5 1907).
valences of the *Daira Khassa* come into much sharper focus when we consider its activities at the margins of the state, this point will naturally have been lost to a generation of historians who have focused so intently on the politics of colonialism and nationalism in the Egyptian capital. Second, the historical legacy of Abbas Hilmi II seems to have been indelibly impacted by the overwhelmingly pejorative interpretation of his reign offered by his powerful enemies—most notably Lord Cromer—to say nothing of other European observers. Cromer saw the Khedive primarily as a huge nuisance whose tenure was tainted by greed and poor financial judgment; Cromer wrote, for example, that “The Khedive’s main wish in life apparently was to enrich himself by every possible means in his power. As a matter of fact, he did amass great wealth, which he squandered, and eventually got himself into a very embarrassing financial position.”\(^6\)

The damage done to the Khedive’s reputation by this prevailing characterization was not lost on Abbas Hilmi II himself, who actively sought to correct for it in his self-serving published memoirs, written several decades after his forced exile in 1914: “I was depicted as an uncouth speculator or a farmer inept at governing a people…My adversaries liked to represent me as a fortune-hunter, little concerned for my country. As always happened in such cases, no one understood my intentions or my initiatives.”\(^7\)

Whatever the underlying factors at play, the upshot is that the Khedive’s personal financial situation and property dealings—all that his *Daira Khassa* has typically been seen to connote—have been treated as little more than a frivolous sideshow. In turn, more generally, the Khedive has been curiously written out of much political history of the 1890s and 1900s.

---

\(^6\) Cromer, *Abbas II*, 68.

In this chapter, I aim to provide a drastically different portrait of the Khedive’s oft-ignored or maligned *Daira Khassa*, and demonstrate its real analytical purchase, by arguing that it constituted a bona fide political institution crucial to the unfolding of events in the Egyptian West during the decade and a half prior to the First World War. Indeed, the evidence I have examined\(^8\) reveals that, even just for the distant and tiny oasis of Siwa, the *Daira Khassa* was never merely a catalogue of financial data and private property, but rather an entire tight-knit network of Khedivial agents arranged hierarchically to serve the gamut of Abbas Hilmi II’s political *as well as* financial interests, and to represent his personal authority far and wide. Moreover, such objectives—which the relevant evidence suggests underlay the *Daira Khassa*’s activities in places such as Siwa and Maryut in this period—do not reflect the innocently patriotic “intentions and initiatives” touted by the deposed Khedive in his memoir, through the writing of which he doggedly strove to craft his legacy as a staunch Egyptian nationalist who always had the best interests of the Egyptian government at heart. On the contrary, I will argue in this chapter that the Khedive’s *Daira Khassa* became a parallel—and, at key moments, rival—institution to the Interior Ministry for the channeling of central authority in Siwa (and other locales in the West). Likewise, I suggest that it was the distinctly *personal* authority and prestige of the Khedive, rather than the ability of the official state representatives appointed by the Interior Ministry to govern effectively, that would remain of paramount importance for Abbas Hilmi II and his men throughout the period.

---

\(^8\) The core of this chapter is drawn from an analysis of approximately ninety rare *Daira Khassa* documents that focus exclusively on the Bureau’s activities in and around Siwa. These documents have miraculously survived in the collection of Abbas Hilmi II’s Private Papers, which have been meticulously preserved and catalogued at the Durham University Library. These ninety odd documents represent only a small fraction of the collection’s *Daira Khassa* holdings, which alone comprise five huge files (with thousands of papers) presumably documenting the Bureau’s activities all across Egypt. This cache of primary materials, heretofore completely underutilized in Egyptian and late-Ottoman historiography, seems like a potential boon for scholars of the period and is thus ripe for further research.
In this way, I argue, the activities of the Daira Khassa in Siwa represented the extension of a distinctive Khedivial mark of sovereignty into the oasis that would vie for primacy among others in what was transforming into an increasingly crowded Siwan political field.

A consideration of the Daira Khassa along these lines raises a number of critical questions not only about the Khedive’s role in Egyptian affairs and his particular designs in the West, but also, more broadly, the practice of local politics, the nature of the Egyptian state, and conceptions of sovereignty and authority in the more remote Egyptian provinces. In the previous chapter, I argued for a fluid model of provincial politics and state/society relations in the case of Siwa, demonstrating how—to the extent that Egyptian state authorities gained any sort of foothold in the oasis after the arrival of the Maher commission in 1896—they owed this to the mediation and accommodation of the Sanusiyya and key local notables, and would remain beholden to these figures in several important respects. This analysis was intended to serve as a clear contrast to more rigid, two-dimensional models of central state encroachment and local resistance that have become de rigueur not only in the limited historiography on Siwa, but in many historical treatments of marginal or borderland regions across a variety of literatures.9

In the present chapter—focusing mainly on the decade leading up to World War I in Siwa—I will further develop this basic contention that the constitution of the Egyptian

---

9 James C. Scott’s recent study The Art of Not Being Governed, though useful in many respects, is a clear example of this rather two-dimensional model of state encroachment and local resistance. Certainly the conventional historiography on the impact of the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms in the Arab provinces takes a similar approach (see Moshe Ma’oz, Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, for a classic interpretation along these lines), though much recent work on the Ottoman provinces has certainly sought to revise this view. Ali Yaycióğlu’s PhD dissertation, “The Provincial Challenge: Regionalism, Crisis, and Integration in the Late Ottoman Empire” is a particularly useful revision for my purposes, given the way it provides a more interactive model of how provincial notables—acting largely autonomously—worked with local populations for the purpose of modernizing and improving governance.
state in Siwa and the West writ large was a fluid and interactive process, mediated first and foremost by local actors operating in a distinctively local political milieu in order to pursue their own local interests. What then makes the *Daira Khassa* such a crucial part of this story is, first of all, the way in which it managed to embed itself within the traditional authority structure in Siwa by cultivating several of the most powerful traditional Sheikhs to serve as Khedivial agents on the spot. Sheikh Sa‘ud Muhammad Sa‘ud Tawia—an elder and member of *Majlis Siwa* who had always been a fairly major player in Siwan affairs—thus saw his social and political status transformed when he was tapped to be the Khedive’s primary *Daira Khassa* agent in the oasis. Some of the most fascinating documents from the *Daira Khassa* collection for Siwa are in fact written by Sheikh Sa‘ud either directly to the Khedive, or else to one of the Khedive’s *Daira Khassa* agents in Cairo. Sa‘ud’s import as a key node in the network connecting the most prominent notables to the Khedive is underscored further when we recall that he was related through marriage to Osman Habun, the most powerful Siwan notable and the local Sanusi agent.

The successful integration of the *Daira Khassa* into the internal Siwan political order goes a long way in explaining a second theme of this chapter—namely, the way in which the *Daira Khassa* managed to garner sovereign legitimacy as an organ of central power where the Interior Ministry, represented by a succession of hapless *ma‘murs*, a small police force, and a handful of civil servants, could not. This point not only once again challenges the typical story of Siwa’s firm incorporation into the state by 1900, but—more fundamentally—also raises the question of what qualified as acceptable
sovereign authority in the oasis.\textsuperscript{10} Throughout this chapter, then, I will explore the tension between the Interior Ministry and \textit{Daira Khassa} as contrasting channels of central authority in the oasis, though I will strive to avoid presenting an overly rigid dichotomy between the two. Indeed, as we have already seen in the case of the Fahmy report, the Siwan \textit{ma’mur} could and often did work with the \textit{Daira Khassa} agents (a crucial point in itself, especially if the \textit{ma’mur} felt as compelled to report back to the \textit{Khassa} men in Cairo as to the \textit{Dakhliya} agents, if not more so). At the same time, however, I will suggest that the instances in which we see the interests of the two institutions diverge serve as especially illuminating cases for understanding how political authority in Siwa emerged out of a contested field in which different, often contrary marks of sovereignty overlapped with one another.

A third and related theme is the vexing question of how to characterize the \textit{Daira Khassa} as an institution, and in turn how exactly to conceive of the Khedive’s role and stature as an Egyptian statesman. For if the Khedive, given his very position atop the Egyptian regime, was by definition a “public” or “state” actor, the activities of his \textit{Daira Khassa} in Siwa—conducted largely in secret—seem to suggest otherwise. Though I do not wish to imply that Abbas Hilmi II was simply the reckless “political and financial adventurer” that Cromer thought he was, the evidence does strongly indicate that the Khedive’s dealings in the West were undertaken in a strikingly personal manner, drawing exclusively on his own private coffers (and thus not those of the state), along the lines of how a private businessman or investor would operate. In this chapter, then, I consider

\textsuperscript{10} As outlined in the Introduction, this idea of exploring the question of what “qualifies” as a sovereign capability in the eyes of various individuals stems from anthropologist Louisa Lombard’s recent work. Louisa Lombard, “Raiding Sovereignty in Central African Borderlands” (PhD diss, Duke University, 2012).
whether it is at all accurate to apply the designation “state actor” to Abbas Hilmi II. Plumbing deeper, I consider the extent to which the activities of the Khedive and his Daira Khassa blur the boundaries between the very categories of state and non-state actor in this period, thereby calling into question the rigid dichotomy that scholars typically pose between the two. Ultimately I explore the hypothesis that the Daira Khassa was in effect an idiosyncratic “quasi-state” institution—the ever-expansive arm of a power-hungry Khedive, who succeeded in harnessing his unique role as a formidable public figure to pursue decidedly private interests and secret political projects outside the main crucible of national affairs in Cairo.

In order to better conceptualize the complex political and institutional identity of the Khedive and Daira Khassa along these lines, it is perhaps useful to invoke the vast social science literature on patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism. The modern concept of patrimonialism stems from Max Weber’s classic typology of traditional forms of ruling authority. Weber distinguishes between patrimonialism and patriarchy, arguing that the former is a more complex and variegated outgrowth of the latter. Whereas in a patriarchal system all military and administrative power is concentrated in the hands of the sovereign, in a patrimonial system the ruler’s relationship to the ruled must be at least partially filtered through a network of administrative bureaucrats.11 Beginning in the mid-twentieth century—largely in response to the persistence of ostensibly traditional, patrimonial regimes in post-colonial African states—scholars such as S.N. Eisenstadt pioneered the concept of neo-patrimonialism as an analytical tool for understanding systems of rule that display an even more subtle and complex blend of patrimonial and

rational-bureaucratic elements. In such a regime, Eisenstadt suggests, patrons can use state resources in order to secure the loyalty of their clients in the general populace; they can also rely on neo-patrimonial networks to extend the reach of the state into its geographical and social peripheries and facilitate communal integration.\textsuperscript{12} Seen through this lens, the activities of the Khedive in the Egyptian West fit several of the characteristics that Eisenstadt and others ascribe to neo-patrimonial rule (though, of course, for a later period). At the same time, however, the case of the Khedive’s \textit{Daira Khassa} highlights an important caveat to the application of Eisenstadt’s theory of neo-patrimonialism to the Egyptian state in this period, and perhaps other similarly modernizing Middle Eastern states more generally.\textsuperscript{13} Whereas scholars of neo-patrimonialism still typically equate the patrimonial ruler with the state—albeit a state that has developed a stronger bureaucratic base that wrests \textit{some} power away from the sovereign—my analysis of the \textit{Daira Khassa}’s activities in the West showcases an exclusive patrimonial network actually \textit{in competition with} the official organs of the state. Again, what is at stake here is not the fact that patrimonial authority deviates from some ideal-type model of state sovereignty, but rather how state institutions in this period were necessarily forced to compete with other viable sovereign capabilities and institutions. I will explore the meaning and consequences of such institutional competition throughout the chapter.


\textsuperscript{13} A similar analysis would obtain for the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II’s decision to bypass the bureaucracy (centered at the Sublime Porte) and concentrate administrative authority instead at Yıldız Palace.
The primary materials that lie at the heart of this study shed light on several such “patrimonial,” quasi-state initiatives and projects that the Khedive and his agents sponsored in the West. Yet even despite the array of examples that emerge from the documentary evidence, it is still difficult to pinpoint exactly what the Khedive’s deeper underlying objectives in the West were throughout this period, or to discern why he pursued them as he did. Here I will offer a few conjectures. First, it is conceivable that the Khedive developed the Daira Khassa as a political institution and cultivated his own network of personal authority in such a fashion as a response to the harsh lessons he learned regarding colonial power early on in his reign. In 1893, for instance—a year after he succeeded his father as Khedive, at the age of 17—Abbas Hilmi II was horrified to discover that Cromer reserved the right to overrule all his government appointments if the British Residency deemed them antithetical to its interests. The Khedive reflects in his memoir on the so-called “crisis of January 1893” surrounding his failed attempt to replace Mustafa Fahmy as Prime Minister: initially, the Khedive recalls, “In deciding to change the Government I did not give heed to Lord Cromer, whom I did not think I needed to consult regarding the composition of the Government. The choice of ministers appeared to me to be left to the Sovereign alone.” Yet after being threatened by Cromer and Lord Roseberry, Abbas Hilmi II realized that “The Khedive could scarcely choose his Prime Minister without the approval of the English resident!” To his chagrin, the Khedive would discover throughout his reign that his role appointing cabinet ministers was nominal and ceremonial at best.

It is also worth considering the possibility that Abbas Hilmi II sought to bolster his authority through alternate channels not only in the face of a consistently hostile

---

14 Abbas Hilmi II (ed. Sonbol), 77-9.
British occupying regime bent on holding him in check, but also as a response to the fact that the Khedivial role in Egyptian affairs had been steadily eclipsed over time by the growth of the indigenous (and not just the colonial) bureaucracy. The political climate of the 1890s was markedly different than that of the first half of the century; long gone were the days in which Mehmed Ali—the founder of the ruling dynasty—personally oversaw all facets of the inchoate Egyptian state and ruled the country as a more purely patrimonial regime, as if it were his own private domain. By the time Abbas Hilmi II took over the helm, the Egyptian state had swelled, and the Government’s role had greatly expanded, to the point that the British were actually surprised to find their new colonial charge in possession of a substantially developed bureaucracy and state infrastructure. The degree to which Abbas Hilmi II was motivated by dynasty-building along the lines of Mehmed Ali or his Ottoman contemporary, Abdülhamid II, remains an open question; but it seems likely that the Khedive could have decided to cultivate his own channels for projecting authority as a direct response to the etiolated role that was left over for the Khedive in the particular political milieu of 1890s Egypt of which he found himself part. This would certainly help explain the pattern of competitive neo-patrimonialism outlined above.

Regardless of the specific factors underlying the Khedive’s motivation to initiate a series of projects and schemes in the West—and to pursue them with a largely secretive, private network of loyal agents—it is extremely telling that, in the popular memory of the period among the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin today, it is the personal imprint of the Khedive on the region that stands out. Two examples from the ethnography undertaken among Awlad ‘Ali tribesmen by Donald Cole and Soraya Altorki drive home
this point. One tribal elder recalled that “‘Abbas brought the railroad. He was the one who opened up the desert,’” whereas his brother added, “‘Yes, we like Abbas very much…He was the first to open the desert. He made maps and brought schools and started the ‘amar [“building;” “development”]. He came to visit us and went to Siwa and visited the border.’” Though this is a very limited sample size, the striking testimony of these two Bedouins begs the question: why is it the Khedive who is personally credited with helping develop the region, and not the actual Egyptian Government?

In this chapter, I seek to answer this question by investigating the Daira Khassa as a manifestation of a distinctive Khedivial mark of sovereignty through which Abbas Hilmi II succeeded in projecting more personal central authority into the Egyptian West. Though the bulk of the chapter will address the inner workings of the Daira Khassa in Siwa’s local political field, I will also briefly examine the Khedive’s Maryut railway project as a way to ask broader questions about the relationship between ostensibly “private” development schemes and state authority.

**The Khedive Heads West**

Abbas Hilmi II was purportedly the first ruler of Egypt to visit the oasis of Siwa in person since Alexander the Great made the long westward journey in order to consult the renowned oracle at the Temple of Jupiter Amon. Like so much else in Siwan history, however, the basic details of even such a momentous event as a Khedivial expedition remain shrouded in some mystery. The sources I have consulted do not even agree on the date of Abbas Hilmi II’s journey, while Siwa scholar Ahmad Fakhry’s

account marks a significant diversion from others in suggesting that the Khedive actually
traveled to the oasis on two separate occasions—first in 1904, then again in 1907.\(^\text{17}\)
Having weighed all the evidence and read these various sources carefully against one
another, however, I believe we can establish that the Khedivial visit to Siwa occurred at
the end of January and beginning of February in 1906.\(^\text{18}\) Despite the important
contradictions between the various narratives of the visit—which will be explored
below—all the sources I have considered for this chapter agree that the Khedive’s
unprecedented journey to the oasis was an extremely significant and transformative
moment in Siwan history.

The Khedivial visit to Siwa assumed a broad significance that transcended its
more circumscribed Siwan or even Egyptian meanings, eliciting anxious reactions on the
part of the Italian as well as Ottoman authorities. The Italians’ most immediate concern
was whether or not the Khedive intended to move on from Siwa—an indisputably
Egyptian locality, in their view—across the border to Jaghbub, which they contended was
located within the coveted domain of Ottoman Benghazi. In May 1906, an agent of the
Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome (Ministero degli Affari Esteri) wrote to a
diplomat at the Cairo Embassy imploring him to “collect accurate information on these

\(^{17}\) This would not be inconceivable, given the level of the *Daira Khassa*’s involvement in the oasis; but
Fakhry’s version begins to seem dubious when we consider that the very same narrative he presents for the
1904 visit is *almost* identical to the one recounted in several other sources claiming that this inaugural visit
occurred either in 1906 or 1907 (the discrepancies in the accounts are particularly illuminating and will be
examined below). Fakhry, *Siwa Oasis*, 113-5.

\(^{18}\) Most likely from January 28 to February 19. The detailed accounts presented in both of Ahmad Shafiq’s
memoirs treating the visit claim that it took place in winter of 1907, not 1906 (though almost everything
else matches up). This likely can be explained by a date conversion error between the Hijri and Gregorian
calendars. Likewise, Gawhari claims in his history of Siwa that the visit took place in 1907; but, as we will
see, Gawhari seems to have lifted much of his narrative verbatim from Shafiq (though again, with subtle
key differences), so it is unsurprising that his claim as to the timing of the trip matches that of Shafiq. See
Ahmad Shafiq, *Mudhakkirat ‘an Wahat Misr wa-al-Sahra al-Gharbiyah* (Cairo: al-Matba’ah al-Amriyah,
1929); Rif’at Gawhari, *Jannat al-Sahra, Siwah wa Wahat Amun* (Cairo: al-Dar al-Qawmiyah lil-Tiba’ah
events, in order to establish whether or not they correspond to reality, and if they are connected—as is supposed—to a well-determined project of the Egyptian Government relative to the regions located on the other side of the Western frontier of Egypt.”¹⁹ The Italians were thus relieved to discover that the Khedive had only gone as far as Siwa and thus never traveled on to Jaghbub.²⁰ In the end, the Italian agents decided that, “For now, any political aim [of the Khedive] on the other side of the border can be ruled out,” since the expedition to the West seemed, in the estimation of those gathering the requisite information, to have been intended merely “to make profitable [mettere in valore]²¹ the

²¹ The Italian phrase “mettere in valore” is the direct equivalent of the French “mise en valeur,” which is given thoughtful treatment by Alice Conklin in her study of French imperialism in West Africa. According to Conklin, “The concept first gained prominence in the 1890’s, when it marked a dual shift in the ‘official mind’ of French colonialism compared to an earlier era.” At this moment, Conklin suggests, colonial interest groups and policy-makers began to downplay further conquest in favor of “a constructive phase of the mise en valeur of territories already acquired…[the phrase] implied exploitation rather than more expansion.” Furthermore, this new form of “exploitation” was now intended to serve in the colonies as an engine of “rationality, progress, and conservation,” thus heralding the end of an ethos of exploitation as mere plunder. As Conklin suggests, “A more systematic management of French overseas resources was needed—one in which the state would have a key role.”

Conklin’s analysis of mise en valeur is extremely useful for capturing the broader implications of the Khedivial project in the Egyptian West. On one hand, Conklin demonstrates with the concrete example of shifting French colonial policy in West Africa around the turn of the century that the idea of mise en valeur as a conscious vehicle of modern statecraft was very much in vogue in the period, and that the concept evidently had legs, circulating between the different powers seeking to bolster their ruling authority across various locales (of which, I would contend, Khedivial Egypt can most certainly be seen as one example). On this score, Conklin echoes Charles Maier’s argument in his seminal article “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History” (analyzed in the Introduction), namely that the defining feature of modern nation-states beginning in the late-nineteenth century, across an array of geographic contexts, was a new conception of territoriality, according to which national space was a wide open field requiring direct and comprehensive action. For Maier, the “new quality of territoriality…is a product of what is happening within the borders. The area within will no longer be construed as a passive enclosure to be policed and kept orderly; it will be a source of resources, livelihood, output, and energy.”

On the other hand, Conklin’s conceptualization of mise en valeur reminds us that a project of activating empty or undeveloped national space is decidedly a political one. It is ironic that the Italian diplomatic agents cited above seemed content to disregard the Khedivial visit and his interest in mettere in valore—in this case, with respect to the desert territory in the West—as another instance of the Khedive’s frivolous profiteering, as if there were no political overtones to consider. The document thus seems to reflect the general bias summarized in the introduction to this chapter whereby all of the Khedive’s personal economic ventures or financial dealings were written off as apolitical, and as a mere sideshow—nothing to be taken seriously. On the contrary, in this chapter I argue that the actions of the Khedivial Daira Khassa in the West were at once personal and imbued with political significance, and that they provide a crucial, if idiosyncratic, example of mise en valeur that arguably continues to have weighty
region considered desert, which he [the Khedive] believes can be developed for his own personal financial gain.”

The Ottoman authorities observed the Khedivial expedition with a similar amount of disquiet. An Interior Ministry document from April 1906 reveals that the Khedive’s movements were being watched closely; the Ottoman agent writing the memo made special note of the fact that the Khedive undertook the journey “accompanied by a great number of tribal sheikhs and notables,” and also that he had stopped by Sollum en route to Siwa. In turn, presumably on the orders of the Interior Ministry, the Mutasarrif of Benghazi sent a coterie of gendarmes out towards Sollum to survey the Khedive’s caravan.

It is possible to reconstruct a basic narrative of the Khedive’s time in Siwa, even if—as we will see—the various sources I have consulted disagree on some important details. The initial journey out to the oasis lasted six days and consisted of two separate legs: first, the Khedive and his entourage traveled by train to Garawla (at that time the last stop on the Maryut Railway); he then proceeded by coach, trailed by an expansive caravan comprising hundreds of Egyptian officers, Bedouin notables, and mounted soldiers (all of whom were shepherding purportedly over 300 camels and 70 horses).

Implications for the state of development in the region. The Khedivial presence in the West brought with it very real attempts at mise en valeur, though—unlike any examples offered by Conklin or Maier—they were divorced from the official organs of the state. See Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 41-3; Charles S. Meier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *AHR* 105 (2000), 818.

---

22 MAE: AIE 108 (Memo from Salvago to MAE, Mar. 18, 1906).
24 MAE: AIE 108 (Guicciardini memo to MAE, Mar. 18, 1906). I did not locate any additional information regarding the Sollum leg of the Khedive’s journey, however.
25 Shafiq, *Mudhakkirat ‘an Wahat Misr*, 83; Ewald Falls, *Three Years*, 271-2. Ewald Falls—whose eyewitness account is one of the key sources for the Khedivial expedition—was apparently one of only four Europeans accompanying the Khedive on the journey (the rest, according to Ewald Falls, were “Egyptians and Arabs”). Ewald Falls attributes his and the other European travelers’ safety along the desert route to
According to one European observer invited by the Khedive to come on the voyage, J.C. Ewald Falls, the caravan followed “the Sultanic road,” so named to mark the coastal land-route to Siwa that Alexander the Great had followed.26

When the caravan reached the outskirts of Siwa—stopping by what Ewald Falls believed to be a “Sanusi mosque that resembled a fortress”—they were received by the Siwan Ma’mur (along with his small garrison of soldiers), a Sanusi deputation, and a sheikh (likely the head of that particular Sanusi zawiya)—all of whom formed a “large square” ready to receive the visitors.27 At some point shortly thereafter, the Khedivial caravan made its way into the main town, where Siwans greeted the procession by throwing a lavish reception with music, banners, and waving palm-branches.28 According to Fakhry—whose account of events in the oasis, it must be remembered, consistently overplays the degree of Siwan subservience to the institutions and officials of the Egyptian state—“All the Siwans crowded to welcome him [the Khedive] and cheered him with great enthusiasm.”29 Other sources, however, paint a more balanced and thus less rosy picture of the Khedive’s reception. According to Ewald Falls, despite many trappings of a warm welcome, “discord was not lacking,” for a salient group of Sanusiyya—“the men in fluttering white burnous and narrow turbans, the bronze-colored monks”—greeted the Khedive “in silence and with ceremonious coldness. On their faces might be read curiosity and compulsion mingled with hatred, unconcealed hatred of the descendant of the plunderer [meaning, Mehmed Ali] whom no real native of Siwa

26 Ewald Falls, Three Years, 273.
27 Ibid., 274.
28 Ibid., 274.
29 Fakhry, Siwa Oasis, 114.
unreservedly recognizes as master.” If we accept Ewald Falls’s testimony, then, the Khedive’s popularity and legitimacy in Siwa at this particular stage was by no means a given; indeed, as we will see in the rest of the chapter, the Khedive and the local agents he tapped for the Daira Khassa would have to work hard over the next eight years prior to his deposal by the British in 1914 in order to cultivate his authority among Siwans.

For the duration of his four-day stay, the Khedive set up camp on the outskirts of the oasis in an area known as Naqb Siwa, using this as a home-base from which he could undertake various local excursions and surveys. One of the most significant of these was his visit, accompanied by approximately fifty Siwan sheikhs and notables, to the sacred tomb of Sidi Suleiman (a prominent local sheikh from the Middle Ages, considered akin to the “patron saint” of Siwa and venerated for his purported miracles and his association with good harvests). In fact, the Khedive seemed to make wooing the Siwan elite his top priority during his four-day stay in the oasis. These same fifty odd Siwan notables who joined him at the tomb of Sidi Suleiman purportedly accompanied the Khedive—some on donkeys or horses, others on foot—during most of his comings and goings around the oasis. Additionally, according to Ahmad Shafiq (a lifelong bureaucrat who became a member of the Khedive’s entourage and later wrote several memoirs), the Khedive gave generous gifts to several of the most prominent notables: cashmere shawls to six Siwan sheikhs; gold watches and chains to Osman Habun, ‘Omar Musellem, Muhammad Sa’id, and Sheikh Sa’ud (all four of whom were members of Majlis Siwa);

---

30 Ewald Falls, *Three Years*, 274-5.
and calico garments to what Shafiq calls the sheikhs of the *turuq* (pl. *tariqa*, or “order”; this presumably refers to the heads of Sanusi and Madani *zawiyas*). The Khedive also hosted a sumptuous lunch banquet for all the Siwan Sheikhs and organized a series of celebrations featuring various shooting games that could be enjoyed by all inhabitants of the oasis.

The narrative of the Khedivial visit becomes slightly murkier, however, with respect to two related themes: the nature of the Khedive’s land surveys and claims in and around the oasis; and the practice and implications of the exchange of gifts between the Khedive and the Siwans. The testimony of Ahmad Shafiq—who claims that he received his information directly from Sheikh Sa’ud—seems the most reliable, and I will therefore begin with his account. According to Shafiq, immediately following the lunch banquet, the Khedive asked Sheikh Sa’ud to remain behind, at which point he ordered the sheikh to accompany him during his meals and evening activities. The next day, Shafiq continues, Sa’ud took the Khedive to various springs around the oasis—including ‘Ayn Khamisa (located two hours from *Naqib Siwa*); ‘Ayn Meshendeb (where Sheikh Sa’ud had a garden where they stopped for tea); and ‘Ayn Kibrayet—as well as several olive gardens, and the hill known for its archaeological treasures referred to by Shafiq as *bilad al-rum al-athriya*. On the following day, the Khedive made a special visit—again

---

34 Ibid., 84.
36 I put the most weight on Shafiq’s memoirs for several reasons. First of all, his testimony is essentially “doubled down”—echoed almost precisely in the work of Rif’at al-Gawhari (though with subtle divergences that I will summarize below). Second, Shafiq’s emphasis on Khedivial land *purchases* in both his memoirs seems to be the most grounded in evidence that is supported elsewhere, even if tangentially (Cole and Altorki, for example, write briefly about the Khedive’s practice of buying up land in the West. See Cole and Altorki, *Bedouins*, 78-80). Finally, Shafiq’s account is by far the most steeped in detail of any that document the visit—most likely due to his source, Sheikh Sa’ud, being so close to the Khedive and such a main player during the actual visit.

Ewald Falls, for his part, confirms that Abbas Hilmi II “specially desired to have various springs analyzed in order to determine their use for irrigation projects” (285). But his account neglects any mention of Sheikh Sa’ud.
accompanied by Sheikh Sa‘ud—to the lush spring known as ‘Ayn Qurayshat. Shafiq writes that, immediately upon seeing the spring and the lands adjacent to it, the Khedive “became very pleased” and instantly appointed Sa‘ud as his agent in charge of agriculture there. Shafiq continues by noting that the Khedive paid the “necessary expenses,” with one of the engineers he had brought along with him as a witness, and that he also gave Sa‘ud fifty Egyptian pounds to cover the costs of the work of dredging the spring.\(^\text{37}\) From what I can gather, this experience of visiting the various springs and coveted lands in Siwa with Sheikh Sa‘ud as his personal guide was the start of what was to become a beautiful friendship between the two, which will be fleshed out below.

Fakhry tells the story of the beginnings of the Khedive’s involvement with ‘Ayn Qurayshat quite differently, however. He writes: “As a gift, the Siwans presented him three springs together with all the land which could be irrigated by their waters: ‘Ayn Qurayshat, the largest in the oasis, ‘Ayn al-Shifa, and the Hatiyah of Tawini. The Khedive gave instructions for the property to be registered officially in the name of his son, Prince ‘Abd al-Mun‘im. He directed the government to restore the springs and help the inhabitants in every possible way.”\(^\text{38}\) This account is obviously a far cry from that which Shafiq presents in his memoir. In Shafiq’s version, the Khedive—seeing the obvious benefits of a particularly plum piece of land—spontaneously took it as his own and made the necessary financial arrangements to secure it as his property, which would be administered \textit{privately} through his new agent, Sheikh Sa‘ud. But in the other version, the Siwans—overjoyed by the Khedive’s largesse—decided to give him the property as a gift, which he then turned over to “the Government.” Siwa historian Rifa‘at al-Gawhari’s

\(^{37}\) Shafiq, \textit{Mudhakkirat ‘an Wahat Misr}, 84.

\(^{38}\) Fakhry, \textit{Siwa Oasis}, 114.
account of the Khedivial visit to Siwa further complicates the picture. Gawhari, for the most part, copies Shafiq’s writing about the four-day expedition verbatim: his retelling of the Khedive’s daily itinerary is almost a direct replica of Shafiq’s, and he even begins the section by noting that he personally had received all his information directly from Sheikh Sa‘ud, just as Shafiq had done. Gawhari’s divergence in the case of ‘Ayn Qurayshat, however, is therefore extremely odd: he claims, as does Fakhry, that the people of Siwa gave ‘Ayn Qurayshat—comprising some 2,000 feddans—to the Khedive as a gift.39

Gawhari’s version of events seems untrustworthy for several reasons, however—and not just because the bulk of it was so obviously lifted directly from Shafiq’s memoir (which predated Gawhari’s volume by approximately a decade and a half). First, Gawhari actually seems to contradict himself in the most direct fashion: in the introduction to the very same book in which the account of the Khedivial expedition is included, he writes that the Khedive “purchased many vast properties in the Qurayshat area [emphasis added].”40 Second, elsewhere in his chapter on the Khedivial expedition, Gawhari again departs subtly from Shafiq’s narrative in such a way that calls into question his familiarity with Siwan geography and suggests a fair amount of confusion on his part. In Shafiq’s detailed account, he writes that—after the Khedive’s four-day stay in Siwa—he returned to Cairo via the tiny oasis of Gara (also known locally as Umm al-Saghir), located two-days northeast by camel from Siwa. According to Shafiq, it was here, in Gara (not Siwa), that the local sheikhs responded to the Khedive’s gift-giving by offering him land—the spring known as ‘Ayn Radi (which the Khedive, in turn, turned over to Sheikh Sa‘ud for dredging work and the administration of its agriculture). Shafiq

39 Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 217.
40 Ibid., 7.
also notes that the same was done for another spring on the return trip, known as ‘Ayn Qattara.\textsuperscript{41} Gawhari, however, claims that ‘Ayn Radi is where the Khedive set up camp in Siwa\textsuperscript{42}—which is not possible given the distance of that oasis from Gara—even as, elsewhere, he parrots Shafiq in noting that it was the people of Gara who gave ‘Ayn Radi to the Khedive!\textsuperscript{43}

If the question of which (if any) lands the Khedive received as gifts from the local population remains one point of contention in the relevant literature, the response to the various gifts the Khedive himself gave to Siwans also requires some unpacking. I have already mentioned the sundry gifts that the Khedive presented to key Siwan sheikhs—including a gold watch and chain to Osman Habun that is presumably the one that became such an object of jealousy and controversy in the anecdote with which I opened the chapter. The Khedive also brought money and clothing that he intended to give as gifts to the general Siwan population; according to Fakhry, it was the overwhelming generosity of the Khedive in giving these gifts that prompted the Siwans to offer him ‘Ayn Qurayshat in return.\textsuperscript{44} But Shafiq, in another of his memoirs, offers a narrative of events that challenges Fakhry’s version by significantly complicating the picture—and, furthermore, reveals even more about the stealthy nature of the Khedive’s land dealings in the oasis.

In a short section of his broader political autobiography—\textit{Mudhakkirati fi Nisf al-Qarn} (\textit{My Memoirs in the Half-Century})—Shafiq recalls how many Siwans were actually offended by the manner in which the \textit{Ma’mur} had distributed the gifts the Khedive had

\textsuperscript{41} Shafiq, \textit{Mudhakkirat ‘an Wahat Misr}, 84. The Khedive’s interest in ‘Ayn Qattara is confirmed by Ewald Falls (\textit{Three Years}, 288).
\textsuperscript{42} Gawhari, \textit{Jannat al-Sahra}, 215.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{44} Fakhry, \textit{Siwa Oasis}, 114.
brought for them, complaining about how everyone was “being given equal treatment, regardless of whether or not they worked on the Khedive’s lands.”{45} Several Siwan sheikhs then used the gift-giving controversy as a pretext for launching, some unspecified time later, into a more severe condemnation of the Ma’mur: they claimed that he was guilty of “bias” as well as extortion, given that he had been snatching up land from locals at a low price and then selling it immediately to members of the Khedive’s entourage (including Shafiq himself, as well as Hussein Ramzi and Yusuf Ziya) at a significant premium.{46} The Ma’mur tried to buy off the sheikhs, offering to compensate them from the profits he had accrued selling to Shafiq and the others, but the indignant sheikhs held their ground and decided instead to send petitions (in person, via Siwan couriers) to both the Khedive and to the Interior Ministry. The Ma’mur, for his part, also petitioned the Khedive, imploring him to send an agent in order to appease the Siwans and essentially save his hide.{47}

Now back in Cairo, the Khedive received the Siwan couriers and, at least on the surface, took their petition to heart. The Khedive summoned Shafiq and harshly reprimanded him for not having informed him first about these backdoor land deals. The Khedive was especially upset by the fact that the whole episode had prompted the Siwans to send a petition to the Interior Ministry, which he argued threatened to “open up the eyes and ears of the occupiers” (meaning the British) and compel them to “intervene in

{45} Shafiq, Mudhakkirati fi Nisf al-Qarn (Cairo: Matha’at Misr, 1934): 133. This passage thus implies that the Khedive must already have owned some land in Siwa; but I have been unable to find out anything more about this.

{46} This second round of accusations ostensibly occurred a short time after the Khedive’s visit, though Shafiq is not specific here with regards to timing (he links the two events but does not mention how much time has elapsed between them).

{47} Shafiq, Mudhakkirati, 133.
Siwan affairs,” which was precisely “what had displeased him.”48 After this meeting with Shafiq, the Khedive called the representatives from Siwa back in and—though he reproached them for “rebelling” against the Ma’mur—gave them the good news that he had ordered Shafiq and the other land speculators to abrogate the deal and give back the land they had surreptitiously purchased.49

The matter does not end there, however. In light of the allegations against the Ma’mur—for his role in facilitating the entourage’s land purchases, as well as the fact that he was creaming relatively large profits off the top, to boot—the Khedive and the Interior Ministry began to wrangle over whether or not he should be recalled. Whereas the Ministry was leaning towards replacing him, the Khedive strongly felt that he should remain in office, for—at least according to what the Khedive said on record—a dismissal would “help the Siwans flout [istikfafa] the Ma’murs and believe that they could remove any officials they don’t like.”50 The Khedive thus delegated an agent named Hussein Muharram to go to the Interior Ministry and meet with a special advisor (mustashar) in order to scotch the Ma’mur’s removal. To Muharram’s chagrin, however, the advisor informed him that the transfer of the Ma’mur had already been secured, and that it was too late to reverse the decision. He then also engaged Muharram in a short conversation

48 Ibid., 133.
49 Ibid., 133. On this issue of returning the lands to their rightful Siwan owners, one Daira Khassa document might offer some corroboration. However, given that Shafiq’s account is vague in its timing (i.e. how long after the Khedivial visit the return of the lands took place)—and since we do not know in fact which properties were in question—it is impossible to ascertain for sure that this document represents the same event. At any rate, in the same letter from Hussein Effendi Fahmy to Ahmad Sadeq with which I opened this chapter, the Ma’mur mentions that the affair of returning various estates (hitaya) to their owners was finally complete, after a “long painful period, with discussions between Sheikhs and the people,” who had been opposed to each other on this matter. In the end, a fine was evidently imposed on some of the Sheikhs and other inhabitants. Fahmy concludes by exclaiming, “Thank God for the settlement of this issue, which had been preoccupying the Siwan public,” and then recounting how, after Sheikh Sa’ud received the complete sum (of the fines), “all the records were burned in public.” See DUL: AHII 165/578-80.
50 Shafiq, Mudhakkirati, 133-4.
about the recent land speculation on the part of the entourage. When, however, Muharram explained how the Khedive, upon receiving the complaints of the Siwans, had forced Shafiq and his companions to return the desired properties, the advisor retorted by exclaiming, “I think the Khedive has also bought land!” He then told Muharram that he “wanted to know whether or not the Khedive had also given up the land” that he knew the Khedive had bought there.51 And at this point in the text, Shafiq—serving as an omniscient narrator, presenting the matter from the perspective of hindsight—steps in and explains to the reader in a footnote what really had happened: “After we returned the land we had bought, the Khedive struck a deal with the owners of those lands and ultimately purchased them in the name of the Crown Prince ‘Abd al Mun’im.”52

This curious episode—carefully documented in Shafiq’s memoir—is extremely provocative. On one hand, it is a clear instance of the Khedive ending up embroiled in a power struggle with the Interior Ministry (an institution, it is implied, that was the preserve of the British occupation at this time). On the other hand, it demonstrates the Khedive’s close-up knowledge of the property situation in Siwa and his ruthlessness in going after desired lands there—to the extent that he actually undermined the activities of his own entourage, initially grandstanding against their irresponsible behavior but then secretly buying up the property he forced them to return.

If we read between the lines a bit further, another set of important questions arises. For one: how was the Khedive able to secure the purchase of the returned land

51 Ibid., 134.
52 Ibid., 134 (f.n.). Note that this last item of information, regarding the name under which the Khedive registered the land, poses a direct challenge to Fakhry’s account, summarized above, which contends that it was the gifted land that the Khedive chose to register under the name of the Crown Prince. This vignette thus seems to constitute another piece of evidence that helps us establish more definitively that Abbas Hilmi II did indeed purchase ‘Ayn Qurayshat, and that Fakhry’s account is gravely distorted.
(the very land that had created such a stir in the oasis and spurred the Siwan Sheikhs to send petitions to both the Palace and Interior Ministry)? Put differently, why was the Khedive’s purchase of the same properties not a similar source of contention in the oasis? For another: if Shafiq and the other Khedivial agents had operated through the Ma’mur, who was later recalled for his actions, then who had the Khedive worked with to buy those same properties? Also: did the Khedive have any ulterior motives for wanting to keep that particular Ma’mur in office? If, as we will see, the Daira Khassa had a pretty good track record of winning Siwan ma’mars over to its side to serve its interests in addition to (if not over) those of the Interior Ministry, it begs the question of the extent to which the Khedive had special ties or obligations to this Ma’mur. Although, given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, we can only offer conjectures (not definitive answers in this particular case), the episode still remains especially striking for the amount it reveals about the Khedive’s local knowledge and clout in a far-off oasis that he only purportedly visited for four days in the winter of 1906. Even if the Khedive’s visit to Siwa had not been an overwhelming success, it seems that he still had managed to lay important groundwork for bolstering his authority in the oasis.

In light of the foregoing analysis, it is already worth revisiting the standard interpretation of the Khedive’s dealings in the West, nicely summed up in the case of the Siwa expedition by his traveling companion Ewald Falls, as strictly apolitical and venal:

“Thus the progress to…the mysterious oasis of Siwa, on the western borders of his empire, was dictated chiefly by commercial interests. Two questions occupied the chief place: first, is there in the region of that desert oasis land capable of cultivation; and, second, would it be worth while to construct a branch line of railway from the Marmarika
port, Mirsa Matru [sic], to Siwa?" Ewald Falls, an archaeologist, also lamented that Abbas Hilmi II was no “patron of science” and concluded that “it was for fairly prosaic reasons that the Viceroy wished to learn something of the western borders of his country.” Ewald Falls here—like the Italians, like Cromer—seems incapable of conceiving how the Khedive’s private interests in territories far outside Cairo in the West—indeed, the very notion of mise en valeur in key desert and oasis locales that underpinned the Khedive’s commercial ventures in the region—could actually amount to more than another “prosaic” attempt of the Khedive to enrich himself. Any political motivations or implications surrounding the expedition are lost on Ewald Falls—this despite the fact that we have just seen how the Khedivial visit cemented certain key bonds between Abbas Hilmi II and local notables; ended up provoking a controversy surrounding official corruption that saw the Siwan Ma’mur deposed in response to Siwan recalcitrance; pitted, perhaps for the first time, the Palace against the Interior Ministry over affairs in the oasis; and ultimately helped establish the Khedive as a major landowner in Siwa who had the savvy to strike lasting deals with locals where members of his entourage had failed.

In the second half of this chapter, using a variety of sources from the Daira Khassa collection that pertain directly to the Khedive’s activities in the oasis and elsewhere in the West, I will continue to develop my basic contention that the Daira Khassa was an increasingly powerful political institution through which Abbas Hilmi projected a distinctive Khedivial mark of sovereignty into the westernmost reaches of

53 Ewald Falls, *Three Years*, 269.
54 Ibid., 271.
Egypt, and accordingly enjoyed the latitude to act in ways that privileged his personal prestige and power over the official interests of the state.

From the Mixed-Up Files of the *Daira Khassa*

The ninety some odd documents pertaining to Siwa that have survived from the *Daira Khassa* files—a series of fragments touching on a number of different issues arising between 1906 and 1914—offer a refreshingly intimate portrait of life in the oasis for a period of Siwan history that has previously remained in the shadows. Indeed, I was able to locate only a negligible amount of information about Siwa in the Egyptian National Archives in Cairo (perusing both the Interior Ministry collection, as well as the files of the Council of Ministers). The *Daira Khassa* documents, however—aside from containing an abundance of fascinating and colorful anecdotes—reveal not only a great deal about the activities of the Khedive and his private network, but also cover key events and prominent characters about whom we heretofore knew little about other than their names.

One document in the archives in Cairo stands out, though, and is worth mentioning on this very point. In May 1909, in response to an incident of alleged theft in Siwa that I will examine below, the Interior Ministry received a report from the *Ma’mur*, which included a list compiled by a previous *ma’mur* of several leading Siwan notables as well as a few short words of description for each. One ‘Abdullah Hamid (noted as both a sheikh and member of *Majlis Siwa*) was said to be “stupid and careless” (*ahmaq wa ar’an*) though “he did what was asked of him.” Sheikh Muhammad Sa’id was listed as being “sly and wicked” (*makar wa khabith*), prone to “practicing corruption.” Sheikh Muhammad Rajeh was described as “chameleon-like,” simply going with the flow
(hirba’hi—ma’hum ma’hum ‘aleyhim ‘aleyhim). ‘Omar Musellem, another member of the Majlis, was also “very sly and wicked.” As for the infamous Osman Habun—the Ma’mur simply said of him that he possessed “every characteristic” (kull al-sifat).  

All of these Siwan sheikhs—maligned in this way in the eyes of the official state establishment, though otherwise largely unknown entities—were actually major players in the oasis and, accordingly, key characters in the Daira Khassa files I have examined. It is thus time to move beyond their mere names and supposed vices, and to gain instead a glimpse of how local politics functioned in Siwa, and how the Daira Khassa managed to work with these individuals in order to embed itself inside that local political milieu.

I - Khedivial Property

On June 21, 1906, Khalil Effendi Hafez, the Ma’mur of Siwa, received a letter from the Mudir of Buhayra transmitting the Interior Ministry’s orders to temporarily hand over his administrative duties to the mulahidh (police sergeant) and travel to Cairo for an important meeting. Hafez departed four days later, passing first through Marsa Matruh (where he was stranded for over two weeks, waiting for a ship to arrive), then Alexandria. The Ma’mur’s entire journey is full of interesting tidbits, but what is most central for

---

55 DWQ: MNW 0075-007496 (See enclosed document with Memo of May 13, 1909). A total of fifteen notables were described in this fashion; I chose to transcribe only those who we meet again in the Daira Khassa documents. Not all the descriptions were pejorative. One Ahmad Mansour, for example, was lauded for being “upright” and for “not interfering.”

56 For instance, see DUL: AHII 165/591-6: while Hafez was stuck in Marsa Matruh, he stayed with a local Coast Guard officer named Radwan Effendi Salem. During this time, an Englishman arrived via a small ship and asked to be shown the way to a series of lands on which he hoped to prospect for coal. Upon inspecting these lands, the Englishman—along with a bashmuhandis (head engineer)—planted a series of flags to mark off various properties. Shortly afterwards, however, a local ‘umda named Sheikh Faraj arrived and told Salem that the Bedouin of the area were deeply offended by the placement of these flags and demanded their removal, claiming that the land was not the Government’s to give away.
our purposes here is what transpired during his visit, on July 21, to the Interior Ministry—the primary reason he had been summoned to Cairo.57

Hafez met with an unnamed Advisor at the Ministry who began the conversation by notifying the Ma‘mur that the Khedive had ordered him to remain in his position in Siwa for another year and asking him why he thought this was so. Hafez responded, “I think that the people—on account of their being content with my plans for them—requested this of the Khedive.” Indeed, according to Hafez, he had even encouraged the Siwan Sheikhs to send a petition to the Interior Ministry, requesting that he remain in office for another year; the Advisor confirmed the receipt of this petition, which had been placed in a special file. The Advisor then immediately redirected the conversation towards the question of the Khedive’s private dealings in the oasis: “He asked me if the Khedive is buying land. I told him yes.” The Advisor pressed the Ma‘mur for more details; Hafez responded by confirming that the Khedive had been buying up approximately 3,000 feddans of land—located anywhere from an hour and a half to three hours from the center of Siwa—ever since the time of the Khedivial expedition.58 Upon hearing this news, the Advisor grew quiet, so Hafez returned to the topic of his remaining in Siwa: “As long as the Khedive wants it, I would happily accept another year in Siwa.” The Advisor, still apparently agitated, continued in silence and merely “rapped his hand on the table.” Eventually, after first allegedly threatening Hafez, the two men came to

57 DUL: AHII 165/591-6. This entire anecdote hails from a report that Hafez wrote to Muhammad Osman—the mu‘awin of the Khedivial Diwan—on July 22, 1906, immediately following his visit to the Interior Ministry.
58 DUL: AHII 165/591-6.
terms: Hafez accepted a salary of 18 Egyptian pounds and was granted a two-month leave before reassuming his post for another year.59

Hafez’s testimony—written up the very next day in the form of a report to an upper-level official of the Khedivial Diwan, Muhammad Osman—is worth pausing over for several different reasons. First, and most straightforwardly, it confirms the fact that the Khedive wasted no time securing large swaths of Siwan land for the Daira Khassa during and after his visit to the oasis—something in evidence in other documents that I will examine below. The document also seems to reveal how the Interior Ministry first learned about the Khedive’s backdoor land dealings—the information that, as I mentioned in my analysis of Shafiq’s memoir, was repeated back to the Khedive’s man Hussein Muharram at a later date. More than this, however, it raises key questions about the relationship between the Khedive and the Siwan Ma’mur: why (again) was the Khedive so keen to keep the Ma’mur in office? At any rate, the Khedive’s desire to give Hafez another term, coupled with the Dakhliya Advisor’s patent distrust of Hafez that comes across in this report, suggests that the Ma’mur (to say nothing of other state officials on the spot) maintained cozy relations to the Khedive, to the extent that his loyalty to the Interior Ministry was in question. The basic fact that Hafez immediately turned around and presented such a detailed report of events to a Khedivial agent only underscores this point. To what degree, then, were the Khedive and the agents of his Daira Khassa actively seeking to woo Siwan Ma’murs and wrest their loyalties away from the official arm of the state? Was this the latest instance in a pattern by which the Khedive strove doggedly to preserve and reward Siwan ma’murs he knew were sympathetic to his interests?

59 Ibid.
In December 1906, Hafez—now back in Siwa, serving a new term as Ma’mur—wrote another report to a Khedivial agent—this time one Muhammad Bey Rashid, designated as a Representative (wakil) of the Daira Khassa. Hafez’s motive for writing this time was to notify the Khassa about the successful purchase (as mandated by Khedivial orders) of some new lands in and around Siwa: namely, ‘Ayn Kirayet, ‘Ayn Shamsin, and then various springs, palms, and properties around the ancient site known as qarat al-ma‘buda. Hafez goes into some detail explaining how it was that he became acquainted with the spring known as ‘Ayn Shamsin, located west of the ma‘buda hill and south of the Siwan outskirt known as Aghormi. According to Hafez, he had heard rumors of the existence of a spring by this name and approached several Siwan elders to inquire about it. They in turn pointed him to ‘Omar Musellem (a prominent Sheikh and member of Majlis Siwa), who told Hafez about the spring by way of reading him passages from the recorded Siwan history (mentioned in Chapter 2) of which he was the custodian. Hafez then inspected the spring (along with Musellem and the Siwan mulahidh Mitwalli Effendi Hilmi—later a ma’mur) and gave his authorization to buy it (as well as ‘Ayn Kirayet) on behalf of the Khassa; Hafez also took 55 Egyptian pounds from Sheikh Sa‘ud and then distributed this sum—“in accordance with Khedivial Orders”—to the poor and needy. He concludes his report to Rashid by assuring the Daira Khassa that “we are indeed ready for all the tasks required of us in the service of our Khedive.”

Several documents from the Daira Khassa collection consist of fairly routine reports on the condition and agricultural output of the Khedive’s various properties in

---

60 DUL: AHII 165/574-5.  
61 Ibid.  
62 Ibid.
Siwa (with ‘Ayn Qurayshat being the most consistently mentioned of these). Yet even these more mundane files offer us glimpses both of how labor was coordinated on the Khedivial properties, as well the manner in which many Siwan notables seemed to be privy to the Khedive’s private dealings in the oasis. In a report to the Khedive in October 1912, the Ma‘mur mentions heading out on a tour of inspection to ‘Ayn Qurayshat, along with 110 Siwan workers and a number of Siwan sheikhs (including Sheikh Sa‘ud, who had been away for some time). The Ma‘mur was happy to report to the Khedive that (among other findings) the date-palms—of which there were now nearly 600—were thriving; and that the clover found in and around the spring was “in extremely good condition—the best found in all the lands of Siwa” and thus suitable to bring to market twice a week. At the same time, incidentally, the Ma‘mur observed that the two estates in the area owned, respectively, by the Madaniyya sect and by Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi were more or less of equal quality.

In another document, Sheikh Sa‘ud reports on the inauguration of a new round of improvement works on ‘Ayn Qurayshat. He notes that several key notables—he along with ‘Abdullah Hamid Muhammad, ‘Abdel Rahman Mu‘arrif, and Muhammad Sa‘id—stayed in ‘Ayn Qurayshat for four days and did all the work of opening up the spring and improving its irrigation system. An earlier report to Abbas Hilmi II from another Khedivial agent—a Yuzbashi named Muhammad Effendi Tawfiq Shawqi (who will be discussed in depth below)—presents a list of expenditures for various works undertaken in ‘Ayn Qurayshat and mentions the beginning of respectable agricultural yields from the

---

63 DUL: AHII 165/551-4 (Ma‘mur Siwa to Khedive, Oct. 1, 1912). This document even contains a diagram of the ‘Ayn Qurayshat area, and the agricultural lands therein.
64 Ibid.
65 DUL: AHII 165/559-60 (Report from Sheikh Sa‘ud, July 1913, 1909).
In yet another document, Sheikh Sa‘ud recalls in detail how 160 Siwans were hired to undertake a repair of ‘Ayn Qurayshat, which took place over three days; Sa‘ud then gave the workers ten Egyptian pounds “in the personal presence of the Ma’mur.”

Finally, in a report from May 1909, the new Siwan Ma’mur—Mitwalli Effendi Hilmi—wrote to Khassa agent Ahmad Sadeq that ‘Ayn Qurayshat was currently being cleaned at length by several Siwans, after enticing them to do the job by distributing clothing on behalf of the Khedive.

A letter that Ma’mur Hussein Fahmy sent to Ahmad Sadeq from April 1908 is a particularly rich depiction of how ‘Ayn Qurayshat was run. He writes, “I received your entire response on the issue of agriculture in Qurayshat. In accordance with its contents, the sheikhs Osman ‘Ismail Habun, ‘Omar Musellem, Muhammad Sa‘id, and Sa‘ud Muhammad Sa‘ud Tawia were put in charge.” The Ma’mur, also on the Daira Khassa’s orders, also authorized a Western and two Eastern sheikhs to help out at the spring, “on account of their being well-known in the science of agriculture in Siwa.” The situation in ‘Ayn Qurayshat and the expenses were then outlined in accordance with the text of “the Khedivial Decree” (al-amr al-sami al-karim).

Fahmy then describes how he assembled all of these sheikhs authorized by the Daira Khassa to oversee affairs in the spring, along with an engineer named Hassan Effendi Labib, to decide on the best means for farming the lands at ‘Ayn Qurayshat. Contending that “the only effective way of farming this land is the Siwan way” (meaning, eschewing plowing), they decided to hire a Siwan farmer to work the spring on a full-
time basis—so that “if he fails to improve it, he alone is responsible.” The sheikhs then agreed on an individual named Ahmad Hamid and then made the offer to him with a salary starting at two Egyptian pounds, which he accepted. Fahmy’s letter concludes with a list of supplies (with their attached expenses) that would be needed for Hamid to start up the necessary works at ‘Ayn Qurayshat. Among all its other sundry bits of information, then, this document reveals how the Daira Khassa—with the assistance of the Ma’mur—deliberately involved not just Sheikh Sa’ud but rather a quorum of the most influential Siwan sheikhs and knowledgable local notables in decisions about how best to manage agriculture on the Khedive’s most prized and profitable piece of land in the oasis.

The local agents of the Daira Khassa proved on more than one occasion to be extremely protective of its property—sometimes inordinately so. One such case involves the aforementioned Khedivial land in one of the areas known for its archeological treasures, known as Qarat al-Ma’buda (or just Ma’buda). Even before the incident in question, however, this particular Khassa property had been causing Sheikh Sa’ud some grief. Writing to the Khedive late in 1909, Sheikh Sa’ud reported that a doctor named Mahmud Sharif had been consistently pestering him to sell off half of the Ma’buda lands. Eventually the doctor resorted to recruiting a local bigwig to his side, sending ‘Omar Musellem over to negotiate. Even though Sa’ud “knew that it was a ruse [makida],” he approved the sale, “out of fear that it might lead to a struggle.” And so on October 12, 1909 Sheikh Sa’ud signed a joint property (mushaa’) contract with Doctor Sharif, ceding him half of the Khedive’s land in Ma’buda but delineating the rights between the two of them in such a way that Sa’ud reserved control over most of the archaeological artifacts

---

71 Ibid.
72 DUL: AHII 165/615 (Memo from Sheikh Sa’ud).
that were located there.\textsuperscript{73} The agreement was apparently all for naught, however, as—a mere month later—Dr. Sharif signed his share of the \textit{Ma’buda} property back over to Sheikh Sa’ud.\textsuperscript{74}

A short time later, Sheikh Sa’ud complained to the acting \textit{Ma’mur} of Siwa, Mahmud ‘Azmi, that two Siwans had trespassed on the Khedivial property in \textit{Ma’buda} and dug up two pieces of pottery. Even though these pieces were determined to be worthless, the two Siwans were still handed over to \textit{Majlis Siwa} in order to be investigated. Ultimately the \textit{Majlis}—judging that the Siwan people on the whole were “completely ignorant in matters concerning artifacts”—opted not to punish the two perpetrators harshly, but it did issue a proclamation to the entire town, declaring that if any other Siwans similarly trespassed on the Khedivial property in \textit{Ma’buda}, they would be imprisoned.\textsuperscript{75} Representing the interests of the \textit{Daira Khassa}, then, Sheikh Sa’ud—with the support of the Siwan \textit{Ma’mur}—was able to mobilize the full force of the local judicial establishment to protect Khedivial property in the oasis.

In other cases, though, Sheikh Sa’ud would not find the \textit{Ma’mur} to be such an ally. In April 1914, Sheikh Sa’ud wrote to the Khedive warning that the arrival of the recently appointed \textit{Ma’mur} heralded trouble for the \textit{Daira Khassa}: ever since assuming his post in Siwa, he had been actively inspecting all the springs in the oasis, searching for mineral deposits and extracting samples of whatever he could find. When the \textit{Ma’mur} insisted, to Sa’ud’s chagrin, on surveying ‘Ayn Kirayet, Sa’ud told him, “This belongs to the \textit{Khassa}, and so it is not permitted.” In Sa’ud’s estimation, the \textit{Ma’mur} wanted the

\textsuperscript{73} DUL: AHII 165/614 (Contract between Sheikh Sa’ud and Dr. Mahmud Sharif, signed Oct. 12, 1909).
\textsuperscript{74} DUL: AHII 165/613. I was unable to ascertain, given the limited evidence, why exactly Sharif decided to return the land other than one mention of the fact that his period of service in Siwa was about to end. See DUL:AHII 165/618 (‘Azmi to Sadeq, Nov. 21, 1909).
\textsuperscript{75} DUL: AHII 165/618. (‘Azmi to Sadeq, Nov. 21, 1909).
land in order to build a new administrative building (markaz); he also apparently wanted land in the Khedivial property located at a site known as “The Dead” (al-mawta). In light of these suspicious activities, Sa’ud was asking the Khedive for his opinion on how to proceed, and broached the idea of selling at least some of the land to the Ma’mur at a very high price.\(^76\)

**II—The Mosque of Sidi Suleiman**

The Mosque of Sidi Suleiman—today still the largest mosque in Siwa, dedicated to perhaps the most revered historical figure in the oasis—dates back to the reign of Abbas Hilmi II. According to Ahmad Shafiq, “When the Khedive visited Siwa, he won over the hearts of the people with the order to build a great mosque,” the total area of which would comprise over 3,000 square meters.\(^77\) Due, apparently, to a “lack of funds,”\(^78\) the mosque was still largely unbuild when World War I broke out and Abbas Hilmi II was deposed, and to this day it is the Khedive’s descendent, King Fu’ad I, who is credited with reinvigorating the construction project upon his visit to Siwa in 1928 and finally completing the mosque a few years thereafter. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the scant historiographical treatment of the mosque construction is incomplete and contradictory. Gawhari claims that King Fu’ad managed, through the implementation of the mosque project, to put a definitive end to the East/West factionalism in Siwa (though of course he and other historians of the oasis also claim that this factionalism had largely disappeared circa 1900, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2).\(^79\) Fakhry, more curiously, writes that “In

---

\(^76\) DUL: AHII 165/645 (Sa’ud to Khedive, April 13, 1914).
\(^77\) Shafiq, Mudhakkirat ‘an Wahat Misr, 66.
\(^78\) Charles Dalrymple Belgrave, Siwa, the Oasis of Jupiter Ammon (London: John Lane, 1923), 139.
\(^79\) Gawhari, Jannat al-Sahra, 29.
fact, the mosque was built by the government and neither ‘Abbas nor Fu’ad contributed in building it.”

The evidence I have at my disposal concerning the mosque construction in the late-1900s paints a different picture of the mosque’s significance both for Siwans as well as for the Daira Khassa. Indeed, contrary to what Fakhry has contended, it was the Khedive—operating through the institution of the Daira Khassa—who personally funded the mosque; as such, he and his men had a huge stake in making sure that Siwans understood it as an example of the Khedive’s personal largesse and his earnest concern for the local interests and most cherished traditions of the Siwan populace (the fact that the mosque would be dedicated to Sidi Suleiman was no accident). If the Ma’mur was involved in overseeing the project, he would still play second fiddle to the Daira Khassa. And, as we will see, when the construction hit a small snag in the winter of 1909, the Khassa would prove more than willing to sabotage the Ma’mur in order to safeguard the authority and prestige of the Khedive and his men.

According to a note that the Siwan Ma’mur Hussein Fahmy wrote to Daira Khassa administrator Ahmad Sadeq, the Khedive gave the orders to commence with the construction of the Sidi Suleiman mosque in December 1907. Upon the receipt of these orders, Fahmy twice assembled all the Siwan sheikhs to discuss how the work should proceed; they ultimately decided to employ all of the inhabitants of the town (with their livestock) and organized a labor rotation presumably intended to minimize the chance of any factional strife. Thus on the first Saturday, the Easterners were charged with the task of transporting gravel to the mosque site, whereas Westerners were to commit themselves to collecting sand. On the ensuing workday, the two sides swapped: the Westerners were

---

80 Fakhry, Siwa Oasis, 114.
now in charge of the gravel, and the Easterners took over sand collection. Fahmy observed all of this work from up close (seated on a chair overlooking the construction site) and was pleased to be able to report that “the work brought together all the laborers,” who then called for the long life of the Khedive and became completely engrossed in their prayers. Later, Fahmy and his men arranged two more meetings with the Siwan sheikhs, who pledged that they themselves would come work on the mosque the following Saturday, along with all their servants.81

The funds for the mosque construction—covering all the building supplies and materials, as well as the labor costs—were provided entirely by the Daira Khassa. Sheikh Sa‘ud, along with another Khedivial agent—Muhammad Effendi Tawfiq Shawqi, a Yuzbashi in the Khedive’s entourage who apparently was tapped to administer certain building projects for the Daira Khassa—oversaw the work and frequently reported back to the Khedive and his representatives in Cairo. The Khassa files that have survived contain two itemized expense reports that Shawqi sent to the Khedive, carefully laying out how much of the Khassa’s money was doled out each day over a two-week period on supplies and labor.82 In another memo sent directly to the Khedive, Shawqi confirmed that the mosque construction was well underway, and that the laborers were hard at work; indeed, during the past week, they had added 49 square meters to the foundation.83 Shawqi also had asked Sheikh Sa‘ud to fetch a special carriage (‘araba) from the Khedive’s lands at ‘Ayn Qurayshat, since the difficulty of transporting stones had been

81 DUL: AHII 165/581 (Fahmy to Sadeq, Dec. 18, 1907).
82 DUL: AHII 165/582-3 (Expense reports of January 2, 1909 and January 22, 1909). For example, from December 19-31, 1908, the Khassa paid 11 Egyptian Pounds and 660 Miliems towards the mosque.
83 DUL: AHII 165/633 (Shawqi to the Khedive, Feb. 9, 1909).
causing frequent delays.\textsuperscript{84} The work presumably continued to go well enough for Shawqi, over a year later, to be able to inform the Khedive that—after a considerable sum of money had been spent on labor over an approximately five-month period—the mosque had now reached the mandated height of three levels of columns.\textsuperscript{85} For the most part, then—even though in hindsight we know that the mosque would never be completed during Abbas Hilmi’s reign—the Khedivial agents seemed generally satisfied with the progress that was made in the first few years of its construction. All the while, the Khassa gave Siwans not-so-subtle reminders that the mosque was personally sponsored by the Khedive; in early January 1909, for example, Shawqi gave the workers a week-long holiday in honor of the Khedive’s birthday.\textsuperscript{86}

The construction project was not always smooth-sailing, however. One incident that disrupted work on the mosque for at least a week, though seemingly quite trivial, is actually worth considering in some depth given how it pitted the Daira Khassa against the Siwan Ma’mur and ultimately garnered the attention of the Ministry of the Interior in Cairo. At the same time, this episode reveals the extent to which the Khedivial agents in Siwa saw their properties in the oasis as a means for projecting authority, as well as the lengths to which they would go to challenge anyone seeking to stand in their way.

On March 13, 1909 it was discovered that a significant quantity of cement had gone missing from a barrel located among all the Daira Khassa’s other supplies and materials for the construction. Shawqi was extremely disconcerted by this “strange incident,” which he immediately believed to be a theft, and it did not take long for him to suspect that the Ma’mur of Siwa at that time—Sayyid Effendi Muhammad—was at least

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} DUL: AHII 165/635 (Shawqi to the Khedive, Apr. 27, 1910).
\textsuperscript{86} DUL: AHII 165/584 (Shawqi to the Khedive, Jan. 10, 1909).
partly to blame. In Shawqi’s view, the theft marked the culmination of a most 
unwelcome paradigm shift in the oasis, since—“from the time that the building of the 
Siwa mosque was started until now, all the supplies, tools, and materials” could be safely 
left in place without being guarded, since none of the Siwans would “dare to take 
anything…out of fear and dread” of the punishment that would befall them. The Khassa 
had also always been able to count on previous ma’murs to enforce the sanctity of its 
property. Yet when Shawqi arrived in Siwa, Sheikh Sa‘ud had warned him that the new 
ma’mur was different—that he proved consistently unwilling to give any assistance in 
affairs concerning the Daira Khassa. Shawqi writes, in a long memo to Ahmad Sadeq: “I 
initially doubted Sheikh Sa‘ud’s words, owing to my arrogant failure to imagine it 
possible for an official not to help and serve the Khassa to the best of his abilities.”

Yet the episode of the cement theft finally clinched for Shawqi what he had 
already started to realize on his own: the Ma’mur was an obstacle to the Khassa’s 
interests and was therefore not to be trusted. What was most at stake in this case was the 
casual disregard that the Ma’mur exhibited towards a matter that Shawqi, at least, 
considered to have vital consequences; it was not every day, after all, that someone stole 
from the Khassa. Shawqi thus wanted to take swift action, in no small part to scare the 
Siwans so that “they would not dare to take anything else belonging to the Khassa, as 
was the case during the time of the previous two ma’murs.” On the second day after the 
theft, Shawqi assembled all the Siwan sheikhs and “informed them that if Our Lord [the 
Khedive]…got wind of this affair, he would be incredibly angry” and would hold them 

87 DUL: AHII 165/586 (Shawqi to Sadeq, Mar. 21, 1909).
accountable. This warning had the desired effect: the Sheikhs consented to do what they could to assist in the investigation.\textsuperscript{88}

Given how urgently he felt the matter needed to be handled, Shawqi was appalled that the \textit{Ma’mur} was so nonchalant about the whole thing. Indeed, Shawqi’s memo to Sadeq contains a litany of complaints against him: Sayyid Muhammad would not show up when called to a meeting; he refused to arrange an assembly of Sheikhs to discuss the matter and goad them into aiding the investigation; he deemed it unnecessary to conduct searches in the homes of five merchants living in Siwa, as a show of force; and he even purportedly sought to dissuade the Sheikhs from offering any assistance to the \textit{Khassa} by threatening them with a story of another so-called meddler—one Minshawi Pasha—who had gotten involved in the Khedive’s affairs and ultimately suffered for it.\textsuperscript{89} All throughout Shawqi’s investigation, he concludes, the \textit{Ma’mur} not only refused to cooperate, but he also actively sought to stifle the \textit{Khassa’s} efforts.\textsuperscript{90}

The resolution of the theft case is unclear (though the amount of cement lost does not seem to have been consequential).\textsuperscript{91} Regardless of how things played out in Siwa, however, Shawqi continued to attack the \textit{Ma’mur} even after the end of his tour of duty in the oasis, ultimately registering a formal complaint against him to his higher-ups at the Mudiriyya of Buhayra and the Interior Ministry. This in turn apparently spurred the latter institution to deny the ex-\textit{Ma’mur} the standard vacation due to all officials who finish a

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Though this Minshawi affair is mentioned cursorily in a few different documents, I have been unable to find out anything about it with any detail, save that it involved another alleged theft from the \textit{Daira Khassa}, of some livestock, and Minshawi was unable to apprehend the culprits. See also DWQ: MNW 0075-007498.
\textsuperscript{90} DUL: AHII 165/586 (Shawqi to Sadeq, Mar. 21, 1909).
\textsuperscript{91} See DWQ: MNW 0075-007493. In a report to the \textit{Mudir} of Buhayra, Sayyid Muhammad suggests that it might have been taken by a worker, or even a child.
post in Siwa,\textsuperscript{92} and to launch a formal inquiry into the matter. Sayyid Muhammad, for his part, wrote a long report to the Mudir of Buhayra defending his conduct during his stint as Ma’mur and pleading his innocence in the cement affair. Indeed, Sayyid Muhammad denied all of Shawqi’s allegations against him, claiming, to the contrary, that he had actively pursued the case, willingly authorized the Siwan sheikhs to undertake investigations, and even secretly recruited a woman to make surreptitious searches inside many different houses.\textsuperscript{93} Sayyid Muhammad was in agreement with Shawqi on only one point: he felt, as did the sheikhs, that “no one would be reckless enough to take anything from the possessions of the Daira Khassa.”\textsuperscript{94} In other words, even a government servant who refused to fall under the Khassa’s sway still understood the nature of its authority in Siwa. At the end of his report to the Mudir, Sayyid Muhammad offered a couple of possible reasons why Shawqi would have spread such vicious rumors about him: at the beginning of March, he had prevented Shawqi from intervening in some administrative projects, including one involving a land purchase; also, Shawqi had recently become entangled in a quarrel with several of the state officials (including the Qadi, the town doctor, and the mulahidh).\textsuperscript{95}

The Interior Ministry dispatched an investigatory commission to Siwa, which interviewed six witnesses. The first of these was Sheikh Sa‘ud, who parroted everything Shawqi had alleged (down to the details about the Minshawi story that Sayyid Muhammad had used as a veiled threat to the sheikhs). Sheikh Muhammad Sa‘id—one of the notables we have seen was involved in some of the Khedive’s affairs—also

\textsuperscript{92} DWQ: MNW 0075-007494.
\textsuperscript{93} DWQ: MNW 0075-007493 (Sayyid Muhammad to Mudir Buhayra, May 6, 1909).
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
corroborated Shawqi’s story. The other four witnesses, however, denied having had any interactions with Sayyid Muhammad along the lines of what Shawqi had described. Upon weighing all of the conflicting testimony, the Interior Ministry investigators—led by Muhammad Bey Badr, head of the Ministry’s police arm (zaht)—determined that the accusations leveled at Sayyid Muhammad were completely groundless, and were perhaps devised by Shawqi and the two complicit sheikhs as an attempt to “frame him [Sayyid Muhammad] and remove him from his position in Siwa.”96 Ultimately the Ministry officials decided to wipe their hands clean of the affair—“the stolen item was not important,” after all97—but not before brainstorming (as Sayyid Muhammad himself had done) several possible reasons why Shawqi, Sheikh Sa‘ud, and Sheikh Muhammad Sa‘id would have sought to sabotage the former Ma’mur in this fashion. Some of the reasons were decidedly personal: Muhammad Sa‘id’s son had apparently been charged with a crime that Sa‘id was unable to bribe his way out of; Sheikh Sa‘ud was also dealing with an accusation involving misconduct towards one of his servants. The commission men also surmised that Sheikh Sa‘ud and Muhammad Sa‘id had made a pact to become close allies with Shawqi by way of causing a rift between him and the Ma’mur (though this point possibly misunderstands the ties that the Khedivial agents would have had in the first place). Finally, they pointed out that some animosity might have arisen between Shawqi and Sayyid Effendi when the former attempted to interfere in the matter of the land rights of a merchant named ‘Abdel ‘Aziz Karam.98

The underlying truth of the case of the missing cement might be lost to us, but what does seem clear from the countervailing testimonies of Shawqi and Sayyid

---

96 DWQ: MNW 0075-007494 (doc. 2).
97 Ibid.
98 DWQ: MNW 0075-007498 (Mudir Buhayra to Interior Ministry—undated).
Muhammad—as well as the paper trail left behind by the Interior Ministry’s investigatory commission—is that local politics in Siwa could not be divorced from the personal realm—especially when it came to the affairs of the Daira Khassa, with the Khedive’s sovereign legitimacy at stake. In the next section, we will see how even a high-profile case with such broad political and legal implications as the murder of the Siwan ma’mur cannot be understood fully without taking into account the intensely local and personal nature of the Siwan political field, of which the Daira Khassa played a vital part.

**Sheikh Osman Habun and the Case of the Murdered Ma’mur**

On the evening of October 2, 1909, recently promoted Siwan Ma’mur Mitwalli Effendi Hilmi decided to move decisively against Osman Habun, having recently heard rumors that the formidable local bigwig was harboring a large cache of illicit weapons and ammunition (as well as a number of slaves) at his compound. Hoping initially that Habun might be convinced to turn himself over for questioning without needing to be coerced, Hilmi sent a messenger to summon him to the markaz. Habun, however—“fearing that the Ma’mur would betray him”—refused to go, only begrudgingly agreeing in the end to send one of his sons in his place. Not satisfied with this concession, Hilmi—despite the apparent illegality of conducting police raids after sunset—marched out to the compound, accompanied by a force of sixteen policemen and soldiers, in order to apprehend Habun by force. Little did Hilmi know, however, that

---

99 NA: FO 371/664 (Gorst to Grey, Nov. 26, 1909). See also Dumreicher, 33-4. In one letter Sheikh Sa’ud claims that the Interior Ministry actually ordered Hilmi to make the arrest, but this is not borne out by any other evidence I have seen. DUL: AHII 165/604-5 (Sheikh Sa’ud to Khedive, Oct. 2, 1909).

100 DUL: AHII 6/249-54 (Report from Muhammad Kamil Muhammad, mulahidh of Siwa, Oct. 16, 1909). I have based the bulk of my basic recounting of the details of the murder incident on this report of the mulahidh’s, since Kamil Muhammad was one of the first responders and was actively involved in spearheading the initial investigation. Other narratives of the details of the case will be mentioned if they diverge in suggestive ways.

in the meantime one of Habun’s supporters named Muhammad Ibrahim Dalas had come
to warn Habun of the impending confrontation, giving him time to prepare his arms and
assemble a small force comprised of his family and servants to defend his home turf.\textsuperscript{102}

At around 2:30 in the morning, Hilmi and his men arrived at the foot of the Habun
compound, built atop a hill; Hilmi, along with about half a dozen of the men, ascended
and entered the gate. The precise details of what happened next differ slightly depending
on who is telling the story, but the crux of the matter is as follows: Hilmi and his men
forcibly entered the compound and met first with Habun’s son, Muhammad Osman
Habun (also known as Hamadu); Hamadu claimed that his father was absent, even though
by one account Habun could be seen hiding on an upper level,\textsuperscript{103} shortly thereafter a
melee broke out, and several rounds of shots rained down upon Hilmi and his men from
different vantage points in the house. In the course of their retreat from the compound,
Hilmi along with five other men were injured; according to the testimony of the Siwan
mulahidh, one of the attackers had actually yelled out, “Shoot the Ma’mur, Hamadu!”\textsuperscript{104}
Hilmi was carried by his party back to markaz, where he died soon after; two of the other
wounded members of Hilmi’s party—a Coast Guard sergeant named Surur Musa, and a
solider named ‘Abdel ‘Aziz—also died from their injuries (whereas the three others who
had been shot eventually made full recoveries).\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. Another version of events—culled from the report of Sidi Ibrahim al-Ma’aruf, head of one of the
zawiyas in Siwa, extant in the files of the Italian Embassy in Cairo—has it that Hamadu actually first
struggled with the Ma’mur and stripped him of his revolver, which then became the murder weapon. The
accuracy of this account is dubious, however, given that al-Ma’aruf claims that Hamadu committed all
three murders, whereas the formal investigation concluded that he was guilty of only that of Mitwalli
\textsuperscript{105} DUL: AHII 165/616-7 (‘Azmi to Mudir Buhayra, Nov. 7, 1909).
Upon Mitwalli Hilmi’s death, the next-in-command—Siwan mulahidh Muhammad Kamil Muhammad—took charge of the situation. At the markaz, he met with the leading sheikhs of the Eastern faction—‘Omar Musellem, Muhammad Sa’id, and Muhammad Mu’arrif—who told him that they “were ready to fight the Westerners.” What Kamil Muhammad leaves out of his narrative, however, is the key role that Khassa agent Sheikh Sa‘ud played in directing the Easterners to this end. Indeed, according to a private report that Sheikh Sa‘ud wrote to the Khedive on the subject of the murder, he was the one who had initially “assembled all the Eastern Sheikhs and informed them about the incident,” and urged them that “it was incumbent upon us now to help the Government” in arresting the murderers. It was at that point, Sheikh Sa‘ud goes on, that “we—all the Eastern sheikhs—agreed that we would alert our families to prepare their weapons and go to Habun’s house to resist him and attack” those responsible for the crimes.\(^{106}\) This testimony, along with Kamil Muhammad’s, reveals a factional dimension to the murder case that has been overlooked in the few published accounts of the incident; the British, for their part, picked up on this theme, noting in a general memorandum about the murders that “Siwa is divided into two towns, Eastern and Western, and the Bedouins [sic] of the former all side with the authorities.”\(^{107}\)

In any case, when the Eastern sheikhs went to the markaz to inform Kamil Muhammad of their intentions, the mulahidh talked them down—out of consideration for “public security”\(^{108}\)—and urged them instead to create a blockade around the town to make it impossible for Habun to escape the oasis.

\(^{106}\) DUL: AHII 165/597-600 (Sheikh Sa‘ud to Khedive, Oct. 28, 1909).

\(^{107}\) NA: FO 371/664 (Graham to Hardinge, Oct. 13, 1909). The British frequently referred to inhabitants of Siwa mistakenly as “Bedouins.”

A short time later, Muhammad Sa‘id returned to the *markaz* to inform Kamil Muhammad that Osman Habun had taken refuge in his home ever since the night of the murder, having escaped to the other side of town disguised in women’s clothing, and that he intended to flee\(^{109}\) (possibly to Jaghbub—the Sanusi headquarters\(^{110}\)). The *mulahidh* thus immediately dispatched a soldier to proceed to Sa‘id’s home and make the arrest; Habun was accordingly apprehended and brought to the *markaz* in chains.\(^{111}\) Likewise, Hamadu was arrested at the home of a friend named Faro Muhammad Rawid, where he had been seeking refuge.\(^{112}\) Kamil Muhammad then commanded the rest of the suspects to come to the *markaz*, and he issued a proclamation to the town that underscores the factional nature of the event: “The obedient man to the East, the rebel stays in his place.”\(^{113}\) Accordingly, Kamil Muhammad claims, all of the Westerners left their section of town except for those still hiding out in Habun’s compound. Not long afterwards, the rest of the suspects were arrested (“with great ease,” according to Sheikh Sa‘ud) and locked up in the *markaz* along with Habun and Hamadu.\(^{114}\)

\(^{109}\) Ibid. See also DUL: AHII 165/597-600 (Sheikh Sa‘ud to Khedive, Oct. 28, 1909). It is unclear to me why Muhammad Sa‘id—if, according to Kamil Muhammad, he was one of the Eastern Sheikhs who came to the *markaz* to profess their commitment to the cause of bringing Habun to justice—harbored Habun at all. It might be a simple matter of timing: perhaps Habun was not there long before Sa‘id emerged to rat him out.

It is also unclear if this marks the second time (at least!) that Habun was reported to have made a narrow escape dressed in women’s clothing, or if the other noteworthy incident—reputedly during the so-called Widow’s War, mentioned in Chapter 2—has been wrongly conflated with the 1909 murder case in the Siwan historiography.

\(^{110}\) FO 371/664 (Gorst to Grey, Nov. 26, 1909).

\(^{111}\) DUL: AHII 6/249-54; DUL: AHII 165/597-600.

\(^{112}\) DUL: AHII 165/604-5 (Sheikh Sa‘ud’s testimony differs on this point. In one letter to the Khedive, he writes that Hamadu came to the *markaz* on his own).


\(^{114}\) DUL: AHII 6/249-54; 165/597-600.
The next order of business for Kamil Muhammad was to round up as many as possible of the weapons that Habun had purportedly smuggled into town (including all those used against the *Ma’mur* and his men during the botched siege operation).

According to Kamil Muhammad, “It came out during the investigation that a Sheikh named Muhammad Rajeh (who was a relative through marriage of Osman Habun) was biased in favor of Osman Habun, and had helped him conceal his smuggled weapons…I assembled the sons of Muhammad Rajeh, the relatives of Osman Habun, and the notables of Western Siwa, and I explained to them that it was necessary to seize the weapons.”

The details of the actual arms hunt are a bit murky, but it appears that the mulahidh—aided by several prominent notables such as Sheikh Sa‘ud, Muhammad Sa‘id, ‘Omar Musellem, and Muhammad Mu ‘arif (namely, those sheikhs who seemed time and again to have a hand in so many of the important affairs in the oasis)—managed in the end to organize inspections of Habun’s house as well as several others. Ultimately, as both Kamil Muhammad and Sheikh Sa‘ud testify, many weapons were recovered from Habun’s storehouses, including a number of Martini rifles.

Unlike the Blunt incident more than a decade prior, this time around—with the murder suspects all already in police custody—there was absolutely no question that Habun and his accomplices would have to be brought to justice. Yet it was not immediately obvious to the authorities how best to proceed. In a way that does in fact recall the Egyptian Government’s tentativeness in handling Blunt’s case, state officials

115 DUL: AHII 6/249-54; 165/597-600.
116 DUL: AHII 165/604-5. One point of disagreement between Sa‘ud and Kamil Muhammad is that the latter recalls having to detain Muhammad Rajeh at the *markaz so* he could not obstruct the inspection, whereas Sa‘ud lists Rajeh as among those who conducted the inspection!
back in Cairo initially balked at the notion that the trial of such a heinous crime against
the highest Egyptian authority in Siwa should be left to the local court. According to
Eldon Gorst (the British Consul-General since Cromer’s retirement), “A question then
arose as to how the murderers should be tried. The Oasis of Siwa is not under the
ordinary jurisdiction, but enjoys under an old decree a Bedouin Court of its own,
composed of sheikhs elected by the inhabitants…In regular course this court should try
the case, but some doubt was expressed as to whether it could be relied upon to award a
just and adequate sentence for so grave a crime [emphasis added].”

The mulahidh Kamil Muhammad, for his part, shared many of the same concerns: “The most important
issue is the courts (and implementation). The courts adhere to the law that pertains in
Siwa.”

To address some of these lingering doubts about the capabilities of the local Siwa
court, the Egyptian Government decided to send ex-Ma’mur Mahmud ‘Azmi Bey, now
serving as the Qaimaqam of Police in Gharbiya, as a special envoy to oversee the
prosecution of the murder case and ensure the proper implementation of justice.

Government officials felt they needed a seasoned veteran such as ‘Azmi, who possessed a
“thorough knowledge of the place, its inhabitants and their customs,” to assess the
situation objectively and—before anything else—make a recommendation as to the

---

118 NA: FO 371/664 (Gorst to Grey, Nov. 26, 1909). Once again, Gorst’s conflation of Siwans with
“Bedouins”—a consistent pattern among Egyptian as well as British officials - is striking.

119 DUL: AHII 6/249-54.

120 It is an open question who in the Government actually made the decision to appoint ‘Azmi. Evidence
from British documents indicate that the British—perhaps pulling strings through the Interior Ministry—
took credit for the appointment. NA: FO 371/664 (Graham to Hardinge, Oct. 13, 1909). Yet by ‘Azmi’s
own account, the expedition commenced on personal orders from the Khedive. In light of some of the
speculation I will raise below, it is worth considering more seriously just who had a vested interest in
‘Azmi being put in charge.
feasibility of trying the Habun case locally.\textsuperscript{121} He was also expected to spearhead the entire murder investigation.

To our good fortune, several of ‘Azmi’s original papers have survived in the Daira Khassa files for Siwa, thus allowing us to reconstruct the narrative of his expedition and investigation with a fair level of detail.\textsuperscript{122} On October 15, ‘Azmi and his entourage—about 100 police and coastguard men hired to escort ‘Azmi, provide his security, and help enforce law and order once in the oasis—received a Khedivial decree via telegraph to begin their expedition to Siwa. They were off early the next morning, after first sending detailed instructions by telegraph to the Ma’mur of Maryut that it was of utmost importance to assist in the implementation of the Khedivial orders. According to ‘Azmi, his men were more than eager to be on their way—and carried out their duties with “complete orderliness and care”—given the “fire of grief and sadness in their hearts” that arose “due to the murder of this officer [the Ma’mur] and his men.”\textsuperscript{123}

The ‘Azmi expedition proceeded first by train (presumably via the Khedive’s Maryut Railway—see Chapter 6), then by a series of coaches “belonging to the Khedivial Khassa.” In Garawla, they camped in tents which were given to ‘Azmi and his men (along with other gifts) by the Khedive. Soon they continued via camel caravan, stopping for a day in the Oasis of Gara (Umm al-Saghir). ‘Azmi found the people there to be “in a state of dread from what had happened in Siwa,” manifesting deep regret for the incidence of the crime. ‘Azmi in turn summoned the sheikhs of the oasis in order to give

\textsuperscript{121} FO 371/664 (Graham to Hardinge,\textsuperscript{122} In some instances, the Daira Khassa simply managed to obtain copies of ‘Azmi’s official reports to the state bureaucracy. In other cases, however, ‘Azmi was writing directly to agents of the Khassa. In light of some of the allegations I will explore below, it is worth mulling over ‘Azmi’s direct ties to the Khedive and to the K\textsuperscript{123} DUL: AHII 165/627-30 (‘Azmi to Mudir Buhayra, Oct. 28, 1909).
them assurances of good will on the part of the Khedive’s government. The expedition team then stayed awhile longer, visiting the sheikhs in their homes; ‘Azmi concludes his recollection of the visit by noting how the residents and notables of Gara all paid tribute to the Government and extolled the Khedive.\footnote{Ibid.}

On the morning of October 27, the sheikhs and members of Majlis Siwa met ‘Azmi at ‘Ayn al-Baqr, a spring located about two hours from Siwa proper, where they had camped the night before. They marched all together to the Siwa markaz, during which time ‘Azmi chastised his Siwan companions and impressed upon them how angry the Khedivial government was about the murders. When ‘Azmi arrived at the markaz, he inspected the thirty-one prisoners who were being held there and decided to station more armed guards at the markaz in order to strengthen the surveillance team already present. The next morning ‘Azmi went, along with all the camel corps officials on the expedition, to the tomb of the murdered Ma’mur and paid his respects by firing a military salute of thirty rounds. Sheikh Sa’ud, for his part, had more to say about the salute: according to him, ‘Azmi was first required to “warn all the Siwans that the rifles would be fired on behalf of the deceased,” so that they would neither be afraid of the sound of gunfire nor agitated by it, “since the people of this town have never in their lives seen anything like these rifles.” In Sa‘ud’s view, the military salute thus turned into another means through which “fear of the Government has entered into the hearts of the people,” so that they now “recognized the value of the Government and particularly His Excellency the Khedive.”\footnote{DUL: AHII 165/597-600 (Sa’ud to Khedive, Oct. 28, 1909).} At any rate, the salute went off without any complications, and ‘Azmi’s investigation would begin on schedule.
Meanwhile, the British, French, and Italian authorities had watched the procession of the ‘Azmi expedition with bated breath. The British, for their part, wanted from the first moment to stay at an arm’s length from the case given their continued fears about antagonizing the Sanusiyya. Consul-General Gorst voiced the opinion that it would be imprudent to “interfere with the decision…especially since the remoteness of the scene of the murder and the somewhat shadowy and purely informal nature of the control exercised by the small Egyptian police force posted there render it very necessary to afford adequate protection to the representatives of Government.”126 Ronald Graham, who was closer to the scene, put things more bluntly: “The more we, I mean the British, keep out of the matter, the better…It must be remembered that the Siwa Bedouins are nearly all Senussites and a very wild lot over whom the Government have no real hold at all. It is also rumored, though not confirmed, that Haboun had some official connection with the Senussi as an agent.”127

The Egyptian press fanned the flames of this anti-Sanusi paranoia, particularly with respect to the ‘Azmi expedition. According to a series of reports filed by Italian diplomats at the embassy in Cairo, several local newspapers and journals argued that the Sanusis of Siwa would be particularly agitated by the arrival of an Egyptian government force and would attempt to counter it with violent resistance.128 This alleged Sanusi threat evidently struck a chord with a French diplomat named Ribot, who expressed to Gorst his grave suspicion that “it would be dangerous and inopportune to carry out hostile acts towards the Sanusiyya in Siwa, precisely while the French have a serious discord with

126 NA: FO 371/664 (Gorst to Grey, Nov. 26, 1909).
127 NA: FO 371/664 (Graham to Hardinge, Oct. 13, 1909). It is, of course, very surprising that this official could be so uncertain about Habun’s Sanusi affiliation given how other British officials (Cromer included) seemed quite aware of this fact for over a decade, as evidenced by the correspondence in the Blunt case.
that Sect over their advance in Wadai.” After all, Ribot exhorted Gorst, “The Sanusiyya, threatened in the North by the British, [and] to the South by the French, could be driven to extreme measures.” Ultimately, however, the ‘Azmi expedition encountered no such opposition from the Siwan Sanusi element; in turn, Gorst could report back to Ribot and his Italian counterparts that the newspaper reports had no basis in fact.129

‘Azmi and his men began their official investigation into the murder case on October 30, starting with the interrogation of 21 witnesses who were not suspected of any wrongdoing. This took several days. Then, for five days beginning on November 2, ‘Azmi interrogated each of the 31 men suspected of some involvement in the murders. Upon the conclusion of this thorough investigation, it was determined that Osman Habun was “the leader of the gang,” even though he did not actually inflict any of the fatal wounds130 (and, in fact, by some accounts he even tried to stop his sons from shooting131). ‘Azmi also concluded that Habun’s son Hamadu was the one who actually murdered Mitwalli Hilmi, whereas a Siwan named Ahmad Rumi was charged with murdering the Coastguard sergeant, and a notorious troublemaker named Mansur Hassuna was accused with the murder of the soldier ‘Abdel ‘Aziz. Hassuna is presumably a close descendant of the Western Siwan notable Hassuna Mansur, who had caused so much trouble back in the 1890s; ‘Azmi pulled no punches when describing him as “one of those brigands who inherited nastiness from his parents and suckled the blood of corruption, and was nourished with bloodshed.”132 ‘Azmi—who, in response to one of his charges from the authorities in Cairo, had determined that the case should in fact be

129 MAE: AIE 117 (Martino to Tittoni, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nov. 17, 1909).
131 Dumreicher, Trackers and Smugglers, 34.
heard locally in accordance with customary Siwan judicial procedure—then scheduled the trial for the morning of November 9. He also promised to make special arrangements to send the court’s decision to the Khedive via a “special messenger” so that any special instructions or rulings could be returned to Siwa in a relatively short amount of time.  

Upon the conclusion of the investigation, ‘Azmi reported to his supervisors that his expedition had been making a huge impact on public security in the oasis: “The security in the town…is spreading its wings. The people of the town are safe and reassured…The presence of God has taken root in the town and its environs…everyone is praying for the justice that has pervaded the town under the shadow of His Excellency the Khedive.” Kamil Muhammad, the mulahidh, more or less confirmed this claim in his own report to the Interior Ministry: “The conditions of the town…are much better than before, especially due to the increased presence of many forces on the part of the Government.” At the same time, though, Kamil Muhammad was much less sanguine about the longer-term prospects for peace in Siwa: “Even though the situation is better now, I do not guarantee it.” After all, he goes on, this latest crime in Siwa was due to the same consistent pattern of “carelessness” (tasâhul) that had marked the oasis’s previous ma’murs; and one only needed to look at what happened to Mustafa Maher to realize this. The only way to change things, in his view, was to significantly ramp up the scale of force used to rule the oasis. Regardless of Kamil Muhammad’s reservations, however, the ‘Azmi expedition did seem to make an impact on the attitude of Siwa’s elite, at least. Indeed, on the final day of ‘Azmi’s investigation, he received a petition from the

133 Ibid.
135 DUL: AHII 6/249-54.
“sheikhs, merchants, and notables of Siwa” asking the Khedive for mercy in his response
to the recent murders.\textsuperscript{136}

The Siwan court, presided over by ‘Azmi, did its job efficiently, handing out a
variety of rulings to the 31 men accused: Habun, Hamadu, and the two other murder
suspects were sentenced to death; eleven suspects were acquitted, including three of
Osman Habun’s other sons (Basho, ‘Amr, and Idris). The rest of the tried suspects were
given prison sentences of varying lengths: eleven were given ten years; four were given
three years; and one was sentenced to one year.\textsuperscript{137}

The swift implementation of local justice exhibited in the Habun murder trial
represents a clear counterpoint to the aforementioned Blunt affair, during which a
relatively tentative, laissez-faire Egyptian Government had chosen not to investigate or
prosecute Blunt’s attackers primarily out of fear of antagonizing the Sanusi brethren.
Much had clearly changed in twelve years: the mere fact that the most powerful Sanusi
sheikh in Siwa was now being condemned to death is a surefire sign of a government
more confident in its abilities to disturb the traditional power structure in the oasis and
still preserve law and order. The Government’s surer footing in the oasis seems to be
borne out by the overwhelmingly positive reception that the ‘Azmi expedition was
 accorded upon its arrival in Siwa.

Moreover, if we are to believe ‘Azmi’s remarkable testimony from a report he
sent to the \textit{Mudir} of Buhayra a few weeks after the murder trial, the recent events had
finally provided the necessary catalyst for Siwan notables to address the age-old

\textsuperscript{136} DUL: AHII 165/621 (‘Azmi to Sadeq, Nov. 7, 1909). It is perhaps noteworthy that ‘Azmi was in direct
touch with this important administrator of the Khedivial \textit{Daira Khassa}.

\textsuperscript{137} DUL: AHII 165/625-6 (We can see a full list of the 31 suspects and their respective sentences included
with a report that ‘Azmi sent to Ahmad Sadeq). See also NA: FO 371/664 (Gorst to Grey).
factionalism in the oasis once and for all. ‘Azmi begins his report with a summary of the intensity of the infighting: “Each faction vies with the other in every activity…to the point that the Ma’mur—if he performed the Friday prayer in the mosque of the Easterners, say, then the Westerners would expect him to perform the following Friday prayer in their mosque.” Given how dire the situation seemed, ‘Azmi continues, he “decided that the most suitable thing is for the town to become one—no East and no West—in accordance with the wishes of Our Lord the Khedive.” What is truly amazing about ‘Azmi’s report is the fact that the Siwan sheikhs purportedly responded so positively to ‘Azmi’s decision to take action on the issue. ‘Azmi first assembled groups of representatives from each side in order to lecture them on the pernicious consequences of disunity and the great benefits of mutual friendship and unity. The sheikhs, in turn, presented ‘Azmi with a petition—to be presented to the authorities in Cairo—to “make the two towns one town, without distinction—no East, and no West.” Then, according to ‘Azmi, the Council of Sheikhs was convened, and they “decided to make Siwa one town” and to reduce the number of sheikhs (presumably on the Majlis) from eleven to six. The Council also agreed to reduce the number of town guardsmen. ‘Azmi naturally deemed this “a great step in the reform of the Public Security situation in this oasis” and consequently asked the authorities to move swiftly in ratifying the Council’s decisions.¹³⁸ This momentous series of events coming on the heels of the murder trial was obviously a huge triumph of law and order, and arguably the key transformative moment in a far-off locale that had proven to be consistently recalcitrant at every step.

Yet if we look deeper into the case—drawing together an array of different sources from the Daira Khassa files as well as some particularly striking Italian

documents—a different interpretation of these seminal events begins to emerge. Once again, some of the new evidence is somewhat contradictory, and it is impossible to know for certain whose version of reality to trust. Regardless of the inherent ambiguities, however, what does seem certain is that the Siwa murders and the ensuing trial of Osman Habun cannot be understood apart from the intricacies of the local Siwan political milieu, in which politics always remained decidedly personal. At the same time, by going behind the scenes in this manner, the underlying (if subtle) role of the Khedive and the Daira Khassa is thrown into sharper focus. And ultimately, as I will attempt to demonstrate, we are left questioning whether ‘Azmi—the ostensible hero of the story, the government man who successfully restored Egyptian state authority in Siwa in the wake of the crimes—was actually in cahoots with the Khedive.

In order to conduct our postmortem of the great Siwan murder case of 1909, we must go back to the beginning and understand what had been going on with Osman Habun. We have already established that, for quite some time, Habun wielded an inordinate amount of influence in Siwa—so much so that past ma’murs had found themselves largely at his mercy. He owed his power to a number of different sources, though foremost among these was his prestige as the main Sanusi agent in the oasis, and the great wealth he had amassed as a merchant and smuggler. Additionally, according to one slightly mysterious document from the Daira Khassa files, Habun also had for over seven years controlled all of Siwa’s waqf properties, which he guarded closely.

---

139 See, for example, the testimony of Arthur Silva White, presented above in Chapter 2.
140 Dumreicher called him “the only prosperous inhabitant” of Siwa. Dumreicher, Trackers & Smugglers, 31.
141 DUL: AHII 165/572 (Undated letter from al-Madani ibn Mustafa). In the letter, the author seems to be appealing to the Khedive to provide material assistance for the people of Jaghbub.
Habun also evidently had firm ties to the *Daira Khassa*. He was related to Sheikh Sa‘ud through marriage, and was understood by the Italian authorities, at least, to be one of the Khedive’s primary *Daira Khassa* agents in Siwa. In fact, according to what Sidi Ibrahim el-Ma‘aruf—the head of one of Siwa’s * zawiyas*—wrote to Egyptian Prince Muhammad ‘Ali in a letter retained by the Italian authorities, Habun was the *Khassa* man on the ground pulling strings and buying up properties for Sheikh Sa‘ud and the Khedive by “tricking the old owners” (behavior which naturally did not endear him to many Siwans); consequently, Habun was able to remain so indifferent to authority and become such a “little despot” in the eyes of Siwa’s *ma’murs* because he could always bank on the support of the Khedive.

Yet in the year or two leading up to the murders, the tide began to turn against Habun. For one, according to Coastguard officer Andre von Dumreicher, the Siwan “police officer” (by which he presumably meant the *mulahidh*—which would have been Mitwalli Hilmi at that time) started to step in personally to settle disputes among many Siwan sheikhs, thus sapping some of Habun’s authority over them; the officer also apparently “admitted some merchants from Alexandria who traded with the Siwi and reduced Habun’s business.” This development arguably prompted Habun to ratchet up his smuggling activities; he dealt particularly with several Bedouin tribes (most likely Sanusi followers) residing in the Ottoman province of Benghazi, and soon became increasingly involved in weapons dealing—the stated pretext, of course, for Mitwalli

---

It should be added that another document (an undated memo from the Siwa *qadi*) claims that the “Khedive oversees all of the *waqfs*” and had even taken possession of the Sanusi and Madani public works. See DUL: AHII 165/590.

142 DUL: AHII 165/585 (Karam to the Khedive).
143 MAE: AIE 117 (Memo from Cairo Embassy to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nov. 12, 1909).
144 Ibid.
Hilmi’s siege on his compound.\textsuperscript{147} Finally, when Mitwalli Hilmi assumed the position of \textit{ma’mur}, apparently with the backing of the Interior Ministry, he dismissed Habun as well as one of his sons from the Siwan Council of Sheikhs—an action that crystallized the animosity between the two.\textsuperscript{148}

It is thus clear that Habun’s authority was already on the wane at the time of the fateful siege. Yet the plot thickens when we take into account new evidence from ‘Azmi, which allows us to peek into the world of the back-table dealings that key Siwan sheikhs had allegedly engaged in out of solidarity against Habun. On December 8, 1909, ‘Azmi reported to the \textit{Mudir} of Buhayra that he had been receiving a steady stream of complaints about Eastern sheikh ‘Omar Musellem. For one, Musellem was accused of corruption in handling the distribution of water from a spring called ‘Ayn Hamam, a task to which he had been appointed previously by the \textit{Ma’mur}; he had even supposedly allowed Habun to burn the old register (\textit{defter}) kept for that particular spring, so that “any complaints against him” on the subject could not be corroborated.\textsuperscript{149} ‘Azmi went on to narrate some of Musellem’s recent alleged interactions with other notables: first, he had joined forces with Muhammad Sa‘id and Muhammad Mu‘arrif in assembling all of the sheikhs who had recently returned from some unspecified raid undertaken with the \textit{Ma’mur},\textsuperscript{150} making each of them “swear an oath that they would be one hand, and that none of them would go to the \textit{Ma’mur} on his own even if he summoned them.”

Additionally, Musellem, Sa‘id, and Mu‘arrif—the same three sheikhs who, we should

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{148} NA: FO 371/664 (Graham to Hardinge, Oct. 13, 1909). See, also, MAE: AIE 117 (Memo from Cairo Embassy to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nov. 12, 1909).
\textsuperscript{149} DUL: AHII 165/611 (‘Azmi to \textit{Mudir} Buhayra, Dec. 8, 1909).
\textsuperscript{150} Unfortunately no details are given that might shed light on what this aborted raid outside Siwa was aiming to accomplish. One clue might come from a British document that mentions the “recent Hassuna raid on the Awlad ‘Ali.” See NA: FO 371/664 (Graham to Hardinge, Oct. 13, 1909).
\end{flushleft}
remember, had come to the *mulahidh* immediately after the murders determined to take up arms against the Westerners, and then later helped him round up Habun’s weapons—“joined together to frame (*tahâlafa ‘ala al-iqâ’*) Osman Habun,” agreeing unanimously to testify against him by telling the *Ma’mur* that it had been Habun’s fault that all the sheikhs decided to return prematurely from the raid, thereby abandoning the *Ma’mur* and compelling him to forgo the mission. The three sheikhs also decided amongst themselves to give the *Ma’mur* another “false report,” the gist of which was that “Osman Habun was determined to flee the town,” and that consequently, he must be apprehended before daybreak (the apparent reason, then, why Mitwalli Hilmi decided to undertake an unlawful nighttime raid). After giving the *Ma’mur* this false report, ‘Azmi continues, the three sheikhs then sent a messenger to Habun informing him that the *Ma’mur* was coming to attack him, thereby all but ensuring that a violent confrontation would ensue.¹⁵¹

‘Azmi claimed to have investigated these accusations, and the case against the three sheikhs was presented in front of the local Siwan court (which, incidentally, ‘Azmi anachronistically called “*majlis ahkam Siwa,*” thus harking back to the days of Egypt’s mid-nineteenth-century court system).¹⁵² The three were each found guilty of the charges, although to varying degrees; only Mu‘arrif was indicted for the apparent set-up of Habun, even though the court found all three of them to be complicit in the matter of uniting as “one hand” against the *ma’mur*. As punishment, each sheikh was fined, and ‘Omar Musellem and Muhammad Mu‘arrif were dismissed from *Majlis Siwa*. According to ‘Azmi, these rulings provoked feelings of great “joy in the town…for these three were

---

¹⁵² Ibid.
the most powerful troublemakers in it.” The people had despaired at how “they were not inside the sphere of law, but rather that they were the law (especially ‘Omar Musellem and Muhammad Mu’arrif)...We consider that dismissal [to be] among the most important factors strengthening security in Siwa.”

But can we take ‘Azmi at his word? Another remarkable document—a long personal letter to the Khedive from a merchant named ‘Abdel ‘Aziz Ghani Karam, who had long resided in Siwa—presents a different interpretation of ‘Azmi’s treatment of these notable Siwan sheikhs, and thus calls ‘Azmi’s entire testimony into question. First, Karam claims that ‘Azmi accepted a bribe (“rashwa”) from Osman Habun’s wife to acquit three of her sons from the murder charges, and that this bribe was actually conducted through “the mediation of her relative, Sheikh Sa‘ud Tawia, as well as Sheikh ‘Abdel Hamid.” We have already seen from the official list of the sentences given to the 31 murder suspects that—whereas Osman Habun and his one son Hamadu were beyond saving—Habun’s sons Basho, ‘Amr, and Idris had in fact been exonerated by the ‘Azmi-led court; this charge of bribery is certainly plausible.

But Karam has even more to say about ‘Azmi’s conduct. He goes on to claim to the Khedive that, after his successful Siwan campaign, ‘Azmi decided to bring several Siwan sheikhs to Cairo with him “in order to provide testimony in front of the authorities” of his good conduct and virtuous deeds during his stint in the oasis. He ended up choosing five sheikhs to accompany him (unsurprisingly, these are some of the usual suspects in the local political scene who we have seen also played regular roles in the affairs of the Daira Khassa): Sheikh Sa‘ud (who Karam reminds the Khedive is a

153 Ibid.
154 DUL: AHII 165/585 (Karam to the Khedive).
155 DUL: AHII 165/625-6.
relative of Habun); Sheikh Abdel Hamid (the father of Habun’s wife); Sheikh Muhammad Rajeh (Habun’s cousin); Sheikh Muhammad Sa’id; and Sheikh ‘Omar Musellem. He expected all five to testify on his behalf, even though, according to Karam, “testimony to the virtue of His Excellency would be a lie.”

Sheikh Sa’ud, ‘Abdel Hamid, and Muhammad Rajeh were the “three primary witnesses,” who Karam said were with ‘Azmi Bey “for the long haul” (fi’l-iqama wa fi’l-dhahab), since “they are the ones who presented ‘Azmi with the big bribe.” Consequently, when called forward they gave ‘Azmi the backing he wanted from them.

Karam then seeks to explain why each of these three was fundamentally indebted to ‘Azmi—why, in essence, they were completely in his pocket: “How could they not testify for the man who had acquitted their children, first of all, and acquitted Sheikh Muhammad Rajeh, second of all? It was he [Rajeh] who had held onto the weapons of Osman Habun and concealed them in his home, after pretending not to have anything to do with it.” Sheikh ‘Abdel Hamid was similarly beholden to ‘Azmi for the acquittal of his daughter, whereas Sheikh Sa’ud—aside from being Habun’s son-in-law—had also been “acquitted from a big charge” connected to the murder case.

Sheikhs Muhammad Sa’id and ‘Omar Musellem, however, demonstrated a “lack of bias” towards ‘Azmi and apparently made it clear that they were “not beholden to him”; this in turn caused ‘Azmi to fear that they would say something incriminating about him during their testimony. Consequently, ‘Azmi “brought extreme measures to bear” on the two sheikhs: he imprisoned them for three days; he then charged them with crimes that he could not prove they committed; and finally he fined them and dismissed

---

156 DUL: AHII 165/585.
157 Ibid. Unfortunately I have not been able to find any more details about this.
them from the Council of Sheikhs.\textsuperscript{158} If Karam is to believed here, then we need to reevaluate the interpretation of the seminal Siwan events of 1909 that emerges from ‘Azmi’s files—namely, that ‘Azmi was a staunch government man representing the Interior Ministry, a Siwan outsider who led a successful campaign to restore justice and state authority in a notoriously recalcitrant provincial town. On the contrary, ‘Azmi in the wake of the murders played the game of local Siwan politics, and apparently played it extremely well—striking deals with key sheikhs, accepting a bribe from Habun’s people to secure their personal loyalty, and even evidently exploiting the age-old factional discord to bolster his own power and be able to brandish his achievements back in Cairo.

The final piece of the puzzle is the role that the Khedive played in the aftermath of the murders. According to the British authorities in Cairo, “The Khedive, whose Maryut Railway and other interests in the Western Desert make him closely attentive to all that happens there, is taking much interest in the present case and has himself superintended the police measures adopted.”\textsuperscript{159} Additionally, once the Siwa court issued its verdict, it was “arranged that the sentences in this special case” were not to be implemented “without the approval of the Khedive” as well as the Council of Ministers;\textsuperscript{160} this is presumably why, as we saw above, ‘Azmi had been required to designate a special courier to bring the verdict directly to Cairo. The Khedive did in fact take advantage of this special jurisdiction afforded to him in reviewing the Siwan murder verdicts, ultimately commuting three of the four death sentences to prison terms (only

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} NA: FO 371/664 (Graham to Hardinge, Oct. 13, 1909).
\textsuperscript{160} NA: FO 371/664 (Gorst to Grey, Nov. 26, 1909).
Habun would hang, in the end\textsuperscript{161}), pardoning three other suspects completely, and reducing the jail time of all the other accused parties.\textsuperscript{162} Between the actions of the Khedive and ‘Azmi, then, the Habun family came off as well as it could have given the circumstances: three of Osman’s sons were acquitted, and Hamadu—the proven murderer of the \textit{Ma’mur} Mitwalli Hilmi—ended up avoiding execution.\textsuperscript{163}

But can we go even deeper and say more about the involvement of the Khedive and the \textit{Daira Khassa} in the Siwan murder case? One helpful document to this end is a frantic letter that Sheikh Sa’ud sent to the Khedive shortly after the arrival of the ‘Azmi expedition, in response to a communication from Ahmad Sadeq (administrator of the \textit{Daira Khassa}) that had greatly ruffled him. Sheikh Sa’ud explains: “I received a letter…clarifying that the Khedive is very angry with me with respect to the incident that occurred in town, of Osman Habun in the murder of the deceased \textit{Ma’mur}.” Sheikh Sa’ud indeed seemed so deeply disturbed by the prospect of a rift between him and the Khedive on account of his behavior during the tumultuous events that, at one point, he even exclaimed, “I would have to throw myself into the sea…if His Excellency the Khedive were angry with me.”\textsuperscript{164}

It is clear, then, that Sa’ud was terrified of the Khedive’s wrath; what is not so clear, however, is exactly why the Khedive was so angry with him in the first place.

\textsuperscript{161} Coastguard officer Andre von Dumreicher tells the story of Habun’s execution. Apparently Habun was told that he was not actually going to be hanged, and that “it would only be a sort of little ceremony or joke they had to go through, to prove that the Government, when it wished, was strong enough to carry out the sentence in the midst of his relations.” And so Habun was duped into ascending to the gallows to say his prayers, when the hangman pushed him down to his death. Dumreicher claims that, “on my expressing my disgust at thus cheating a condemned man, Radwan [a Coastguard sergeant] assured me that the commission were convinced that this was the only possible way to hang Habun, the man being such a terrible coward.” Dumreicher, \textit{Trackers \& Smugglers}, 34-5. If this odd account is true, then the Habun era in Siwa came to a close with a remarkable act of deceit.

\textsuperscript{162} NA: FO 371/664 (Gorst to Grey, Dec. 16, 1909).

\textsuperscript{163} Hamadu and the other two murder suspects were officially pardoned by King Fu’ad in 1928, on the occasion of his visit to Siwa. See Dumreicher, \textit{Trackers \& Smugglers}, 35.

\textsuperscript{164} DUL: AHII 165/597-600 (Sheikh Sa’ud to the Khedive, Oct. 28, 1909).
Sa‘ud’s letter provides us with at least a clue here, for what is particularly striking about it is not just Sa‘ud’s contrition and his desperate plea for the Khedive’s pardon, but rather his urgent attempt to explain how he had in fact tried to prevent the siege from taking place at all. He begins by explaining his whereabouts during the night in question when he first heard noise coming from “the direction of Osman Habun’s house,” which prompted him to go in order to “inquire as to what was really happening.” Sa‘ud continues: “And when I approached the house, I found some police officers in front of me, and they told me to go back, because the Ma‘mur had forbidden any of the people [of Siwa] from being there.” Sa‘ud persisted, however, making it clear who he was and demanding to be let through so he could talk directly to the Ma‘mur; but he was held back a second time, at which point he claims it was futile to resist. 165 After then proceeding to document how he had taken a leading role in galvanizing Siwa’s sheikhs to assist in bringing the criminals to justice, Sa‘ud concludes by promising that, “God willing, what goes on after today in all matters will be pleasing” to the Khedive, and that he is “now always in the markaz ready for requests from the Bey [Kamil Muhammad], and…under the command of the Khedive.” 166

Sheikh Sa‘ud’s dogged effort to prove to the Khedive how he had first sought to prevent the Ma‘mur from carrying out his siege, and then subsequently intervened at various stages in the incident’s aftermath, brings us, full circle, to the nature of the Khedive’s interests and sense of authority in Siwa. Was the Khedive so angry because—as we saw earlier, in the case of a petition against the ma‘mur at the time that Siwan notables sent to Cairo—this was an event that was bound to draw the Interior Ministry

165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
further into Siwan affairs? If we can believe what Prince Muhammad ‘Ali confided to one Italian diplomat, this interpretation certainly holds some water: “The inquest for the murder of the Ma’mur is merely a pretext for concealing [the] political motives of the Egyptian Government, and perhaps for the territorial aggrandizement in those regions.”

It is thus worth considering that the Khedive was holding Sa’ud personally responsible for allowing personal rivalries and local politics to get so out of hand in the oasis that, in light of the Interior Ministry’s newfound interventionism, his personal authority there was now in jeopardy. At the same time, it is an open question what the Prince meant by “territorial aggrandizement” in a locale that was already technically part of Egypt—did he mean aggrandizement by the official state bureaucracy at the expense of Khedivial personal authority?

A final point that for now can only be the subject of speculation is the nature of the relationship between the Khedive and Mahmud ‘Azmi. We have seen some evidence that ‘Azmi took orders and received gifts directly from the Khedive during the expedition to Siwa. We also know from the paper trail ‘Azmi left behind that he was writing regularly to administrators of the Daira Khassa, not just to state officials in Damanhur (the provincial capital of Buhayra) or in Cairo. I have also pointed out that both ‘Azmi and the Khedive, in the wake of the murder investigation, seemed to have a vested interest in lightening the burden that befell the Habun family (which had clear ties to the Daira Khassa), and suggested that ‘Azmi went out of his way to punish two of the Siwan sheikhs who had allegedly set Habun up, and who had refused to play by ‘Azmi’s rules after the supposed bribe he took from Habun’s wife. Was it the Khedive who had pushed

---

167 MAE: AIE 117 (Memo from Cairo Embassy to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nov. 12, 1909).
for ‘Azmi’s appointment to head the Siwa campaign? Was ‘Azmi actually working for the *Daira Khassa*?

**‘Too Big to Sell’: The Politics of the Khedivial Railroad**

On July 4, 1899, W.E. Garstin—the Minister of Public Works in Egypt—approved the *Daira Khassa*’s request to construct a narrow-gauge railway that would run for approximately sixteen kilometers along the Mediterranean coastline from Mex (on the western outskirts of Alexandria) to Maryut. The Ministry’s letter of authorization—which noted that the main function of the railroad would be to “serve the *Daira Khassa*’s properties” in the region, and stipulated that all expenses for its construction would be borne by the *Daira Khassa*—marked the official inauguration of what would become known as the Maryut Railway (or the Khedivial Railway).  

Several years later, the *Daira Khassa* appealed once again to the Egyptian Government, this time requesting an extension of the Maryut line all the way out to Sollum, via Marsa Matruh, and the upgrade of the railway’s gauge from narrow to standard. After a land surveying expedition undertaken jointly by the chief engineer of the Maryut Railway (a German named Kayser) and the Director of the Coast Guard Administration, Hunter Pasha, the *Daira Khassa* initially requested an additional 119 Feddans of land for the new portion of track. The Ministry of Public Works accepted the proposal for the extension, though with the proviso that the *Daira Khassa* must first secure the approval of the Ministry of Finances (which dealt with any issues of “crossing

---

168 NA: FO 371/1636 (Garstin to *Daira Khassa*, July 4, 1899).
169 NA: FO 371/1636 (Translation of Arabic letter from the *Daira Khassa* to the Ministry of Finances, Mar. 14, 1903).
of state land”) as well as the Ministry of War.\textsuperscript{170} This stipulation was due to some unique aspects of the proposed extension—“the particular nature of the difficult-to-reach places, the great distance of the…line, as well as its…proximity to the northwest frontiers of Egypt”—each of which rendered the project “of special public interest.”\textsuperscript{171} All of the requisite authorizations were apparently secured by the end of November 1903.\textsuperscript{172}

Although much more research into the formative years of the Maryut Railway remains to be done,\textsuperscript{173} by every indication the Daira Khassa committed a great deal of energy and resources to the railroad project for at least a decade after its inception. The Khedive hired a team of German engineers to spearhead the construction and consulted regularly with them. The Daira Khassa actually bought many of the necessary building tools from the Egyptian State Railways authority, and—at least initially—employed prisoners on loan from the Interior Ministry as labor.\textsuperscript{174} In 1906, arrangements were made with Egyptian State Railways to exchange traffic between the Maryut line and the burgeoning national network.\textsuperscript{175}

The Khedivial Railway proceeded from its flagship station at Wardian, through Mex, out to Lake Maryut (which formed the “frontier of the Western Desert,” according to J.C. Ewald Falls—a longtime resident in the region).\textsuperscript{176} The Khassa actually constructed a narrow dam in order for the railway to traverse the lake. From there, the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{170} NA: FO 371/1636 (Letter from H. Fakhry, Agent of the Ministry of Public Works, to the Daira Khassa, Nov. 3, 1903).
  \item \textsuperscript{171} NA: FO 371/1636 (Letter from Ministry of Public Works to the Daira Khassa, Oct. 21, 1903).
  \item \textsuperscript{172} NA: FO 371/1636 (Letter from the Ministry of Finances to the Daira Khassa, Nov. 17, 1903).
  \item \textsuperscript{173} Indeed, in this short section I am only scratching the surface of this fascinating topic. The Abbas Hilmi collection at the Durham University Library actually contains five whole files (comprising thousands of documents) on the Maryut railway from 1899-1913, which I have not yet tapped. It is my hope that these documents will form the substance of a separate article I plan to write on the development of and vision behind the Maryut Railway.
  \item \textsuperscript{174} Shafiq, Mudhakkirati, 325. See, also, NA: FO 371/1636 (Kitchener to Grey, Mar. 16, 1913).
  \item \textsuperscript{175} NA: FO 371/1636 (“Working Agreement between Egyptian State Railways and Maryut Railway for exchange of traffic to and from Maryut line,” signed by Macauley and Ali Siddiq, Nov. 12, 1906).
  \item \textsuperscript{176} Ewald Falls, Three Years, 205-6.
\end{itemize}
line proceeded steadily west—maintaining a distance of about 6-9 miles from the coast—and passed through a number of Bedouin villages and old caravan stations (such as Bir Hamam), through to Amriah—the headquarters of markaz Maryut.\textsuperscript{177} By the time construction on the line was halted, around 1912 (for reasons we will see below), the Daira Khassa had succeeded in laying down approximately 230 kilometers of track, reaching as far as Garawla (a small coastal town lying just east of Marsa Matruh).

Throughout the railway’s construction, the British seemed to have given the Khedive—whose Daira Khassa covered all building expenses on its own\textsuperscript{178}—a free hand in administering it. Lord Kitchener—who succeeded Gorst and Cromer as Consul-General of Egypt—claimed that “the Khedive was not interfered with,” even if his predecessors had been well aware of the project.\textsuperscript{179} After all, according to Kitchener, the British had taken the view all along that the Maryut Railway was merely “a toy with which he [the Khedive] would amuse himself, and that he had no serious intention of making a proper Railway.”\textsuperscript{180}

This laissez faire attitude of the British towards the Khedivial Railway ultimately came back to haunt them: when, in the early months of 1912, the Maryut project escalated into a diplomatic fiasco, the British were caught completely unawares. Things came to a head in January 1912, when Lord Kitchener first got wind that one of the Khedive’s lawyers named Martino Bey was in Rome, purportedly to arrange for the sale of the Maryut Railway to an Italian syndicate. Kitchener urged James Rennell Rodd, the British Ambassador to Italy, to follow up on the matter, but Rennell Rodd was unable to

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 204-14.  
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 204-5.  
\textsuperscript{179} NA: FO 371/1636 (Kitchener to Grey, Mar. 16, 1913).  
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
acquire any information at all about an alleged railway deal from either the Secretary-General of the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry, or an English contact at the Bank of Rome.\textsuperscript{181} The matter was apparently tabled.

Two months later, however, Kitchener received firm evidence that the Khedive had in fact granted an option for the sale of the Maryut Railway—along with the rights to the Sollum extension that he had provisionally been granted by the Egyptian government back in 1903—to an Italian businessman living in Alexandria named M. Aldon Ambron, who represented a group known as the “Italian North Africa Railway Syndicate.”\textsuperscript{182} This Syndicate—which counted among its ranks key agents of the Bank of Rome\textsuperscript{183}—had actually been established on May 16, 1910. The Italian Government had actively encouraged its formation at that time, before the Ottoman-Italian War, in order to help facilitate the construction of a coastal railroad in Cyrenaica (meaning, west of Sollum). The Egyptian Khedive was brought into the Syndicate in order to allay potential Ottoman concerns about the project, and to capitalize on his connections in Istanbul to help secure a concession in the first place. No real progress had been made on a Cyrenaican railway, however, when the war broke out and the plan was temporarily abandoned.

But when, in March 1913, Kitchener received word of the new sale option the Khedive had offered the Syndicate—a deal that would essentially place an entire coastal railway line stretching from the western border of Egypt all the way to Alexandria in the hands of the Italians—the British Foreign Office devolved into a state of panic. The British were naturally alarmed at the prospect that the line “should fall into alien hands”;

\textsuperscript{181} NA: FO 371/1637 (Rennell Rodd to Grey, Mar. 23, 1913).
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} According to Rennell Rodd, the Bank of Rome had become the primary financial backer to Italian projects in Tripoli and Cyrenaica. See NA: FO 371/1637 (Rennell Rodd to Grey, Mar. 23, 1913).
they also united behind Kitchener’s basic contention that “as this line is built on Government property, [the] Khedive cannot sell.” Consequently, the British thought it suitable for the Khedive “to be severely taken to task,” especially since “he hasn’t had a good wigging for years, and it’s the only thing that keeps him temporarily straight.” In order to be able to make their case to the Khedive as forcefully as possible, though, agents of the British Residency had to scramble around in order to find proof establishing that the Khedive had overstepped his legal rights.

The evidence that the British actually adduced was somewhat inconclusive: despite not having any formal “concession” for the extension to Sollum—which would have had to come from the Egyptian Council of Ministers—the Khedive did in fact have “various authorizations from individual ministers.” Basically, as Kitchener somewhat wishfully summed up the situation, “Both sides sold what was not theirs, for the syndicate is to pay the Khedive one quarter of profits of a concession for a line through Cyrenaica which, according to Sir R. Rodd’s info, they do not hold. The Khedive sold on the authorisations he held, which the syndicate accepted as sufficient.” In light of this muddy situation, the British held fast to the simple underlying principle that, in the words of Foreign Secretary Grey, “The Khedive has exceeded his rights in granting an option, as the Mariout line is built on Government property.” Indeed, in their view, “The Khedive has overstepped all bounds...for pecuniary advantage to himself, [he] was selling to foreigners a means of penetrating his country.”

---

184 NA: FO 371/1636 (Kitchener to Grey, Jan. 19, 1913).
185 NA: FO 371/1636 (Foreign Office memo, Mar. 13, 1913).
186 NA: FO 371/1636 (Kitchener to Grey, Mar. 15, 1913).
187 NA: FO 371/1636 (Grey to Rennell Rodd, Mar. 19, 1913).
188 NA: FO 371/1636 (Kitchener to Grey, Mar. 16, 1913).
Kitchener confronted the Khedive about the deal in hopes of pressuring him to back off the sale option altogether. According to Ahmad Shafiq, Kitchener told the Khedive that he had “put himself in a very tight spot because he sold land that he does not own. And therefore he is personally responsible to the Egyptian government, which owns this land.” The Khedive—who had recently fallen into dire financial straits and was thus bent on selling his private railroad in order to pay off some of his debts—responded to Kitchener’s hard line by asserting that he would only withdraw from the sale to the Italian syndicate if the Egyptian Government agreed to purchase the Maryut Railway, instead—a position that Grey likened to “blackmail.”

At first, Kitchener flat out refused to buy the railway for the Government. This reaction was due in large part to British calculations that the Maryut line was worthless. According to a memo by Lord Cecil, “There is no financial justification whatever for the purchase of this line,” given the fact that it “runs through a country to a great extend devoid of cultivation, and sparsely inhabited by Arab tribes. Such cultivation as exists…is for the most part of an inferior description. The railway connects no population centers, nor does it open up any district of either mineral or great agricultural wealth.” Cecil also objected to the idea of the Egyptian Government being obliged to pay to maintain the line, given the delicate state of the country’s budget; after all, he concludes, Britain had to bear in mind the need to shore up the confidence of those who had invested “large sums of foreign capital in this country.” Other British agents

---

189 Shafiq, Mudhakkirat, 325.
190 Kitchener claimed that the Khedive had squandered much of his property and was in substantial debt, owing some 600,000 Egyptian Pounds to Credit Foncier. The Khedive also apparently lost 500,000 Egyptian Pounds in something called the “Zervudachi smash.” See NA: FO 371/1636 (Kitchener to Grey, Mar. 15, 1913).
191 NA: FO 371/1636 (Grey to Kitchener, Mar. 19, 1913).
concurred with this assessment: one questioned, “What British capitalists are going to look at ‘The Khedive’s toy’ as a commercial proposition?”¹⁹³

For his part, chiming in from London, Lord Grey instructed Kitchener not to purchase the Maryut line—seeking instead to defeat the purchase by applying appropriate pressure on the Syndicate—and argued that the Khedive should be allowed to fail: “I realize that the consequences of this decision may be serious to the Khedive, whose financial position…appears to be most precarious…It will be better to let the crash come, and we shall then be able to take the Khedive’s affairs out of his hands.”¹⁹⁴ Grey also ordered Kitchener to pass on a threatening memo to the Khedive, the contents of which Abbas Hilmi actually included verbatim in his memoirs: “His Majesty’s Government considers with grave concern the decision taken by Your Highness concerning the Mariout railway, according to which, part of the railway communications on Egyptian territory has been put under the influence of a foreign power…The position of the Egyptian Government is that it will not acquire the Mariout line…I take this opportunity to warn Your Highness against concluding the agreement, and against entering into negotiations with any other Government or foreign syndicate for the sale of this line.”¹⁹⁵

Things did not go quite the way that Grey imagined, however. For one, the Khedive proved to be extremely defiant in the face of the Foreign Secretary’s threat, informing Kitchener nonchalantly that he was “deeply grieved that a political character which had never entered his mind should have been given to negotiations relative to an

¹⁹³ NA: FO 371/1637 (Note from Rennell Rodd to Grey, Mar. 25, 1913).
¹⁹⁴ NA: FO 371/1636 (Grey to Kitchener, Mar. 27, 1913).
¹⁹⁵ Telegram from Grey to the Khedive. Quoted in Abbas Hilmi II, The Last Khedive of Egypt (Sonbol ed.), 119. See also draft version of Mar. 28, 1913 in NA: FO 371/1636.
act of purely financial interest.\textsuperscript{196} Agents of the \textit{Daira Khassa} also appealed to the Egyptian Government, arguing, for example, that “the establishment of the line up until Sollum has a definitive and indivisible character” based on the authorizations granted in 1903, and that the \textit{Daira Khassa} had every right to do as it liked with the Railroad—which, after all, the Government had not bothered to interfere with for over ten years.\textsuperscript{197} The \textit{Daira Khassa} also played down British exhortations to rethink the syndicate deal in light of new geopolitical realities: in a letter to the \textit{Khassa}, a Residency agent had written that, as a result of the Ottoman-Italian War, “Egypt is thus found to have as a neighboring power not the Suzerain power any longer, but rather Italy. The question of the railroad connecting at the border changes its aspect completely and takes on a major importance.”\textsuperscript{198} The Director-General of the Maryut Railway did not think that the new situation along the border changed a thing, however, and refused to renege on what he called the \textit{Daira Khassa}’s “natural and legitimate rights.”\textsuperscript{199}

For another, once the British learned more about the nature of the Khedive’s dealings with the Syndicate from their man in Rome, they began to realize that stepping in to buy the Maryut line might not be such a bad idea after all. After a couple weeks of intense discussions with a number of different parties, Ambassador Rennell Rodd finally received from the Secretary-General of the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry what he felt were “full and frank admissions as to their position with regard to the Khedive’s railway.” The Italian Government’s backing of the Syndicate’s purchase of the line

\textsuperscript{196} NA: FO 371/1637 (Kitchener to Grey, Apr. 3, 1913).
\textsuperscript{197} NA: FO 141/635/3 (Letter from Shafiq, Director-General of the Maryut Railway, to the Minister of Public Works, Mar. 23, 1913).
\textsuperscript{198} NA: FO 371/1637 (Draft letter from Egyptian Government to the \textit{Daira Khassa}).
\textsuperscript{199} NA: FO 141/635/3 (Letter from Shafiq, Director-General of the Maryut Railway, to the Minister of Public Works, Mar. 23, 1913).
apparently had everything to do with a desire to curb the Khedive’s assistance to the Sanusi-led resistance movement in Eastern Libya. According to what Rodd learned, the “Italians had hoped to be able to influence the Khedive through his pocket,” viewing the “railway scheme…as a means of holding His Highness and checking his further intrigues by prospect of financial advantage which they could neutralise if he did not desist.”

Indeed, the Italians apparently believed that “if they now lost [their] hold on the Khedive…his hostile action in Cyrenaica would be intensified.”\textsuperscript{200} Furthermore, the Italian diplomat told Rodd that if they were to force the renunciation of the sale option, then the British would have to step in and do more to make sure that the Khedive did not ramp up his involvement in the anti-Italian hostilities.\textsuperscript{201} Lord Grey was severely disturbed that “the Italian Government should have entered into direct negotiations with [the] Khedive in a matter affecting [the] security of Egypt without informing either [the] British or Egyptian Governments.”\textsuperscript{202} Yet when Rodd chastized his Italian counterpart further for undertaking this backdoor scheme, the response he received—that it occurred simply out of a fit of “absent-mindedness” (légèreté)—only rankled the British even further.\textsuperscript{203}

This series of revelations went far in galvanizing British opinion towards accepting the necessity of purchasing the Railway line, mostly as a security measure (though it would take time for the actual deal to be finalized). At the same time, the British finally found common cause with the Italians, who agreed to remove their backing

\textsuperscript{200} NA: FO 371/1637 (Rennell Rodd to Grey, Mar. 23, 1913).
\textsuperscript{201} See, for example, NA: FO 371/1637 (Rennell Rodd to Grey, Mar. 23, 1913). The first requirement was for the British to ensure the recall of ‘Aziz Bey from Cyrenaica. The other was to secure the remittance of a “sum collected by an Egyptian Commission ostensibly for the assistance of the destitute in Cyrenaica, but really utilized for the supply of arms and ammo to the hostile tribes.”
\textsuperscript{202} NA: FO 371/1637 (Grey to Rennell Rodd, Mar. 24, 1913).
\textsuperscript{203} NA: FO 371/1637 (Rennell Rodd to Grey, Mar. 26, 1913).
for the Syndicate. In early April, the Khedive agreed to the terms of a forced renunciation of the Syndicate deal. Ambron would complain several times to Rodd, urging that he and his fellow Syndicate members deserved compensation for the profits suddenly withheld from them, but Kitchener seems to have managed to sweep this issue under the rug. Finally, in early February 1914, Kitchener agreed to buy the Maryut Railway from the Khedive on behalf of the Egyptian Government, for a sum of 376,000 Egyptian Pounds.\textsuperscript{204} Upon the conclusion of the deal, one Foreign Office agent remarked that “It is well that this Railway has been got out of the Khedive’s hands. The price paid can hardly be regarded as remunerative expenditure, but it is under half of what the Khedive originally wanted.”\textsuperscript{205}

**Conclusion**

Although, on the surface, the Maryut Railway affair appears very different than the Khedive’s involvement in the local political field in Siwa, I suggest that this episode highlights several themes I have explored throughout this chapter concerning the *Daira Khassa* as an institution and the Khedive as something other than a straightforward “state actor.” First, there is the thorny issue of whether or not the *Daira Khassa* did in fact own the state lands upon which the railroad had been built. This issue was actually never fully resolved: though the British vehemently argued throughout the affair that the Khedive had absolutely no right to sell anything, the Khedive and various *Daira Khassa* agents never backed off their claim to hold fundamental rights to the property; and, of course, in the end, the Khedive did sell—though, paradoxically, to the Egyptian Government

\textsuperscript{204} NA: FO 371/1966 (Kitchener to Grey, Feb. 6, 1914). Shafiq puts the sum at 390,000 Egyptian Pounds.
\textsuperscript{205} NA: FO 371/1966 (Kitchener to Grey, Feb. 6, 1914).
(which had given the original permission back in 1899), and just not to a foreign syndicate.

Moreover, the Maryut Railway project constitutes another murky case in which it remains difficult to parse whether or not the Daira Khassa’s activities in the Egyptian West were ever merely commercial in nature, or else if there were political overtones that the Khedive consistently sought to deny. What was the underlying objective of the Maryut Railway project for the Khedive? And what was at stake with him funding it from his own private coffers, with so much of the planning conducted in private (or at least with the Egyptian Government paying very little heed to the construction for over a decade)? In the eyes of the British, in specific reference to the proposed sale to the Italian syndicate, at least, there was “little doubt that the transaction had from the first a political rather than a strictly commercial character.”206 This suspicion was confirmed for them by the testimony of the Italian agent on the decidedly political motivations for encouraging, behind the back of the British Residency, the syndicate’s private dealings with the Khedive; as I have just suggested, this was likely the primary motive convincing the British to go against their initial instincts and buy the railroad in the end.

The Khedive, on the other hand, consistently fell back on the explanation that the Railway was strictly a commercial venture, intended—as the 1899 charter indicated—to connect some of the Khedive’s private agricultural lands in the West. In his memoir, the Khedive argues: “They tried to find a political purpose in the transactions I undertook for the sale of the Mariout Railway, but it was merely a financial operation. I hoped to connect Alexandria to the frontier with Cyrenaica in order to serve the vast region of

206 NA: FO 371/1637 (Kitchener to Grey, May 11, 1913).
Maryut, where I had undertaken important agricultural enterprises.”\textsuperscript{207} This assertion of course does not rule out the possibility that the Khedive did in fact have ulterior motives—political and/or territorial designs in the West that the Maryut line would help facilitate—that he sought to mask when his dire financial situation forced him to abandon the project. According to one provocative Italian memo from 1904, the Ottomans certainly did not take the Maryut project lightly: it was reported that “The Sultan…is not very enthusiastic about this railroad, which could…arrive at the frontiers of his African possessions,” and that he was already “fearing the consequences.”\textsuperscript{208}

I argue that the key to understanding the seemingly paradoxical nature of the Khedive’s various projects in the West is, once again, to push the conceptual limits of how we understand sovereignty in Egypt (as elsewhere) in this period. The common thread uniting both Abbas Hilmi II’s various attempts at \textit{mise en valeur}—his purchase of and attempts to develop private property in Siwa; and the Maryut Railway—with his close-to-the-ground involvement in Siwan local politics is the way that the \textit{Daira Khassa} transformed itself in this period into the Khedive’s paramount institution for projecting sovereignty in Egypt’s western periphery. Increasingly shunted out of the spotlight of Cairo’s crowded political scene, the Khedive turned to parts of the country where the official institutional capacity of the Egyptian Government was still extremely uneven in order to cultivate new channels for arrogating political power.

More than this, I have also argued that the success of the \textit{Daira Khassa} in forging tight political and commercial bonds with local notables in Siwa illustrates the process of sovereign “qualification”—why certain centralizing marks of sovereignty ultimately

\textsuperscript{207} Abbas Hilmi II, \textit{The Last Khedive of Egypt} (Sonbol ed.), 113.
\textsuperscript{208} MAE: ASMAI, vol. II 101/2/24 (Memo to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, July 3, 1904).
trump others in an overlapping field defined by the interactivity between various actors vying for political influence and power. Given the option between the Khedive and the Interior Ministry’s ma’mur as two opposing faces of centralizing sovereignty in their oasis, Siwans typically favored the former—not because of some bent towards patrimonial rule, but rather because the Khedive had more successfully channeled, deferred to, and plugged into decidedly local, non-centralizing marks of sovereignty. The fact that the Khedive was able to brandish his image as a builder—and as an agent of development—in the West at this time only enhanced his sovereign qualifications in the eyes of locals in Siwa and beyond.

When we cast the Khedive’s various activities in this light, we can avoid falling into the trap of having to choose between taking the Khedive at his word (the commercial ventures of the Daira Khassa were for the greater good of the Egyptian nation) and adopting the colonial view (the Khedive was a no-good greedy adventurer whose continued insistence on exercising old-fashioned patrimonial authority was a stain on Egypt’s otherwise fine record of progress in the rule of law). The various projects that the Daira Khassa undertook in the Egyptian West throughout this period—*mise en valeur* as well as the extension of the Khedive’s political influence—transcend any easy dichotomies, representing instead the range of means that the Khedive sought to harness in order to stand out in a complex field of would-be sovereignty-seekers, and to project a sort of central authority in a region where state and nation were still very much being worked out on the ground.
Chapter 4—Towards a Social History of the Egypt-Benghazi

Borderland

Introduction

There can be no doubt that the critical study of “borders,” “frontiers,” and “borderlands” has become a hot topic among historians of the Ottoman Empire in recent years, just as it has in almost every subfield of global history. And yet the historiography of Ottoman borders and borderlands has, for a number of reasons, remained strikingly underdeveloped and conceptually muddled.

To a large extent, the main analytical shortcomings of this otherwise promising field stem from the ways in which it has been conflated with the paradigm of imperial centralization and decentralization—that age-old obsession of Ottoman historians. Early in their introduction to an edited volume on Ottoman borderlands, for example, Kemal Karpat and Robert Zens suggest that “Ottoman borderlands…must be viewed separately as each borderland defined its relationship with the Porte.”¹ Moreover, the authors declare that the overarching goal of the collection is to provide “a much-needed look at the Ottoman borderlands and their role in the survival and in the demise of the Ottoman state,” an endeavor that “reflects the complex interaction between a centralizing state and its far-flung territories.”² Similarly, many Ottoman border studies address the closely related theme of the empire’s territorial expansion, and the mechanisms and forces that enabled or hindered it. And so, in his introduction to another collected volume on the subject, early modern historian A.C.S. Peacock notes that the “the study of Ottoman

² Ibid., 14.
frontiers is of course intimately linked to that of Ottoman expansion and contraction… regardless of the decline thesis, there were periods when the empire was broadly gaining territory at expense of neighbors, and those when it was losing it.” As such, even some excellent and innovative recent studies on the Ottoman Empire’s external boundaries—zones of contestation with other imperial powers such as the Safavids or the Habsburgs, say—still take a decidedly state-centric approach, and thus remain focused principally on what these liminal border zones can tell us about the vicissitudes of Ottoman territorial mastery and geopolitical wrangling.

I argue in this chapter that scholarship of this ilk has actually served to back the burgeoning field of Ottoman borderland studies into an analytical dead-end, whereby historians have typically evinced a reluctance to conceive of borders and frontiers in the Empire as anything other than mere benchmarks of the relative success or failure of centralized imperial control from Istanbul. Attempted in this vein, the critical study of borderlands or frontiers is interesting or useful analytically only insofar as it helps us collate data on the nature of Ottoman provincial rule and territorial sovereignty at various pressure points in the history of the Empire. The language of borderlands may be new, but the conceptual framework is decidedly old: the perspective remains, as ever, that of the imperial center, and the main question is how effectively the center was able to rein in its provinces in the far-off periphery.


This general trend of reducing borderland studies to an investigation of the center-periphery relationship both results from—and continues to contribute to—the preponderance of early modern scholarship in the field. Indeed, a perusal of both aforementioned collected volumes on Ottoman borderlands reveals that the lion’s share of studies being done on the topic focus solely on the early modern empire and are thus engaged primarily with the particular preoccupations of that period’s historiography. According to Gábor Ágoston, for example, early modern historians of Ottoman borderlands such as himself are still grappling with Paul Vittek’s controversial ghazi thesis, which (as is well known) continues to define the contours of the historiographical debate on the nature of the early Ottoman state.\(^5\) It is no wonder, then, that this sustained engagement with Vittek has in many cases compelled historians to see the frontier first and foremost as a conceptual tool for understanding the mechanisms and implications of imperial expansion and contraction. Again, “frontier” in this view seems to be a straightforward stand-in for the Ottoman “periphery,” which can only be meaningfully analyzed vis-à-vis its fluctuating relationship with Istanbul and thus not, say, as a crossroads where ideas, goods, populations, and cultures are fluidly exchanged, or where particular local spatial meanings are produced.

At the same time, one unintended consequence of such scholarship on Ottoman borderlands and frontiers—focused, as so much of it is, on the central state’s expansion into and control of remote provinces in the early modern period—is that it paradoxically

ends up buttressing the tired and much maligned Ottoman “decline thesis.” We see this effect most clearly when it comes to earlier generations of scholarship on Ottoman borderlands and frontiers during and after the Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. As long as the study of Ottoman borderlands remains so fixated on the center/periphery relationship—and, in turn, the story of the far-flung provinces’ steady and inevitable slippage away from Istanbul’s control, as the outmoded and teleological decline narrative would have it—then the nineteenth-century story can never really amount to much more than an investigation of how successfully the Ottomans were able to stanch the Empire’s fatal bleeding.

Even much revisionist scholarship on Ottoman frontiers can remain stuck within an earlier set of questions and paradigms. This critique is not meant in any way to mitigate the profound contribution of many recent groundbreaking studies of the Ottoman-Arab periphery in the post-Tanzimat era, several of which serve as key templates for this dissertation. Rather, it is merely intended to suggest how—given the way the historiography has evolved to favor the particular set of preoccupations of early modern historians—much of the scholarship on nineteenth-century Ottoman borderlands reads as though its primary objective is to respond directly to earlier paradigms and

---


answer the hypothetical questions that arise from them: did Ottoman reform and centralization projects in the nineteenth century succeed or fail in warding off the contraction and decline of the empire? If so, for how long? How meaningfully did the Ottomans handle the external challenges of encroaching European power—and the internal challenges of local autonomy and resistance—at the marginal zones of Ottoman sovereignty? Did such efforts make any tangible difference in the end?

Both Eugene Rogan’s and Frederick Anscombe’s excellent monographs from the late-1990s—arguably the height of the “frontier turn” in Ottoman studies—pose answers to such questions concerning the relative success and failure of the Tanzimat reforms along the Ottoman periphery. Much of the analytical force of Rogan’s work stems from his use of the case of Ottoman Transjordan in the mid- to late-nineteenth century to mount a powerful revision of earlier scholarship that had described the Tanzimat in strictly “negative” terms, and thus had essentially served to reinforce the decline paradigm.8 Contrary to such works, Rogan argues that the Tanzimat in Transjordan were largely successful: by building robust institutions, reforming defunct or illegible local practices, fixing the land code and system of revenue collection, and establishing a competent local bureaucracy (among other measures), administrators effectively “extended the Ottoman state into the frontier,” and incorporated this remote peripheral region into its sphere of modern “infrastructural” (as opposed to “despotic”) sovereignty.9 Many of Rogan’s examples—especially his compelling analysis of how the Ottomans succeeded in key ways in “turning tribesmen into Ottomans”10—are directly relevant to my examination below of the impact of the Tanzimat in Ottoman Benghazi (a similarly

---

8 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*, 1.
9 Ibid., 1-5.
peripheral, and largely tribal, Arab province).\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, however, I will attempt to explore several of Rogan’s main themes outside of the strict center/periphery framework he employs to analyze Ottoman reform and incorporation initiatives at the “frontiers of the state.” Indeed, for Rogan the Ottoman “frontier” is still tantamount to a peripheral zone over which the “Ottoman Empire faced a real need to extend its sovereignty”; to “open” the frontier, then, was to reassert centralized imperial authority and “create an enduring administrative apparatus at the periphery.”\textsuperscript{12}

It is instructive to read Rogan’s monograph next to Anscombe’s account of the “Ottoman Gulf” in the late-nineteenth century. Although Anscombe is less interested than Rogan in actively theorizing the “Ottoman frontier,” the two works nonetheless share much in common, essentially showing opposite sides of the same coin. Both Rogan and Anscombe explore how the Ottomans sought to put imperial rule on firmer footing in formerly recalcitrant, largely autonomous Arab provinces along the edge of empire; but whereas Rogan emphasizes the Ottomans’ remarkable successes in incorporating Transjordan, Anscombe spins a woeful tale of utter failure in central and eastern Arabia. The reasons that Anscombe cites for this massive failure—the Ottomans’ lingering difficulties in financing their reform initiatives; misreadings of European geopolitical designs; the impact of a poor communications infrastructure; major disconnects between policies from on high in Istanbul and local decision-making on the spot\textsuperscript{13}—have immediate resonance with the case of Ottoman Benghazi in the same period. As I will

\textsuperscript{11} In fact, citing the work of Lisa Anderson (whose findings I will analyze in this chapter), Rogan posits that “Libya would seem to have been the closest example of the process of change initiated by the extension of Ottoman rule to Transjordan.” Rogan, Frontiers of the State, 17. Throughout this chapter I will challenge this comparison, however.

\textsuperscript{12} Rogan, Frontiers of the State, 9-11.

\textsuperscript{13} Anscombe, Ottoman Gulf, 167-73.
demonstrate below, the Ottomans attempted many of the same initiatives—and encountered many of the same issues and pitfalls—in their Libyan provinces as they did in both Rogan’s Transjordan and Anscombe’s Hasa. Yet, once again, this manner of evaluating the Ottoman frontier primarily through the lens of the center/periphery paradigm—and the relative success or failure of Ottoman reforms—need not be the end game for conceptualizing Ottoman borderlands. In what follows, then, I will attempt to push harder on the notion of the borderland as a category of historical analysis in Ottoman scholarship, and posit how the field might extricate itself from its conceptual dead-end.

Rethinking Ottoman Borderlands: Benghazi, Egypt, and the Case of Internal Boundaries

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the fairly limited historiography on the Ottoman Libyan provinces in the nineteenth century does not look much different. Works by scholars such as Lisa Anderson, Michel Le Gall, Engin Akarlı, Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, and Selim Deringil all place a strong emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of various Tanzimat-era reforms and initiatives in shoring up Ottoman ruling authority in Tripoli (Trablusgarp), Fezzan, and Benghazi, and in enabling local officials to exercise more modern and comprehensive forms of sovereignty over the largely tribal populations of these provinces.14 For Anderson, the Tanzimat were in fact an unmitigated success in the Libyan provinces: efforts towards administrative and educational reorganization, as well as land reform and agricultural development, all had the upshot of supplanting traditional

---


215
commercial and social life by the end of the nineteenth century and affirming the 
ascendancy of modern, efficient Ottoman bureaucratic governance.\textsuperscript{15}

Le Gall, by contrast—in what is in many ways still the definitive, most detailed 
account available of Ottoman rule in the Libyan provinces in this period—suggests that 
the Ottomans’ record was far more mixed. For one, there was variation by region: if the 
Ottomans succeeded in re-establishing firm administrative control over Tripoli, Benghazi 
was a different story altogether; and this is to say nothing of the divide between the 
coastal towns and their desert hinterlands. For another, the reform and establishment of 
certain key institutions in the provinces never entirely uprooted traditional identities and 
social patterns, as Anderson would have it—whatever successes the Ottomans did enjoy 
in this period owed themselves to the flexibility of the local administrators and their 
willingness to adapt to local particularities. Ultimately, for Le Gall, the last two decades 
of the nineteenth century in Ottoman Libya witnessed a great deal of “trial and error” by 
administrators; this was a natural response to “the diversity of intents and priorities which 
marked Ottoman policy” towards Tripoli and Benghazi during a period of extreme 
transition and flux, as these territories were transformed “from remote military outposts 
to provinces in which the government intervened directly in the daily lives of the 
citizens.”\textsuperscript{16}

Although these now classic works of modern Libyan history offer much insight 
into how the Ottomans governed this particular subset of Arab provinces, I argue that 
they miss a crucial part of the story by limiting their gaze geographically—most 
centrally, for my purposes, by largely neglecting to consider the significance of broader

\textsuperscript{15} Anderson, “Ottoman Reform”; Anderson, \textit{State and Social Transformation}. 
\textsuperscript{16} Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 2-4.
regional connections with the neighboring province of Egypt. On one hand, this oversight can be interpreted as another inevitable byproduct of working within the constraints of the center/periphery paradigm, which has often locked scholars into focusing primarily on any given province’s direct relationship with Istanbul, rather than its lateral orientations towards other neighboring provinces. On the other hand, it seems also to reflect how the nation-state form continues to loom inordinately large in the historical-geographical imagination, so that—in this case—the three disparate Ottoman provinces that coalesced to form what we now know as “Libya” are usually analyzed together, whereas more organic regional linkages (such as cross-border tribal and commercial networks) are overlooked.\textsuperscript{17} As I will demonstrate below, this narrow geographical scope becomes particularly problematic when it comes to conceptualizing Ottoman policy towards Benghazi’s Bedouin tribes, as well as the relationship between the Ottoman Government and the Sanusiyya—two issues that cannot be analyzed effectively when Egypt is removed from the equation.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} It does of course make sense that Tripoli and Benghazi are so obviously treated together, given that the latter was governed through the former for several decades after the reconquest in 1835. Between 1836 and 1863—up until the implementation of the Provincial Reform Law in the region—Benghazi was a kaimakamlık of the Eyalet of Tripoli (see Ahmida, \textit{Making of Modern Libya}, 74). Then, after a short-lived period as an independent mutasarrıflık, Benghazi once again was administered, from 1872-78, as a sanjak (or, mutasarrıflık) of the Vilayet of Tripoli. In 1878, for the first time, Benghazi was split off as an independent Vilayet of its own for nearly a decade. Finally, in 1888, Benghazi was restored as a special sort of sanjak as it had been between 1863 and 1872—like Jerusalem or Mount Lebanon, it operated as an independent regional governorate, lower in status than Tripoli but reporting directly to the Interior Ministry in Istanbul (See: Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 187; Anderson, “Ottoman Reform,” 331; Rogan, \textit{Frontiers of the State}, 17; Ahmida, \textit{Making of Modern Libya}, 74. Ahmida misinterprets the status of Benghazi after 1888, however).

\textsuperscript{18} Ahmida’s monograph on state formation in Ottoman and colonial Libya goes further than any other studies in pointing in this direction. Ahmida’s work is particularly instructive when it comes to explaining the importance of cross-border commercial linkages—the fact that the tribes of Benghazi saw various key locales in Egypt as the main markets for their goods. Ahmida also contributes to the discussion on the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship, though he arguably overstates the degree to which the Sanusiyya constituted a bona fide “state” system.
Extending the geographical scope of analysis to include Egypt in discussions of Ottoman administration and policy in Tripoli and, especially, Benghazi does more than fill in some important empirical lacunae, however. It also enables us to push the conceptual limits of the Ottoman borderlands historiography by highlighting the broader significance and analytical purchase of examining the internal boundaries or frontiers that marked adjacent provinces within the Empire off from one another. Although the theme of internal Ottoman borderlands has received surprisingly scant attention over the years, I argue that it is ripe for further investigation, offering us a much-needed way out of the center/periphery or centralization/decentralization paradigms that still dominate the conversation on Ottoman borders and frontiers.

One advantage of such a re-orientation is that it would allow Ottoman historians to engage more comprehensively with the larger field of critical and comparative borderland studies—particularly works that follow the “social history of borderlands” approach pioneered by scholars such as Peter Sahlins, Michiel Baud, and Willem Van Schendel in order to transcend historiographical trends and paradigms in their own respective fields that they found similarly inadequate and limiting.19 Baud and Van Schendel argue, for example, that

The study of borders and borderlands has been unduly restricted by an emphasis on the geographical, legal, and political aspects of the creation and consequences of borders. This has led to a state-centered approach, in which researchers took the state as their point of departure. Further, they have tended to focus their research upon these artificial lines in social space and—often unwittingly and unwillingly—confirmed the nationalist claims that borders represent.20

---

In short, what Baud and Van Schendel take issue with in their seminal review essay is the same sort of rigid, state-centric, one-dimensional historiographical paradigm that has defined and constrained the Ottoman field. In its place, they posit a more fluid model that begins not with the state but rather the borderland zone itself, and emphasizes the distinctive spatial and cultural perspectives and identities of the borderland’s local population:

By taking both sides of the border as a starting point for research, it will be easier to understand the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of borderlands and the particular historical transformations that they have experienced. It is necessary to invest borderlands, and their population, with a more active historical role. We should ask which social and political impulses originated in borderlands and what effect they had locally as well as beyond the borderland—particularly in relation to state building on both sides of the border. The crucial question is what borderlands can teach us about ways of conceptualizing social space and local identity, and the roles these have played in promoting or thwarting the development of modern states. ²¹

In the same spirit, I suggest that exploring the social history of Ottoman internal borderlands will enable historians to pose an entirely fresh set of questions concerning how various groups of non-state actors understood the particular local geographies they inhabited within the Empire, and also how these perceptions influenced regional social, economic, cultural, and political networks. Of course, it must be pointed out that such an approach to borderlands by no means removes the state from the picture; if we follow Baud and Van Schendel’s lead, it simply allows us to examine state-society relations in new ways, illuminating how local non-state actors took an active role in mediating the larger designs of the Ottoman state through the articulation of diverse spatial practices. It also provides a methodological model for how to read official documents against the

²¹ Ibid., 241.
grain in cases such as mine, where evidence on local tribal activities and spatial practices is virtually non-existent outside the state archives.²²

Re-focusing our critical gaze on the Empire’s internal borderlands is especially promising—not only for the Ottoman field, but also for the larger theoretical conversation on borderlands and frontiers—when we bear in mind that it had been the standard practice of the Ottoman authorities for centuries not to delineate any formal boundaries between provinces within the empire. This fact alone raises all sorts of crucial questions for the social historian of borderlands. How did local inhabitants of the borderland understand the meaning of the invisible boundary lines that everyone knew existed but were not acknowledged formally by the state? What did it mean to live as an Ottoman subject rooted at the margins of one province, but relying heavily on cultural, commercial, or kinship ties with the inhabitants of another just across the “border”? How did local inhabitants know where the border was when it was never demarcated on the ground? How in turn did they understand and communicate what it meant to cross such a line? How did local administrators define authority in such ill-defined liminal spaces, and how did local subjects manipulate any authority vacuums that might have arisen? Did the amorphous nature of internal borders afford unique avenues for the assertion of local agency and autonomy?

The internal borderland linking Egypt and Benghazi is a perfect case in point. From the time of the Ottoman conquest of much of North Africa in the sixteenth century until the end of World War I, the frontier between Benghazi and Egypt merely

---

²² This method is similar to the framework I adopted in previous chapters to elucidate the mechanisms through which local non-state actors mediated state authority in Siwa and other locales in the Egyptian West.
represented a transitional zone between two provinces lying within the broader sphere of Ottoman imperial sovereignty. Even once Egypt became semi-autonomous in 1841, the Ottoman government in Istanbul refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of any formal boundary line marking off a distinctive Egyptian sphere of sovereignty, choosing instead to refer to both Egypt’s western (and eastern) border as a hatt-ı imtiyâz (“line of distinction”) or hatt-ı faslı (“line of separation”) and thus not as a boundary line, as such.\(^23\)

The upshot of this ambiguous situation was the steady emergence, throughout the nineteenth century, of the Libyan Desert as a fluid zone of overlapping Egyptian and Ottoman sovereignty, with the putative boundary between the two spheres essentially functioning as an invisible tangent line between one modernizing state and its larger suzerain, caught up in the same process of centralization beginning in this period.

Though it is true that Egypt’s semi-autonomous status renders this something of a special case, I contend that many of the themes that emerge from the critical examination of the Egypt-Benghazi borderland are directly applicable to other internal borderlands around the Empire in this period.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the ways such an approach to internal Ottoman borderlands helps us account for the behavior of the various tribes that inhabited the peripheral zones of the Empire, and the critical (if paradoxical) role they played in Ottoman efforts at state-building. These are questions that Reşat Kasaba takes up directly in his recent monograph on the movement of local populations as a recurring trope throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire. As Kasaba notes, nomadic and unsettled

\(^{23}\) The same was true of the Ottomans’ approach to the Yemeni borderland. Especially once they became embroiled in a spate of disputes with the British in that region over the border between Yemen and Aden, the Ottomans refused to legitimate a formal boundary line even after they were forced to demarcate one. They chose instead to call it a hatt-ı faslı. I am indebted to Professor M. Şükrû Hanoğlu for bringing this comparison to my attention.
tribes managed to endure until the very end of the Empire, even despite the state’s concerted efforts to eradicate the “disease” of tribalism in the nineteenth century. Moreover, according to Kasaba, the Empire’s tribal population continued to loom so large in Ottoman statecraft after the Tanzimat that the conclusion must be drawn, against conventional wisdom, that “tribes and the Ottoman state…grow simultaneously.” This assertion fits Kasaba’s larger claim that the “institutionalization of the Ottoman state” must actually be seen as a “process unfolding in continuous relationship with other groups and elements of society.”

In this way, by suggesting that the Ottoman state’s expansion was necessarily articulated through the local practices of key non-state actors such as the Arab tribes, Kasaba aligns himself with the new social historiography of borderlands outlined above, in which local perceptions and experiences of marginal space are excavated in order to cast the history of the modern state in a new light. Kasaba in fact directly invokes the ways in which the ambiguous nature of Ottoman internal borderlands facilitated the constant movement of local populations that in his view defined the Empire for most of its history:

Conceptually and in real terms, the internal boundaries that separated the Ottoman state from the tribal social structures were never clear. Nor were the external borders separating the Ottoman Empire from its neighbors as clearly identifiable as historical atlases presume. There was always movement of people, goods, and ideas…that cut across internal divides as well as the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, both the imperial center and the modern state that emerged from it were deeply embedded in local practices, making it impossible to talk about centralization as having clear starting and end points.

---

26 Ibid, 8.
27 Ibid., 8.
Kasaba, also clearly dissatisfied with the staid Ottoman centralization/decentralization paradigm, thus posits the social history of movement (by tribes and other groups of non-state actors) across the internal borders of the Empire as one compelling way out of the conceptual bind. In this way—and throughout his monograph—Kasaba echoes historian David Ludden’s broader point that “mobility has typified human experience as much as sedentary, settled life, and in many places and times, much more.”

In the rest of the chapter, I will attempt to put into practice the social history approach exemplified by the above-mentioned scholars by illustrating the case of the Egypt-Benghazi borderland during the second half of the nineteenth century. Rather than proceeding strictly chronologically, the chapter will be organized around two broad themes: the significance and consequences of the steady movement by various Bedouin tribes in both directions across the border; and the impact of the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship on matters of political identity and governance in the region. I argue throughout that Ottoman officials’ complex encounter with the social and spatial practices of these two key groups of non-state actors was one of the defining factors driving the evolution of conceptions of political sovereignty in the borderland over the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Moreover, I suggest that such an emphasis on the Ottoman side of the borderland is vital for understanding the broader process by which the emergence of a sense of borderedness transformed the entire region.

The aim is not to provide a comprehensive portrait of more than half a century of Ottoman rule on the Benghazi side of the borderland, but rather to highlight some key aspects of how thinking more laterally, across internal borders, both expands and deepens

28 In this way—and throughout his monograph—Kasaba echoes historian David Ludden’s broader point that “mobility has typified human experience as much as sedentary, settled life, and in many places and times, much more.” David Ludden, “Presidential Address: Maps in the Mind and the Mobility of Asia,” The Journal of Asian Studies 62 (2003), 1062. Indeed, the mobility that Kasaba describes exemplifies Louisa Lombard’s notion of a “non-centralizing mark of sovereignty,” which I explored in the Introduction to the dissertation.
our understanding of Ottoman provincial governance, and challenges conventionally held notions about the role that groups of non-state actors—in this case the tribes and the Sanusiyya—played both mediating and challenging Ottoman statecraft after the

*Tanzimat.* At the same time, I suggest that a closer look at the question of sovereignty in this borderland serves to problematize our view of the broader Ottoman-Egyptian relationship in the late-nineteenth century. Before turning to these themes, however, it is important to provide some background on Ottoman administration in Benghazi and some of the unique challenges that state officials consistently faced in that subprovince.

**The Travails of Ottoman Administration in Benghazi: A Brief Overview**

In 1835, the Ottoman military reconquered the provinces of Tripoli and Benghazi from the rogue Qaramanli dynasty, which had exercised de facto autonomous rule in both since 1711. The Ottoman Government then faced the immediate challenge of providing effective administration for these vast but sparsely populated provinces, and projecting its authority and legitimacy among various groups of inhabitants who were not necessarily so keen to accept the return of centralized rule from Istanbul. As scholars of Ottoman Libya such as Le Gall and Anderson have demonstrated, the Ottomans showed great resourcefulness and skill in re-incorporating the Libyan provinces into the imperial fold; although the upshot was not nearly the coup of successful centralization that Anderson would have us believe, there can be no doubt that, as Le Gall claims, by 1902 these provinces were significantly “better administered.”

But there are several key caveats to this narrative, none more salient than the fact that Tripoli and Benghazi experienced the era of Ottoman reconquest and reform quite unevenly. If the Ottomans managed to establish a competent bureaucracy, raise ample

---

revenues, and usher in a series of public works projects in Tripoli, Benghazi was an entirely different story, remaining a relatively poor, underdeveloped backwater that officials posted there considered a place of exile.\textsuperscript{30} In the Ottoman mindset, for nearly a half-century after the reconquest, Benghazi would play second fiddle to the more populous and lucrative mother province of Tripoli.\textsuperscript{31}

Part of the issue, from an Ottoman perspective, was Benghazi’s population—both in terms of overall numbers and distribution. Though estimates for the nineteenth century vary considerably, it is thought that in the late-nineteenth century, the entire province had only around 200,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, the vast majority of whom were unsettled Bedouins. The province had almost no large towns to speak of: the town of Benghazi, by far the most populous, is estimated to have contained only around 5,000 people in the middle of the nineteenth century; Derna was half that size.\textsuperscript{32} Le Gall writes that Benghazi had grown to 13,000 inhabitants by 1884;\textsuperscript{33} another estimate puts the number at around 19,000 by the end of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{34} Whereas the province of Tripoli had 570,000 inhabitants by 1911, Italian demographer De Agostini found the population of Benghazi province to be only 185,400 in 1922, of which only 24,920 lived in towns.\textsuperscript{35} Regardless of the specific numbers—which were notoriously hard to pin down given

\textsuperscript{30} Le Gall writes that Ottoman officials understood that a post in Benghazi was “honorable exile.” Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 57-9. For their part, British proconsuls stationed in Benghazi seemed to consider their posts a particularly cruel form of torture. See, for example, the passionate appeal of proconsul Hutton Dufaues to be transferred. NA: FO 101/68 (Dufaues memo, Apr. 7, 1880).
\textsuperscript{33} Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 184.
\textsuperscript{34} Ahmida, \textit{Making of Modern Libya}, 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Ahmida, \textit{Making of Modern Libya}, 15. In the estimate of Italian ethnographer Enrico De Agostini, in 1922 Benghazi had 10,000 inhabitants whereas Derna had around 9,700 and Marj, 1540. Enrico De Agostini, \textit{Le Popolazioni della Cirenaica: Notizie Etniche e Storiche} (Bengasi: Azienda tipo-litografica della Scuola d’Arti e Mestieri, 1923).
fluctuations caused by epidemics, famines, and frequent migration\textsuperscript{36}—what seems undeniable is that the Ottomans faced a unique situation in Benghazi given the dearth of inhabitants actually living in large towns. This was particularly problematic given that the Ottoman administration struggled for the entire period of its rule after the reconquest to exercise much if any effective control beyond a handful of these marginal coastal towns, which were even more isolated given their geography—hemmed in by the sea on one side and a high plateau on the other, beyond which the expansive Sahara desert unfolded.

Given Benghazi’s relative lack of importance to the Ottoman center for much of the century, the presence of troops in the province was relatively light. In 1881, the Ottomans had only two regular infantry battalions stationed in Benghazi, which comprised a total of 1,100 troops; this was one tenth the size of the standing army in Tripoli. By 1890, there were still only five battalions comprising 3,500 troops. Since there was no conscription in the Libyan provinces throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottomans sometimes formed irregular units, though this was not common practice in Benghazi during the 1880s; more typically reserve troops would be brought in from Tripoli if needed.\textsuperscript{37} Even during the critical final two decades of the century, “Bedouin fighters outnumbered the Ottoman soldiers by at least a hundred to one.”\textsuperscript{38}

Likewise, Benghazi suffered from inadequate building and communications infrastructure (even relative to Tripoli), which only exacerbated the sense of the province’s extreme isolation and poverty. For most of the nineteenth century there was no telegraph line connecting Benghazi across the 1,000 kilometers of semi-desert to

\textsuperscript{37} Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 185-6.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 186.
Tripoli; the nearest telegraph office was actually in Crete. The Mediterranean Sea never proved to be much of a life-line for linking Benghazi up with the rest of the Empire: Ottoman ships called on the port of Benghazi extremely infrequently—once a month at best—and the port infrastructure was extremely shoddy.\textsuperscript{39} The British proconsul stationed in Benghazi was duly appalled, as is evidenced by his report on the state of the province in 1879:

In the interest of the Ottoman Government it is greatly to be desired that the new Governor General should be armed with power and authority to carry out the following reforms and improvements in this province, namely...the re-establishment of the telegraph line; the organizing of a regular postal service, and the clearing of the harbor of sand, and render it safe to vessel...The absence alone of these means of communication, and the contingent isolation of this province from the rest of the Turkish Empire, and commercial centres, are calamities greatly to be deplored in this age of progress.\textsuperscript{40}

One particularly illuminating Ottoman document from 1893 underscores just how rudimentary the port infrastructure along the Benghazi coastline remained, even more than a half-century after the reconquest. In a letter circulated to different branches of the imperial Government in Istanbul, the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi complained that the province’s coastline was almost entirely unprotected, to the point that foreign ships—many of which, disguised as sponge-fishing vessels, were importing contraband—could come and go as they pleased. In order to be better equipped to control this illicit activity, the Mutasarrıf made several requests: first, he wanted two ships sent by the Navy to be used to patrol the coastline regularly; he also requested the construction of lighthouses at the ports of Derna and Tobruk, as well as new offices for harbor officials in two different coastal towns. Although the Minister of the Interior recognized the gravity of the

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 57-9. Only in 1904 did the Sultan issue an \textit{irade} regulating steamship service between Benghazi and Constantinople, mandating that a line be run every two weeks. See NA: FO 195/2160 (Alvarez memo, June 21, 1904).

\textsuperscript{40} NA: FO 195/1082 (Hutton Dufaues to Layard, March 1, 1879).
situation, he did not make any promises; he was uncertain whether either the requisite funds or boats could be allocated to Benghazi at that time.\textsuperscript{41}

Not only does this exchange reveal the sorry state of Ottoman port infrastructure in Benghazi at the time, but it also calls attention to the most central problem plaguing the province throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century: a chronic lack of funds. Benghazi was not alone in this regard: after the Ottoman central government declared bankruptcy in 1875, many provinces struggled to balance their budgets now that they could no longer count on any financial assistance from Istanbul if they got into trouble. But, along with the Arabian provinces that Anscombe investigates, Benghazi’s situation was inordinately bad—so much so that local officials often could not afford to make regular and timely salary payments to troops and employees of the local bureaucracy, let alone undertake important reform projects like the one the Mutasarrıf had proposed for Benghazi’s harbors.\textsuperscript{42}

Tripoli actually fared much better than Benghazi when it came to raising revenues. Unlike Benghazi, Tripoli benefited from its abundance of larger, more prosperous towns, from which substantial revenue could be raised in the form of municipal taxes; Benghazi had basically no comparative means to raise such funds given its paucity of towns with over 1,000 inhabitants. Officials in Tripoli also had much more success implementing a range of tax reforms, which entailed identifying individual

\textsuperscript{41} BOA: BEO 175/13089 (Memo from Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, Mar. 19, 1893/1 Ramazan 1310).

\textsuperscript{42} According to Le Gall, the public works environment never improved. Even by the start of the twentieth century, he writes, the Ottoman Government had “completed only a few public works projects and most of them, including the building of new schools in the town of Benghazi, would not have been completed had the imperial treasury not supplied loans and aid” (Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 253). This account makes an interesting contrast to Rogan’s analysis of the symbolic import of buildings and infrastructure in fostering a deeper sensibility around Ottoman authority among the local population of Transjordan. See Rogan, \textit{Frontiers of the State}, 59-61.
landowners and granting them registered land deeds. Tax reform in Benghazi, on the other hand, was a complete mess, as we will see shortly. The province of Tripoli also benefited from the largesse of local merchants and notables, who funded public works and communications projects with their own private savings; nothing remotely like this was possible in Benghazi. Finally, Ottoman governors in Tripoli managed to deal more effectively with recalcitrant local notables—most fundamentally the Kuloğlu population—so that a more centralized and loyal bureaucratic structure could be cemented in the province. The largely tribal and Sanusi notability of Benghazi would be much more reluctant to accept any such impingement on their independence and local authority.

Aside from the general circumstance of imperial bankruptcy after 1875, Benghazi’s fiscal situation was aggravated by the suppression and decline of the slave trade, which had been extremely lucrative for the region at its height, as well as Istanbul’s decision to establish Benghazi as an independent province in 1878. Among other obligations, this latter move required the local administration to finance military bureaucratic and military salaries, and purchase military supplies, from its own budget. Around 1880, it became clear to Ottoman officials in Istanbul that drastic measures were required to fix Benghazi’s finances, as is borne out by a scathing report that Yıldız issued that year condemning the general state of neglect in the province.

In light of this dire situation, the only recourse was to take the plunge and go after the Bedouins, who comprised the bulk of the province’s population yet had until this

43 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 71-3.
44 Ibid., 101.
45 Ibid., 205. As mentioned above, this experiment lasted only ten years. In 1888 Benghazi devolved into a mutasarrıflık.
46 Ibid., 206.
point largely managed to avoid paying any direct state taxes to the government. For the first forty years after the reconquest, content enough with the revenues they had been able to rustle up, local officials resigned themselves to leaving many of the unsettled tribes in the interior to their own devices. And so the Ottomans never completed a comprehensive land survey in Benghazi, as they had done elsewhere around the periphery of the Empire after the Tanzimat (and as Rogan demonstrates in the case of Transjordan). This \textit{laissez faire} posture had in turn enabled many tribes loyal to the Sanusiyya to transfer their lands as \textit{waqfs} to the the Brotherhood—something they felt entitled to do owing to their strict Maliki legal interpretations of land ownership. But by around 1880, the Ottoman government could brook this situation no longer: as Le Gall puts it, “The conclusions to be drawn by the Ottoman authorities were obvious: indirect taxes—customs dues and some municipal taxes—were insufficient sources of revenue. New measures to enlarge the tax rolls were needed. This meant more, and effective direct taxation of the bedouin.”

Late in 1882, the Ottomans took decisive action by appointing Haci Reşid Paşa—who was already notorious for his harsh repression of recalcitrant Bedouin tribes in the Hicaz in the mid-1850s, as well as in Transjordan in the late-1860s—as the new governor of Benghazi. Within a few months of his arrival, Reşid Paşa embarked on the first of what would be three lengthy tax campaigns into the province’s inhospitable desert hinterland, in order to bring the Bedouins under effective government control and force them to pay their state (\textit{mîrî}) taxes—including those owed on land that the tribes had

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Le Gall mentions that a “partial” land survey had been started around 1860 but was never completed. Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 216.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Le Gall, “Ottoman Government,” 98-99.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 207.
\item \textsuperscript{50} For the latter campaign, see Rogan, \textit{Frontiers of the State}, 49-52.
\end{itemize}
transferred to the Sanusiyya. Reșid’s strategy was to make a show of subjugating a few especially powerful tribes, in order to cow the others into following suit. And so during the first campaign, lasting from 1882-84, Reșid targeted the Bara’sa and ‘Abeydat tribesmen from the Derna region, allegedly seeking to recover 10 million kuruş in arrears (dating back perhaps ten years). The first few months of the campaign were a complete failure: even though Reșid tried to conciliate the Bedouins by offering them ceremonial burnouses and even showing his solidarity with them by converting to the Sanusi faith, the tribes refused to pay their taxes to the state. Moreover, Reșid’s campaign compelled a large number of tribesmen to flee towards the Egyptian frontier, beyond the Paşa’s reach. Ultimately this first round of actions against the Bedouins yielded only a tenth of the intended sum in back-taxes; and rumors that Reșid had actually squandered more cash than he had managed to recover led to his temporary removal from his post, as well as an investigation into his affairs.

Applyingcleared of all charges, Reșid returned to Benghazi in late 1888 and immediately mounted a second campaign into the province’s interior. This time he targeted the Zuwaya, a large and powerful tribe based in the oasis district of Awjila-Jalo, one of the key nodes along the Wadai-Benghazi caravan route; along with the Mejabra, the Zuwaya—most of whom were loyal to the Sanusiyya—played an instrumental role in

---

51 Ibid., 210-11.
52 NA: FO 101/72 (Wood to Granville, May 1, 1883). The European consular corps at this and successive moments seemed concerned about Reșid’s Sanusi affiliation, often branding him a “fanatic” (see, for instance, NA: FO 195/1653—Proconsul Cameron’s memo from May 6, 1889). It is not clear to me on what evidence Le Gall bases his claim that Reșid’s conversion—far from sincere—was actually merely a “thinly veiled gesture of reconciliation” other than the general idea that Le Gall’s goal in this section is to show the degree to which the Ottoman provincial government in Benghazi was completely against the Sanusiyya. See Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 211.
53 NA: FO 101/72 (Wood to Granville, July 11, 1883 and Dec. 24, 1883). I will explore this theme of cross-border flight in more depth below.
55 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 211.
overseeing commerce along the route.\textsuperscript{56} Reşid had even more reason to pursue and punish the Zuwaya given their part in orchestrating a recent ambush on an Ottoman military detachment outside Ajdabiya, during which two officers had been killed.\textsuperscript{57} This time around, Reşid fared much better: his battalion defeated the Zuwaya, forced many of their tribesmen to withdraw from Awjila-Jalo, and coerced them into paying six years of back-taxes.\textsuperscript{58} By the end of the second campaign in 1891, Reşid had also scored some victories over the Mogharba and Awagir, although the resultant flight of these tribes from their home territories had the counterproductive effect of spawning intertribal violence.\textsuperscript{59}

Reşid launched the third round of tax campaigns against the backdrop of an extreme famine and drought that had beset the province in 1892. Acting on the assumption that such hardship offered the government a unique opportunity to subdue the province’s tribal population once and for all, Reşid effectively doubled the tax burden on the Bedouins in the first year of the drought, at the same time they were already beholden to the provincial government for food relief.\textsuperscript{60} The results of this ruthless policy were mixed: the government did succeed for a time in raising revenues, but it also drove many tribesmen to resist or flee (to Egypt, Tripoli, or locales further south). Many Bedouins who had been driven into Benghazi town on account of the drought banded together with the merchant population there to petition Reşid’s brutal policies; in October 1892 the Porte issued an order calling for a temporary cessation of state tax collection.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{57} For a basic account of this episode, see NA: FO 195/1610 (Cameron memo, Sept. 6, 1888).
\textsuperscript{58} Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 216.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 216-7.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 217-9.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 220.
By 1893 or 1894—after the famine abated and Reşid had fallen victim to the typhus epidemic that struck Benghazi—the tax campaigns ostensibly had failed to net any concrete or lasting financial gains for the provincial government. As we will see below, Ottoman officials in Benghazi were in fact still scrambling to raise tax revenues from the province’s numerous tribes well into the first decade of the twentieth century. For his part, Le Gall acknowledges these ongoing challenges and notes that Ottoman tax reform on the whole failed in Benghazi where it had succeeded in Tripoli, primarily due to lingering tensions with the Sanusiyya over issues of tax jurisdiction and exemption. It is curious, then, that elsewhere in his study he emphasizes how Reşid’s campaigns succeeded in undermining Sanusi authority over Benghazi’s tribes, by demonstrating the Brotherhood’s inability to defend them against Ottoman military force or ward off the government’s larger designs in the province. What is ultimately missing in Le Gall’s account is a more thorough analysis of the movement of various tribes beyond Benghazi’s borders, and the ways that such lateral, cross-border movement at once expands our view of issues of sovereignty and tax jurisdiction in Ottoman Benghazi, and allows us to imagine how the Sanusiyya—still quite powerful in western Egypt—managed to maintain their regional authority even despite temporary moments of weakness at the hands of Benghazi’s provincial government. It is to these issues that we now turn.

---

62 Ibid., 222, 251, 253.
63 Ibid., 253.
64 Ibid., 207-8, 217, 236, 248.
Internal Border Crossings: Tribes, Movement, and the Limits of Ottoman Sovereignty

Less than a decade after their reconquest of Tripoli and Benghazi from the Qaramanli dynasty—and a mere three years after issuing Mehmed Ali the historic Firman of investiture, thus rendering their lucrative Egyptian province semi-autonomous—the Ottomans were compelled to address the very real fluidity of their internal border between eastern Benghazi and western Egypt. In January 1844, a local Ottoman official in charge of petitions named Amin Efendi received a series of letters from the notable sheikhs of two broad groups of Bedouins—one comprising tribesmen originally from an area known as Zil al-Teyn, in Tripoli; the other comprising Bedouin from the western region of Benghazi. Fourteen years prior, these tribes had “left their homelands and moved to and settled in Egypt” (terk-i evtân ile, Mısır tarafına nakil ve iskân eylemişler). Now, however, these tribes—“choosing to return to their homelands” (vatanlarına evdetlerini ihtiyâr ederek)—decided to petition the Sultan (via the local Ottoman authorities in Tripoli) for official pardon and permission to resettle in the hinterlands of Tripoli and Benghazi, respectively. The lone document I found from this year addressing this issue of cross-border tribal resettlement indicates that the Ottomans deemed the matter extremely important, passing it up through the official channels of authority: Amin Efendi—apparently not wishing to take sole responsibility for any

65 Throughout this section, I use the term “border” only inasmuch as the Ottoman state and Bedouin tribes alike consistently seemed to invoke one, even though its referent—a vague, undefined internal hatt-ı fasıl—was not demarcated or defined in any clear way. This is essentially the beginning of the period in which a clearer sense of what I have been calling “boderedness” emerged throughout the borderland. As I will demonstrate throughout this section, a sense of distinctiveness between two separate political spheres was forged through the mobility of the Bedouins, who effectively reified a border (once it was in their interest to do so) by crossing and invoking one.
decisions of such consequence—sent the sheikhs’ letters to the Mutasarrif of Benghazi, who in turn forwarded them to the Vali of Tripoli.\footnote{BOA: A.MKT 8/67 (Jan. 28, 1844/7 Muharrem 1260).}

Faced with a nearly identical situation a decade later, the Ottomans responded with a similar degree of concern and careful deliberation. That the tribes were freely crossing the border was not really what was at issue, however. Rather, the Ottomans were content enough to permit the tribes to return across the border to their homelands, so long as they could harness the situation in order to begin implementing a new, more legible and stable Bedouin policy in Tripoli and Benghazi. In this respect, the evidence from this period regarding the Ottomans’ tribal policy in these provinces fits seamlessly with the chronology that Kasaba provides for the Empire writ large, according to which the Ottomans began in the middle of the nineteenth century to expand their system of information gathering on nomadic Bedouins, collecting as much data as possible on tribal chiefs and movements for the purposes of security and taxation.\footnote{Kasaba, \textit{Moveable Empire}, 105-7.}

In the middle of 1856, approximately 3,000 Bedouins from several different Benghazi tribes decided to return to their original homelands, after having crossed into and settled in Egypt approximately thirty or thirty-five years before.\footnote{BOA: A.MKT.UM 231/84; A.MKT.MVL 80/95. Given the dating offered by the authors of these two documents, it would appear that this is in fact a different group of Bedouin tribesmen than the one described above in A.MKT 8/67. The Bedouins described here, in the two documents from 1856, would have settled in Egypt between 1237 and 1242 Hicri (between 1822 and 1827), which is—as indicated in the documents—30-35 years before the date in which the documents were written. The Bedouins described in A.MKT 8/67 allegedly migrated to Egypt in 1246 Hicri (1830). The original circumstances motivating these various tribes to resettle in Egypt are unknown.} To this end, they had already moved back across the border and come to rest at a location approximately thirty hours away from the town of Benghazi; as a measure of good will, they had also
willingly paid their taxes “like the rest of the population.” The local authorities accordingly desired to know how these “nomadic” tribesmen (a substantial number of whom were described as cavalry and infantrymen) ought to be treated. The Ottomans’ response to this new phase of cross-border Bedouin resettlement ultimately took two different forms. First, they appealed to the Vali of Egypt (Sa’id Pasha at this time) to inquire whether or not the Egyptian Government would have any objection to the resettlement of the tribes. The Vali’s office assured the Ottoman authorities that there was no objection; in fact, the Egyptians seemed more than happy to be rid of the unruly tribes, who had openly revolted when the Government—not failing to notice that the tribesmen had already “been on Egyptian soil for a considerable length of time”—attempted to settle and sedentarize them. It was, in fact, the Government’s ensuing military response to the tribes’ violent unrest that compelled a large number of Bedouins to seek refuge in their original homelands in Benghazi (though another group allegedly broke off from their fellow tribesmen and settled somewhere in “Egypt”). Given their troubles with these Bedouins from Benghazi, it is unsurprising that the Egyptians sought assurance from the Ottoman authorities that the tribes’ resettlement would be undertaken only on the condition that they never return to Egypt.

The Ottomans also opted to turn the matter over to the highest legal authority in the Empire, the Meclis-i Vâlâ in Istanbul—an action that once again bespeaks the seriousness with which they regarded the issue of tribal resettlement in Tripoli and Benghazi at this time. Upon reviewing the details of the case, the Meclis stipulated that

---

70 BOA: A.MKT.MVL 80/95.
71 BOA: A.MKT.UM 231/84; A.MKT.MVL 80/95. The latter document indicates that the tribes’ rebellion took the form of raiding and plundering, and that some tribesmen had even committed murder.
72 BOA: A.MKT.MVL 80/95.
the Ottomans would pardon the tribes and permit them to resettle in Benghazi, provided that they continue to pay their taxes, promise not to return to Egypt, and “concern themselves strictly with their own affairs and customs.” The Meclis also requested the organization of population registers (nüfûs defterleri) in order to keep track of the resettled Bedouin. The Ottomans ultimately responded favorably to the Egyptian Governor, informing him of the decision of the Meclis-i Vâlâ and assuring him that the tribes would never again “set foot in Egypt.”

There is evidence that the Ottomans’ efforts to resettle at least some of these Bedouin groups in Benghazi and keep closer watch over their activities were successful. In 1864, the Grand Vezir wrote a memorandum to the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi reporting on the findings of an official tour of inspection in the easternmost parts of the sub-province that had recently been commissioned, in order to “investigate the conditions of the country, and to safeguard and reform the ideas of the Bedouin” (teftiş-i ehvâl-i beldân ve temîn ve taslîh-i efkâr-i urban için). According to the Grand Vezir, the Sultan had been very pleased with the results of the measures taken in Benghazi towards “classifying the Bedouins and tribes, and resettling the tribes that had [formerly] migrated to Egypt in their old homes.”

Ostensibly emboldened by the early successes of the revamped tribal policy, the Sultan even asked the Mutasarrıf to select some Bedouin notables from Benghazi to form a new special ceremonial honor guard in Istanbul.

---

73 Ibid.
74 BOA: A.MKT.MHM 292/86 (doc 1).
75 BOA: A.MKT.MHM 292/86 (doc 2). It is unclear from this document whether or not the request was actually implemented. Nonetheless, it remains striking for the specific instructions given for how these notables were to appear once in Istanbul—how they should be clothed and fed. The notion of the Sultan seeking simultaneously to shore up and showcase the allegiance of provincial tribes through official ceremonial has been treated in depth by Selim Deringil in his pathbreaking The Well-Protected Domains. See, also, Rogan, “Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid’s School for Tribes (1892-1907),” IJMES 28 (1996).
In other cases, however, the continued free movement of various Bedouin tribes across the internal border with Egypt would consistently vex the local Ottoman authorities, posing all sorts of challenges to their efforts to administer Tripoli and Benghazi more soundly. Two related issues that emerged in the first decades after the reconquest are particularly revelatory. On one hand, officials realized that the ease with which local Bedouin tribes could slip across the border had serious repercussions on their ability to collect taxes—a major problem for them given the habitual precariousness of the finances of both districts, Benghazi in particular. On the other hand, the Ottomans often found themselves hard pressed to deal effectively with the matter of internecine conflict between groups of Benghazi and Bedouin tribes living in Egypt, which typically took the form of cross-border raiding and theft.

One such case encompassing both issues began with the activities of approximately 700 Mogharba tribesmen from the environs of Sirte (“a vast territory in the middle of Tripoli and Benghazi”). Around 1854, according to a report tendered by the Egyptian Governor Sa‘id Pasha, the Mogharba tribesmen had been forced to abandon their homes in Sirte due to the incidence of crushing scarcity and dearth in the region; in turn, they had managed to retreat all the way to the Sudan. In consequence of their departure, the arrears from their unpaid taxes exceeded 6,000 *keyses*, a sum that the Ottoman authorities in Tripoli certainly wished to collect. In order to begin redressing

---

76 Although it seems very plausible that the issue of cross-border tax evasion was one of the key motivating factors for the Ottomans’ decision to undertake their particularly brutal tax campaigns in Benghazi in the 1880s and 1890s, it has not been mentioned by Le Gall or Anderson. Instead, Le Gall first mentions cross-border tribal resettlement as a response to Reşid’s campaigns.

the issue, the Governor of Tripoli at the time, Osman Paşa, had managed to achieve some sort of reconciliation and convince a group of the tribesmen to return to Sirte.78

The Mogharba Bedouins were not so compliant once back in their home territory, however. Shortly after their return, they crossed over to the Egyptian side of the border and raided four tribes79 located there, stealing approximately 2,500 camels from them. Making matters worse, ever since this wanton act of plunder, the tribesmen had been living “in a state of nomadism, and in a mode of savagery and brigandage” (hal-i bedeviyette ve meslek-i vahşet ve şakavette).80 According to the text of an official report (mazbata) submitted to Istanbul by Tripoli’s local administrative council in 1859, the authorities of the province finally decided (after several years had already passed) to take decisive action against the Mogharba. They cited two main reasons for this decision: first, the fact that “the Bedouins of both sides are subjects of the imperial Sultanate, and are under the shadow of the Sultan’s protection” (iki taraf urbani saye-i şahânede müstazill teba’a-yi sultanat-i seniyeden bulundukları); and second, the fear that the Mogharba’s hostile activities were “causing damage to the security of their neighbors” (hemcivârlarının selb-i emniyetlerini mûcib olarak).81 The council’s contention here that the Ottoman Government had a responsibility towards the security and well-being of Bedouin tribes on the Egyptian side of the border is particularly striking given the unstated political subtext: although Egypt was still officially an Ottoman province (albeit

78 BOA: A.MKT.UM 371/57; see also A.MKT.UM 384/54 for another document that confirms this account (and is in many respects a verbatim rendition).
79 The tribal names are hard to read with clarity, and are unknown to me. My best guesses, however, are: the Cevâbir, Rebâya, Samlûs, and Cedâvîk tribes.
80 BOA: A.MKT.UM 371/57. The language of this document of course clearly parallels evidence adduced by Selim Deringil in his seminal essay on the Ottomans’ civilizing discourse vis-à-vis those tribes living in “a state of nomadism and savagery” within Tripoli and Benghazi (among other remote Arab provinces). I discuss this document further in the next section of this chapter.
81 BOA: A.MKT.UM 371/57.
a semi-autonomous one), the protocol for the actual practice of Ottoman sovereignty and jurisdiction in Egypt was extremely murky. As such, this and subsequent border cases I will examine below represent key moments in which we can glimpse the ambiguities embedded in the Ottoman-Egyptian relationship after 1841 being actively worked out on the ground.

In order to set matters straight, the Vali of Tripoli and one local Council member named Haci Ahmed Kumûdu accompanied the Sheikhs of the four aggrieved tribes from the Egyptian side of the border to Sirte. Once there, with the assistance of the local Kol Ağası, Süleyman Efendi, as well as some officials from the town of Khoms, the appointed messengers delivered the “necessary warnings” (*tenbihat-i muktaziye*) to Mogharba leader Ali Latboş and other notable sheikhs in the Sirte region. Things went sour, however, when it came to the issue of recovering the camels for the Egyptian sheikhs. A total of 76 camels deemed to be originally from their herds—some of which had been recognized by their distinguishing marks (“nişanlardan tanıyarak”)—were given back to them. But as recompense for the vast remainder of the animals owed to them, the Egyptian sheikhs actually took a large number of camels from the Ottoman authorities and at once withdrew with their tribes into the desert.\(^{82}\)

This new incidence of camel theft, this time at the Ottomans’ own expense, inevitably drew the local authorities deeper into the conflict. At first they considered the possibility of taking military measures against the Bedouins, and began to brainstorm a suitable strategy. Several factors complicated the issue, however. First, it was going to be particularly difficult to pursue these Bedouins in light of the fact that they had “no

\(^{82}\) BOA: A.MKT.UM 371/57. The language of the document makes it clear that the Egyptian Sheikhs had now stolen from the Ottomans, referred to as “us” (“*bizden külliyetli deve almış idi*”).
place or home” and were “roaming around nomadically inside a vast desert—exceeding 400 hours in terms of latitude and longitude—and reaching as far as the Sudan” (yersiz ve yurtsuz olarak, bedeviyetle Sudan kitasına müntehi tûlen ve ‘arzan dört yüz saatlikten vâsi’ bir çöl içinde cevelân etmekte oldukları). Moreover, according to the text of the mazbata, the Council members felt that “the moment they [the Bedouins] heard of any plans to send troops” from Benghazi, they would merely retreat further into the desert. Consequently, there “would be no use” pursuing them from only one direction. Instead, the mission required an all-out “three-pronged” siege—coordinated from “Benghazi to the East; Fezzan to the South; Khoms from the West”—until the Bedouins could be “cornered in one place” (bir mahalde sıkıştırılınca kadar).83

More than the military logistics, the local authorities were also extremely concerned about coming up with the requisite funds to cover what they estimated would be an unusually expensive mission. The Sahara was once again the culprit here: since their campaign against the tribes would take place in “a vast desert devoid of water and cultivation (su ve şenlikten hâli badiye-i vâsi’ye),” it would be particularly difficult and costly to transport food and drink, and to supply other necessary provisions to the troops. Ultimately, the local authorities—fully aware that they were on their own in resolving this matter, since they would receive no financial assistance from the central government—decided against the large-scale military campaign they had initially envisaged on the grounds that it was simply too expensive. Instead, they opted to pursue a course alternating “between threat and reconciliation” (tahdit ve telîf arasinda); failing that, it was their hope that they would be able to entrap the Mogharba the moment they returned to their home turf. The matter was still unresolved at the time of drafting the

---

83 BOA: A.MKT.UM 371/57.
mazbata, although the Vali of Tripoli—Ahmet İzzet Paşa—assured the Grand Vezir that the local authorities would not abandon the issue, and that “serious attention and effort will be given to recovery of the stolen camels and mîrî funds.”

Reading between the lines of the mazbata, it is clear that one key issue connected to the question of Ottoman jurisdiction goes unmentioned. Even though the Council initially felt that the Ottoman Government had a responsibility towards (and authority over) the Bedouin population living on the Egyptian side of the border—after all they, too, were still subjects of the Sultan—the military action they had planned but were unable to finance was always contingent upon the disobedient Bedouins being pursued inside the bounds of the Benghazi or Tripoli hinterlands—in other words, before they effectively crossed over into Sudan (or Egypt, for that matter). Moreover, once the officials abandoned the military option, their only recourse was to wait for the moment in which the tribesmen in question came directly back to the Tripoli side of the border (“berilere doğru geldikleri anda”). Although İzzet and the authors of the mazbata do not come out and say it, what seems implicit in the course of action they ultimately adopted was their inability to follow their problems across the internal border into Egypt. This is what possibly explains İzzet’s continued correspondence with Sa’id Pasha in Egypt, which he mentions towards the end of his memo to the Grand Vezir.

Another episode of cross-border tribal violence that occurred three years after the Mogharba incident serves to underscore the fundamental limitations of Ottoman authority and jurisdiction along and especially across its internal border with Egypt. At the same time, it illuminates the degree to which the free movement of Bedouins in both directions

---

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
across the border—as well as the various social networks linking many of these Bedouin groups together—posed unique challenges to Ottoman efforts to firm up their administration of Benghazi.

In 1857, a group of Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin—crossed into Benghazi from Egypt and raided and plundered the local population in various parts of the sub-province; they also attacked a postal delivery convoy somewhere on the road between Benghazi and Tripoli. By all accounts, the damage done by the violent actions of these Awlad ‘Ali “brigands” was severe, “unleashing a state of total destruction on the local inhabitants” (ahaliye isâli dest-i hasâr etmekte). When the attackers learned of the Ottoman local authorities’ plans to move against them and take punitive measures, however, they managed to flee back across the border to Egypt and consequently avoided any punishment.

This situation put the local government in Benghazi in a serious bind. On one hand, as the Vali of Tripoli warned (summarizing an official report from Benghazi’s Administrative Council), if no action was taken against the Awlad ‘Ali brigands, the local population in Benghazi “would fall into a state of devastation.” On the other hand, the local authorities were fully aware in this case that they had no de facto jurisdiction in Egyptian territory, where a different set of legal conditions prevailed, and therefore could not pursue the Awlad ‘Ali across the border and attempt to arrest them there. The Ottoman officials thus found themselves powerless to prosecute a series of crimes committed in nominally Ottoman sovereign territory for the simple reason that the brigands had taken full advantage of the legal authority vacuum that the internal border

---

86 In the document relating this case, much like in the above-mentioned documents recounting the matter of Bedouin resettlement, the Ottomans pointed out that the Awlad ‘Ali were originally from Benghazi but had long since settled in Egypt (specifically in Bahera and Aqaba). See BOA: İ.MTZ(05) 18/668 (docs. 6, 7).
87 BOA: İ.MTZ(05) 18/668 (docs. 6, 8).
88 BOA: İ.MTZ(05) 18/668 (doc. 6).
had effectively created. Fully aware of the strategic advantages of invoking an internal border, these Awlad ‘Ali Bedouins cleverly sought refuge back in semi-autonomous Egypt where they knew the arms of Ottoman justice could not reach them.

Determined not to let the matter slide, however, the local Ottoman officials in Benghazi and Tripoli turned to the Egyptian Government for assistance. Osman Paşâ—the very same Vali of Tripoli who had been dealing with the Mogharba tribesmen in Sirte a few years prior—sent two different letters to the Governor of Egypt (still Sa‘id Pasha) imploring him to take the requisite punitive measures against the Awlad ‘Ali brigands on the Ottomans’ behalf. In short, if the officials in Benghazi were unable to arrest and sentence the criminals, their only hope was that the Egyptians would do it for them. The matter was ultimately passed on to the office of the Grand Vezir, who—apparently still uncertain that the Egyptians would comply with Osman Paşâ’s request—asked for a Sultanic decree that would legally compel Sa‘id to take disciplinary action against the brigands. The sheer existence of the İrade file from which I have culled the details of this case indicates that the decree was in fact issued; at the same time, the lack of any ensuing paperwork on the matter makes it difficult to know if Sa‘id actually followed through with his Sultanic obligation. If İrades were intended to be legally binding in theory, it is possible that they were not always enforceable in practice in Egypt at this time—especially when they concerned issues taking place in the remote reaches of

---

89 BOA: İ.MTZ(05) 18/668 (doc. 8).

90 It should be noted that this is actually a distinctive form of İrade file. The abbreviation İ.MTZ indicates that these decrees pertained to only a handful of special “privileged” (mümtâze) provinces—privileged for enjoying some degree of autonomy. Other bureaucratic conventions reinforced the notion that Egypt was unlike other fully sovereign Ottoman provinces. For example, Egypt was still referred to as an “evâlet” well past the time at which other provinces had become vilayets. Also, Egypt was often construed as a “hütt,” which was another distinctively ambiguous geographic designation connoting a sense of otherness—of the territory being not fully Ottoman.
Egyptian sovereignty, and thus outside the immediate concern of the Egyptian Government.

If the Ottomans were thus compelled to struggle with the limitations of their legal jurisdiction in Egypt in this case, the Awlad ‘Ali episode highlights yet another major implication of the de facto authority vacuum that prevailed along the internal border between Benghazi and Egypt—and a situation that the Bedouin tribesmen also knew precisely how to exploit to their advantage. In a second report to the Grand Vezir, Osman Paşa lamented that the Egyptian Awlad ‘Ali—who were exempt from paying fiscal taxes under Egyptian law\textsuperscript{91}—had managed to provoke their kinsmen on the Benghazi side of the border not to pay the taxes they owed to the Ottoman Government. Consequently, when it came time to collect the taxes that were due that year, many of the Awlad ‘Ali in Benghazi fled across the border and took up residence with their fellow tribesmen in different parts of Egypt. The coffers of the Benghazi government had taken a direct hit as a result, as officials watched with dismay as the fiscal deficit rose to uncomfortable heights.\textsuperscript{92} Once again, it seems, the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouins had proven to the Ottoman authorities that they knew how to game the system: when it was in their interest to do so, the Bedouins tacitly invoked—and effectively reified—the border by crossing over it into the safe haven that was semi-autonomous Egypt, where they knew an entirely different tax code and justice system were in effect.

This would not be the last time that the Ottomans appealed to the Egyptians for help in dealing with an instance of criminal activity at the hands of the Awlad ‘Ali. Three decades later, in July 1888, Awlad ‘Ali tribesmen in Egypt stole a number of

\textsuperscript{91} The evolution of the Egyptian state’s policy of Bedouin tax exemption was explored above in Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{92} BOA: İ.MTZ(05) 18/668 (doc. 7).
animals that had been transported across the border by a merchant named Miftah Mahluf and his companions. In response, the Ottoman Interior Ministry drafted a memo to its equivalent institution in Egypt, requesting that the Egyptian authorities work to restore the plundered animals, and also to take the necessary steps so that similar incidences of theft would not happen again. Again, the Ottomans could not effectively look out for the legal interests of their subjects in Benghazi so long as the perpetrators of the crimes were safely ensconced on the Egyptian side of the border; they required the Egyptian authorities to step in on their behalf, though there is no evidence that this ever happened to a satisfactory degree.

The nagging potential of the porous Egyptian border to create new challenges and headaches for the Ottoman officials in Benghazi never abated. If, as we have seen, developments in Egypt in the 1840s and early-1850s had induced some Bedouin tribes to seek permission to resettle in their original homelands in Benghazi and Tripoli—which must have offered the Bedouins comparatively favorable living conditions at that time—the last decades of the nineteenth century seemed to be marked by steady Bedouin flight back in the other direction, as a direct result of the aforementioned brutal tax campaigns of Haci Reşid Paşa deep into the Benghazi hinterland. One additional border episode from 1896 is particularly illustrative of the profound sense of anxiety with which the Ottomans continued to regard the issue of Bedouin tax evasion, and also the general confusion that surrounded their attempts to come to grips with the authority vacuum that had arisen along this internal border, which the tribes were, as ever, completely mindful of and more than happy to exploit.

93 BOA: DH.MKT 1524/92.
The problems began when several Bedouin tribes from the districts of Tobruk and Bomba (both now subsumed within the administrative subdivision, or kaza, of Derna) decided to cross into Egypt in order to avoid paying their state taxes. While en route, they attacked some tribes living very close to the border on the Benghazi side, pillaging animals and other belongings, and even committing several murders. As an initial response to this latest surge of tribal violence, which severely destabilized conditions in the region, the Ottomans moved quickly to appoint a team of officials to head to the border in order to attempt to arrest the murderers and collect the large sum of Bedouin tax arrears owed to the local government.94

More than this, however, the recent episode generated significant discussion between Ottoman authorities at various levels of the bureaucracy concerning the issue of how to raise the revenues so sorely needed in Benghazi, especially given that the fiscal consequences of the Bedouins’ tactic of absconding to Egypt had become particularly dire of late. In a letter to the Interior Ministry in Istanbul, for example, the Benghazi Administrative Council explained that—upon carefully examining the sanjak’s Bedouin tax registers—they had discovered that “more than one third of the Bedouins from the district95” were actually currently residing in Egypt.96 This was, of course, a strikingly large proportion, and the local officials in turn felt that immediate action was required in order to counter the detrimental impact of this substantially reduced Bedouin tax base.

The arguments adduced by different officials during the ensuing deliberations not only reveal a great deal about how the Ottomans perceived the limitations of their own

94 BOA: DH.TMIK.S 14/4 (doc. 4).
95 It is unclear if the author of the document is referring here solely to Bomba and Tobruk, the kaza of Derna, or else a wider swath of tribal Benghazi.
96 BOA: DH.TMIK.S 14/4 (doc. 3).
authority over the tribes even within Benghazi, but also—again—clearly underscore the powerlessness they felt in the face of Bedouin flight to Egypt. In order to move as quickly as possible to remedy the core problem, the Ottomans made a clear distinction between two types of Bedouins from among those currently based in Egypt: there were “those who had left behind land and property” (arâzi ve enlâka munsarif olanlar), who would henceforth be considered “tantamount to settled” (meskûn hükmünde); and then there were those “unsettled” Bedouins who were “not obliged to pay [state] taxes.”

According to the extremely revealing text of a report that the Grand Vezir sent to the Interior Ministry, this second group of nomadic “unsettled” Bedouins had actually never been required to pay the state (mîrî) tax, but rather had only ever paid a 9% duty on the proceeds from their trade in animal products; consequently, it was impossible to pursue them for their arrears. Instead, the Ottomans targeted the group of so-called “settled” Bedouins, threatening to confiscate and sell the property they had left behind upon crossing over into Egypt, in order to compensate for the taxes they owed. This was in effect the only real recourse for the Ottomans given that these tribesmen had once again managed to slip into the cross-border authority vacuum. After all, the Grand Vezir lamented—summarizing what he had learned in a report from Egypt’s own High Commissioner (Fevkalâde Komiser)—given that there was no law in Egypt granting officials the authority to collect any taxes from Bedouin tribes, “the Egyptian

---

97 BOA: DH.TMIK.S 14/4 (doc. 4). The word for taxes used here is vergi.
98 Aside from more indirect forms of taxation such as toll taxes (which I examine in the following section), the Ottoman Government generally collected four different types of taxes from its population in Tripoli and Benghazi: the state or mîrî tax, collected on the basis of income; the tithe (paid in kind); the livestock tax; and (when applicable) a building or property tax (amlak). From this document, then, it seems as if officials were conceding that the unsettled Bedouin tribesmen had only typically been responsible for the livestock tax, though as we will see below, this too seemed to go largely unpaid (which explains the introduction of the livestock toll). For a breakdown of the taxes, see De Agostini, Popolazioni della Cirenaica, 10-11.
99 BOA: DH.TMIK.S 14/4 (doc. 4).
Government would not be able to do anything.” It was, moreover, not even certain that the Egyptian authorities could help the Ottomans bring the perpetrators of the latest Bedouin crimes to justice: the Egyptian High Commissioner had told the Grand Vezir that it would be necessary for him first to have the names of all the attackers in order to be able to arrest them in accordance with Egyptian law; and it does not seem from the evidence that the Ottoman authorities were able to provide this requisite information.

Nearly a year later, however, the Ottoman authorities had started to advocate for a very different response to the fiscal crisis that the tax evasion of so many tribesmen had engendered. Local authorities still upheld the general principle that they should implement a de facto absentee property tax—that they had the right to sell any lands and property that the more prosperous of the tribesmen now resident in Egypt had abandoned. But now they were arguing that a new, more sound basis for tax collection—one that actually “was possible to implement”—needed to be established, “in order to prevent a set of harmful occurrences” from besetting the province. Ultimately, the officials argued, they would need to devise the means for “bringing the aforementioned Bedouins all back to their homelands” (urban-i markûmenin tamâmıyla vatınlarına celb ve mu’âvedetleri). There was, in their view, “no other measure that could be envisaged” than the Bedouins’ gradual return to Benghazi, where they would once again be under unequivocal Ottoman sovereignty. Only this way would they be able to make up for the huge deficit caused by the 1/3 absentee rate among the tribesmen—again, because the Ottomans realized they had absolutely no legal means or authority to go after the guilty
parties themselves, or else force the Egyptians to pursue Bedouin taxation on their behalf, so long as the tribes remained on the eastern side of the border.\textsuperscript{100}

Try as they might, the Ottomans could never escape the vicious cycle that their tax policy in Benghazi had engendered. Desperate to raise revenues for this remote, habitually underfunded province, successive Ottoman governors sought to force the largely tribal population to pay its fair share, which in turn prompted many of the tribes simply to cross the border to evade taxation; seeking to make up for this lost tax base, the Government attempted to exact inordinately steep taxes on those tribes it could reach, which only had the unintended result of driving even more tribes across the border. Early in 1899, many tribes from the area around Tobruk emigrated to the Egyptian side of the border as a response of the Benghazi Government’s intentions to force them to pay the same taxes as the sedentary population.\textsuperscript{101} Similarly, a section of the ‘Abeydat tribe near Derna set off for Egyptian soil in protest of renewed “pressure of taxation” as well as the purported abuses of some tax collectors; they decided to move to Egypt after hearing “favorable accounts” from the Awlad ‘Ali in Egypt concerning “their present position and their satisfaction with the Egyptian Government.”\textsuperscript{102} According to British officials monitoring the affair, the Benghazi governor sent two pious Muslims to the ‘Abeydat in order to persuade them not to resettle in Egypt but only “partly succeeded.”\textsuperscript{103}

In sum, despite all their efforts since the early 1880s to solidify their authority over the province’s various tribes, Benghazi officials still struggled with the basic task of raising tax revenues from them even into the first decade of the twentieth century. One

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[100] BOA: DH.TMIK.S 14/4 (doc. 3).
\item[101] NA: FO 195/2054 (Alvarez memo, Mar. 9, 1899).
\item[102] NA: FO 195/2054 (Alvarez memo, Feb. 27, 1899).
\item[103] NA: FO 195/2054 (Alvarez memo, Apr. 24, 1899).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
final document from 1902 further underscores this point, exemplifying how Bedouin flight across the internal border to Egypt remained one of the major issues plaguing the local government. The document—a memo from the Ottoman Minister of Finance in Istanbul to the Grand Vezir—serves in part as a summary of decades of Bedouin tax policy in Benghazi. According to the Minister, a fixed tax had been levied in principle on the various tribes of different districts in Benghazi—including the Bara'sa and the Jedabiya tribes—for the past thirty-five years, without the policy ever being amended (te’dîl görmemesinden). This did not mean, however, that the taxes could actually be collected in practice: “some of these tribes were dispersed”—presumably to Egypt or other locales outside firm Ottoman jurisdiction—whereas “others lost their wealth” and were thus too impoverished to pay. Further in the document, the Finance Minister broke the general problem down into four different scenarios, all of which had contributed to the putative tribal tax having gone unpaid: some tribes from the various districts in Benghazi had “joined up with other tribes in the sub-province” (ostensibly confounding the tax registers and making themselves difficult to locate); some had “migrated to other places” or else were simply “unaccounted for” (again, the specter of cross-border tax evasion to Egypt seems implied here); some were “unable to settle their debts on account of their being in a state of poverty”; and, finally, some tribes had “claimed that they were exempt from taxation.”

The rest of the document outlined the Finance Minister’s proposals for dealing with each of these scenarios. Those Bedouins who had joined or latched onto other tribes within Benghazi should still be required to pay their shares of the “tribe tax” (kabileye âit

---

104 The document does not mention if these claims were made on the basis of affiliation with the Sanusiyya, but this would not be implausible.
105 BOA: DH.MKT 489/56 (doc. 22).
vergi) to the sheikhs of their original tribes (who were the ones responsible for collecting the sums from individuals and turning them over to the Ottoman authorities). The Bedouins who moved to other regions—regardless of where they ended up—should pay taxes based on the land and property they left behind. This stipulation echoes the discussion from five years prior of how to raise revenue from the so-called “settled” or propertied Bedouins, but it stops short of recommending the forcible sale of these tribes’ abandoned lands and property. Those Bedouins who were too poor to pay—and who had no land or property—would have their shares of the debt waived. Finally, the Finance Minister required those Bedouin who were claiming all-out tax exemption to adduce the relevant documentation to prove their case.106

A Tax by Any Other Name: Cross-Border Commerce and the Derbend-i Defne Duty

Despite the damage done by this constant spate of border troubles, in one key respect, at least, the Ottomans managed to capitalize on the steady movement of various groups and tribes across the internal border between Egypt and Benghazi. For years, in fact, the local Ottoman authorities had been enforcing a sort of informal customs tax or toll on all livestock transported by land into Egypt from Benghazi. This duty—known as the Derbend-i Defne Parasi for the mountain pass, located at the small frontier town of Defne, through which all livestock en route to Egypt needed to traverse107—had officially replaced the Ottoman “livestock tax” (agnâm resmi) in Benghazi and Tripoli in the early-1860s.108 Ever since, the local Ottoman authorities had seized upon the opportunity to

106 Ibid.
108 BOA: DH.MKT 489/56, (doc. 3—Foreign Ministry to Interior Ministry, Apr. 16, 1902/7 Muharrem 1320).
levy this tax on the lucrative cross-border traffic in animals,\textsuperscript{109} although not without its share of controversy. As Ottoman and British archival evidence makes clear, the local practice of the Derbend-i Define tax can be seen as another case study in border ambiguity, raising important questions about the practice of Ottoman sovereignty along the Egyptian borderland. At the same time, a consideration of this border duty throws into high relief the ways that local Ottoman authorities in Benghazi sometimes acted autonomously (without official sanction from Istanbul), as well as the potential consequences of such actions. Although these matters were not settled by the end of century, the local officials’ insistence on collecting the duty in spite of the frequent complaints against it underscores the importance of cross-border commercial linkages with Egypt in this period to the provincial government and local actors alike—a fact that is all too often ignored in the historiography on Ottoman Libya, focused as it is on tax reforms strictly internal to the provinces of Tripoli and Benghazi.

As far as the Ottomans were concerned, the Derbend-i Define toll—set at 3 or 4 kuruş per animal—was but the latest instantiation of the age-old tax on animal husbandry in the region. It was levied on all animals crossing into Egypt from Benghazi by land; by

\textsuperscript{109} This route from Benghazi to Egypt, along the coast, constitutes one of the two major caravan routes that were at stake as the borderland emerged as a zone of contestation (the other was the north/south route from Wadai to the town of Benghazi). According to Ahmida, the tribal population in Benghazi had long seen various locales in western Egypt, as well as Alexandria, as the natural markets for their goods. In 1891, for instance, tribes from Benghazi exported 920 camels, 248 horses, and 53,131 sheep (worth a total of 51,600 pounds) to Egypt. In 1900, 160,000 sheep were exported to Egypt and Malta; this number increased to 200,000 in 1901 and 300,000 in 1902. According to a War Office intelligence memo from 1912, 500,000 sheep from Tripoli and Benghazi were imported into Egypt the previous year (NA: WO 106/214). Ahmida adds that this already steady traffic in livestock only benefited from the social connectivity that the rise of the Sanusiyya fostered in this borderland region. See Ahmida, \textit{Making of Modern Libya}, 81.
contrast, animals shipped by sea—which was the preferred means of transport by European merchants—were not taxed.110

In March 1883, the Ottoman authorities in Benghazi informed the European consular corps there that, henceforth the Derbend-i Defne tax would be expanded to include all non-Ottoman subjects engaged in the local animal trade. Moreover, by virtue of a decision taken by Benghazi’s Administrative Council, a new Commission would be formed to issue mandatory transit permits (tezkere), the neglect of which would result in a substantial fine. The British Proconsul in Benghazi at the time, Cecil Wood, adamantly refused to accept the revamped tax law, arguing that it contravened Article 11 of an Ottoman-European commercial treaty signed at Kanlıca on April 29, 1861, “wherein it is declared that all such taxes and monopolies on the transit by land of goods and animals [on Ottoman territory] are abolished.”111

Moreover, Wood was able to claim that the Derbend-i Defne tax had actually been “declared both arbitrary and illegal in 1878” by two former mutasarrıfs of Benghazi, on the basis that the tax had never fulfilled its purported main function. He writes: “This tax dates from the time of the abolition of inland custom houses during the Mutasarrıfship of Halil Pasha, who recommended to the Sublime Porte the establishment of a fort and garrison at Defne to protect the exporters of cattle (etc.) on their way to Egypt, who

110 BOA: DH.MKT 489/56 (doc. 3). One document from 1865 offers some evidence of the possible origins of the sea route as an option for Benghazi livestock merchants; even if it only indicates a small window in which non-European traders were allowed to move animals by sea, it is still illuminating in its illustration of how closely the Ottomans were tracking cross-border traffic in livestock. A petition raised to the central Ottoman authorities by livestock traders in Benghazi and Tripoli made it clear that—because of some “recently adopted ban” (the details of which are, alas, unstated)—they had been unable to move and sell their sheep, goats, and oxen; as a result, they argued, the large quantity of animals left in their hands were in danger of dying. The Ottoman government instructed the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi to grant these traders temporary permission to transport their animals by sea to Egypt and Malta (their two main markets). The authorization was granted for only a month. See: BOA: A.MKT.MHM 341/18.

111 NA: FO 195/1446 (Wood report, Mar. 18, 1883).
would pay a certain amount in return for the protection thus afforded to them.” But, in light of the fact that “neither fort nor garrison have ever existed at Defne,” according to Wood, the levy had no legal basis: “The Arabs have been forced to pay the tax for the protection” that the Ottomans neglected to provide them. Ultimately, the European consular corps in Benghazi mounted “united pressure” on the Sublime Porte and succeeded in compelling the Ottoman government to condemn the actions of the local authorities as illegal and discontinue the duty.

It was not long, however, before the local authorities defied these orders from Istanbul: within a few years at most, they re-established the Derbend-i Defne tax. British Proconsul Justin Alvarez, who took over the Benghazi post in 1890, chalked this up to the persistence of “vested interests in corruption”; an official in the Foreign Office also noted that the duty had now been re-imposed “apparently on the sole authority of the local governor.” In another equally pejorative memo drafted a month later, Alvarez provided some more insight into what the local authorities might have been up to. In his view, the Ottoman Governor of Benghazi had “practically abdicated from the cares of Government in favour of the Muhassebejy [sic], or Provincial Accountant.” In other words, seen from the perspective of the province’s chief finance official, there was a perfectly reasonable explanation for why officials in Benghazi would have opted to resume collecting the Derbend-i Defne tax in defiance of Istanbul’s wishes: it was a proven and reliable source of revenue in a province habitually hampered by

112 Ibid.
114 Proconsul Justin Alvarez noted that it had been re-established “some years before” his arrival in Benghazi, which took place in the middle of 1890.
inadequate funds.\textsuperscript{118} It did not matter to local officials that Benghazi’s animal merchants were extremely dissatisfied with the duty, or that the local population had, according to Alvarez, “for a long time groaned under the [duty’s] illegal imposition” to the point that they had even telegraphed the Sultan and the Porte several times “begging for its removal.”\textsuperscript{119} The Ottoman officials understood that they would always be able to raise a substantial amount in revenue from the Derbend-i Defne duty, legal or no: the cross-border trade in animals was so vital for such a large chunk of Benghazi’s population that they really had no choice but to pay the tax begrudgingly.

More than this, even, it seems that the collection of the Derbend-i Defne duty constituted one of the local Ottoman authorities’ paramount marks of sovereignty in the region. If they found themselves largely powerless to control the Bedouin population of Benghazi’s interior—especially given the fact that the mobility of these tribes in the face of ramped up taxation efforts threw the Ottomans’ lack of sovereign capabilities across the border in Egypt into high relief—the Benghazi authorities managed instead with the Defne toll to exercise sovereignty by controlling one key node of commerce. In this way, the Ottomans established a mark of sovereignty quite distinct from the territorial mode, defined as uniform control over a bounded political space. Rather, the Derbend-i Defne tax represents something more akin to Hugo Grotius’s concept of jurisdictional sovereignty, which he contrasted with the idea of territorial “dominion” or ownership of space. As Lauren Benton demonstrates, Grotius developed his concept of jurisdiction as

\textsuperscript{118} It should be pointed out that the introduction of similar such internal tolls or excise taxes in the Hasa region of Arabia—against reformer Midhat Paşa’s will, and in violation of his promises to the local population—was a major source of revenue in that similarly cash-strapped province. According to Anscombe, by 1889-90, “over one third of Hasa’s government income came from such ‘assorted taxes and revenues,’” and yet the imposition of these levies became one of the biggest grievances of local tribes and merchants—and, in turn, one of the policies most damaging to Ottoman legitimacy in the Gulf region. See Anscombe,\textit{Ottoman Gulf}, 58, 63, 168.

\textsuperscript{119} NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez to Lansdowne, Mar. 3, 1902).
a way to resolve the issue of how sovereignty could be conceived in the vast open spaces of the ocean, which no one imperial power could possibly “own.” Jurisdiction implied first and foremost the ability of sovereign agents to police and control the movement of people and their goods through these spaces that they did not (or could not) own. I argue that it is instructive to see the deserts comprising this borderland region as akin to the wide open ocean spaces that Grotius contemplated; and so the Derbend-i Define duty, in turn, enabled the Ottomans to exercise a particular mark of sovereignty that hinged on monitoring and controlling movement at one key node through which merchants needed to pass. In this one case at least, the fact that the Ottomans could not effectively administer wide swaths of their own territory did not matter so long as they could keep tabs of the movements of those segments of their population engaged in this lucrative livestock trade. As I will show in Chapter 5, this way of conceiving sovereignty clashed with the strict territorial sovereignty that the Italians desired to impose over the lucrative caravan routes in their would-be colonial domain in Benghazi.

The issue of the Derbend-i Define duty’s legality came to a head once again in the aftermath of several incidents involving European merchants early in 1902. Around this time—due to increased freight costs for animals as well as the “imposition of quarantine at Malta and elsewhere on vessels” engaged in trade at Alexandria—European merchants had been compelled to abandon the sea option and use the overland route to Egypt instead. In one case, a British subject was charged four piasters per sheep

---


and three per goat at Defne as he sought to move 1,874 animals overland for sale in Alexandria; the Derbend-i Defne tax was also similarly claimed from Italian and French merchants attempting the same journey.\textsuperscript{124}

Subsequently, in late February, the Ottoman memur of Defne—accompanied by a number of troops—stopped a caravan comprising some 1,600 sheep being led overland by the chief shepherd working for a Benghazi merchant and British subject named Joseph Abuharoun. When the shepherd was unable to produce a tezkere proving his authorization to cross the border, the memur declared him a smuggler, seized 300 of the animals, and demanded the payment of a steep fine. Abuharoun later filed an official complaint alleging that—in addition to the 300 cattle confiscated as a penalty—another 140 sheep had been lost en route, due to “robbery in consequence of the confusion produced by the seizure and the detention of three shepherds out of the eight in charge of the flock.”\textsuperscript{125} Abuharoun—wishing to sue for damages—argued defiantly that “any contention on the part of the Benghazi local authority that I have broken any law or regulation by sending my animals from this province into Egypt is fundamentally incorrect.”\textsuperscript{126} Like Wood and Alvarez before him, Abuharoun clung to a defense based on the 1861 Kanlıca treaty, based on which he argued that the Derbend-i Defne tax “is an arbitrary and illegal impost levied without the sanction of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan.”\textsuperscript{127}

In light of these episodes, which the European consulates considered violations of international treaty law, the consular corps of the province once again took the Mutasarrıf

\textsuperscript{124} NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez to Lansdowne, Mar. 3, 1902).
\textsuperscript{125} NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez memo, Apr. 3, 1902).
\textsuperscript{126} NA: FO 101/92 (Statement of Mr. Joseph Abuharoun, May 19, 1902).
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
to task. Over the course of a three-hour meeting, Alvarez and his counterparts from Italy, France, and Austria-Hungary impressed upon the Mutasarrıf the tax’s illegality, and “obtained from him with the greatest difficulty a promise that orders should be given to the Mamur of Defne…to allow all flocks belonging to foreigners to pass freely” as long as the local government was given beforehand a certificate declaring the numbers of the animals and the names of the owners. The Mutasarrıf did not follow through on his promise, however.\textsuperscript{128} In the meantime, while the legality of the Derbend-i Defne tax was once again being examined and debated between European ambassadors and Porte officials far away in Istanbul, the local authorities pressed Abuharoun to pay the money he owed the government “in settlement of any just claim which the Local Authority might have upon him…in the event of the decision that this imposition was a legal tax.”\textsuperscript{129} In November of that year, British and Maltese livestock merchants from Benghazi and Derna approached Alvarez for advice as to whether or not to pursue the overland route for the export of animals to Egypt that season.\textsuperscript{130} The Porte and the European embassies had still not hashed out a decision regarding the legality of the Derbend-i Defne tax, but by that time the issue was practically moot. By the summer of 1902 the politics of the Egyptian-Benghazi internal border were escalating into a new, decidedly more acute phase. This transformation—and the emergence of what would become a complex, multivalent two-decades-long border crisis—will be the subject of Chapter 5. For the remainder of this chapter, however, I will focus on another major issue that plagued Benghazi officials in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century: the Ottomans’ fraught relationship with the Sanusiyya. Examining this relationship others

\textsuperscript{128} NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez to Lansdowne, Mar. 3, 1902).
\textsuperscript{129} NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez memo, July 21, 1902).
\textsuperscript{130} NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez memo, Nov. 19, 1902).
another critical lens through we can observe the crucial interactivity between state and non-state actors that underpinned the contested political dynamics of the borderland as it emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

**Istanbul’s Frenemies: The Ottoman-Sanusi Relationship Revisited**

According to Le Gall, “The history of Ottoman rule in Benghazi in the period 1881-1902 is, above all, an account of the Ottoman Government’s relations with the Sanusiya brotherhood.” Such a claim accords neatly with the general thrust of scholarship on nineteenth-century Libya, which is unanimous in acknowledging the considerable influence that the Brotherhood wielded among the largely tribal population of the region. And yet scholarly interpretations of the precise nature of the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship vary considerably, disagreeing most on whether the two parties were aligned behind a common set of regional interests. In this section, then, I will survey the extant literature on the Ottomans and the Sanusiyya, and then pose some revisions to prevailing conceptions of this elusive historical relationship drawing on new evidence from the Ottoman archives. I will place special emphasis throughout on the geographical dimension of these documents—and the way they reveal the degree to which the Ottomans understood the Brotherhood to be a kinetic cross-border phenomenon with far-reaching regional authority, and not simply as a problem primarily confronting Benghazi’s tax collectors, as Le Gall contends. Ultimately, I argue that the Ottomans consistently walked a fine line between perceiving the Sanusiyya as a serious threat and seeking to harness them as a key ally, but that the geopolitical climate of the 1890s rendered the situation too dangerous to risk antagonizing the Brotherhood in any serious way.

---

131 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 181.
The Isnad and Beyond: The Historiography of the Ottoman-Sanusi Relationship

Le Gall reminds us that the first waves of colonial scholarship on the Sanusiyya—initially by the French in the late-nineteenth century, then by the Italians in the interwar period—continue to define the contours of the debate. Even if later scholars have shed the characterization of the Sanusiyya by authors such as Henri Duveyrier as “fanatic pan-Islamists,” other fundamental aspects of the colonial isnad have managed to endure.132

E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s seminal 1949 study The Sanusi of Cyrenaica provides a crucial bridge between the colonial literature and more modern scholarship, correcting for the pejorative impulses of the earlier waves but perpetuating some other lasting myths about the Brotherhood’s coziness with the Ottoman Government. According to Le Gall, Evans-Pritchard introduced a number of ideas about the symbiotic relationship between the Ottomans and the Sanusiyya that persist even in “the best of modern scholarship.” First is the notion that the two parties “cooperated in a number of spheres, including education and tax collection.” Second is Evans-Pritchard’s claim that “Sanusi goodwill was reinforced by tax-exempt privileges conferred on the tariqa by Sultan Abdülmecid in a firman from ‘about 1856’ and later confirmed by his successor, Sultan Abdülaziz.” On this basis, Le Gall suggests, later generations of scholars reinforced the view that the Ottoman government and Sanusi leadership reached a “modus vivendi” characterized mainly “by the need to cooperate against the threat of an Italian conquest and the danger of French and British expeditions in North Africa and the Sudan, respectively.”133

133 Ibid., 92. On this last point, Le Gall cites B.G. Martin’s Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) and Lisa Anderson’s State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980. Engin Akarlı makes a similar argument in an article on Ottoman military strategies for defending the Libyan provinces. In the face of the threat of Italian occupation, Akarlı writes, the government needed to render these provinces military self-sufficient. To this end, they decided to arm the local populations and “neutralized” the threat of mobilizing the region’s tribes by establishing “close and
Among several other examples one could cite, Lisa Anderson’s well-regarded work from the mid-1980s on state-building in Libya, mentioned above, typifies how many of these earlier ideas concerning the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship go unquestioned in modern scholarship. According to Anderson, the Sanusiyya willingly “cooperated in the Ottoman Government’s forward policy in Africa” during the nineteenth century, providing crucial assistance to the Government in its drive to reform the spheres of education and commerce in Benghazi. Anderson also repeats Evans-Pritchard’s assertions that the Sanusiyya received a “charter” from the Sultan “exempting it from taxes and allowing it to collect a religious tithe from its followers,” and that the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship was solidified in the face of the threat posed by European colonial encroachment. Most striking, however, is Anderson’s argument that the incorporation of Sanusi notables into the urban-based Ottoman administration had the net effect of eradicating local tribal identities in Tripoli and Benghazi so that “by the turn of the century, many prominent Sanusi families were educating their sons ‘a la turque,’ further reducing their reliance on tribal followings to support their claims.”

Le Gall was really the first scholar to break with the accepted wisdom that the Ottomans and the Sanusiyya maintained a symbiotic relationship based on mutual interest and cooperation throughout the late-nineteenth century. Although, like other scholars, Le Gall holds that the main thrust of Ottoman policy in Benghazi in the late-nineteenth century was to establish new ways of controlling and working with the local population mutually beneficial cooperation with leaders of the Sanusi Order.” Engin Akarlı, “Defense of the Libyan Provinces,” 78-9.


136 Ibid., 332.

137 Ibid., 337-8.

138 Ibid, 336.
in Benghazi (as elsewhere in the Arab periphery), he refuses to go along with earlier interpretations that the Sanusiyya were the Ottoman Government’s natural allies in this endeavor. Instead, Le Gall offers a closer look at events in Benghazi in the 1880s and 1890s to demonstrate that the relationship was actually marked by mutual distrust and hostility, and that “for the most part, Ottoman governors in Benghazi viewed their differences with Sanusi leaders and their bedouin constituency as a simple question of subduing an unruly population.”

Le Gall hinges his critique of the remarkably durable isnad of earlier Sanusiyya scholarship on a number of different points. First, he argues that the Sanusiyya never cooperated with the Ottomans in their efforts to collect taxes from Benghazi’s Bedouin tribes, nor would they ever agree to do so on account of key differences between Ottoman/Hanefi and Sanusi/Maliki interpretations of land ownership. Second, he points out that no scholar can actually prove that the Sanusiyya ever received a firman from the Sultan affording them either tax exempt status or the right to collect waqfs from their Zawiya properties. Third, he claims that the looming threat of European penetration in northeastern Africa might have “provided the Ottomans with rhetorical ammunition for dealing with the Sanusiyya but that other substantive issues in the province of Benghazi were of more immediate concern to the two parties and of greater importance in molding their relations.”

Fourth, he suggests that even if the Ottomans were willing to test the waters with the Sanusi leadership earlier on in their reform project in Benghazi, certainly by around 1890 they basically saw either no possibility or else little need of trying to woo the Brotherhood. Finally, Le Gall argues that by the turn of the century—and certainly

---

139 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 248.
after the death of Muhammad al-Mahdi in 1902—the Ottomans had, to a large extent, managed to “demoralize” the Sanusiyya and their Bedouin followers, and that only in the Young Turk period after 1908 would the Ottomans again turn to the Sanusiyya for potential support.¹⁴¹

There has been a surprising dearth of scholarship on the Sanusiyya since the mid-1980s, when both Le Gall and Anderson were writing in depth about the nature of the Ottoman reforms in the Libyan provinces. Two more recent works stand out, however. First, in his study of colonialism and state formation in Libya, Ali Abdullatif Ahmida offers interpretations of the Sanusi Order that at once accord with and diverge from Le Gall’s revisionism. On one hand, Ahmida follows the old isnad that Le Gall rejects by invoking the Sanusiyya’s tax exemption by Sultanic decree after 1856. On the other hand, Ahmida acknowledges that “Ottoman policy toward the Sanusi was suspicious,”¹⁴² in no small part due to the ways in which the Brotherhood had actually unified the Bedouin tribes of Benghazi in resistance against Ottoman tax collection efforts.¹⁴³ Although he might overstate the degree to which the Sanusiyya had become a bona fide “state” in the late-nineteenth century, he seems to be on safe ground when reconstructing an expansive cross-border Sanusi system that the Ottomans were at odds to penetrate.¹⁴⁴

Second, Selim Deringil revisits the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship in an article on the Hamidian state’s civilizing discourse towards the nomadic populations in the Empire’s peripheral provinces. In stark contrast to Le Gall’s insistence that the Ottomans

¹⁴³ Ibid., 85.
¹⁴⁴ Ahmida’s emphasis on Benghazi’s natural linkages with Western Egypt is particularly compelling and somewhat unique. He argues, for example, how many Benghazi Bedouin tribes saw various locales in Egypt as the natural markets for their goods; and how the Sanusiyya managed to capitalize on these linkages to arrogate authority throughout the borderland.
never saw the Sanusiyya as legitimate or reliable partners in their project of reform in Benghazi.\footnote{Deringil actually cites Le Gall’s dissertation but does so in a curious fashion. He praises it for its “detailed discussion of Ottoman rule” but lumps it together with Anderson’s work on the Tanzimat and thereby fails to acknowledge the key ways in which his account of the “Ottoman modernity project” diverges from all others. See Deringil, “‘Nomadism and Savagery,’” 319 [f.n. 36].} Deringil cites new archival evidence from 1884 to document how “the Sanusi sheikhs were seen by Istanbul as bearers of civilization to the tribes, ultimately working in favor of the center,” by educating the tribesmen in “religious morals” and helping to “abate their savagery.”\footnote{Deringil, “‘Nomadism and Savagery,’” 322-3.} Recognizing the Sanusis as the masters of the unruly and backwards Bedouin tribes in the region, the Ottoman government resigned to working through them, even resorting to sending Muhammad al-Mahdi a number of special illuminated Qur’ans in “suitably large writing” in response to the alleged attempts of the Italian Government to woo the Sanusi leadership with gifts of its own.\footnote{Ibid., 323.}

The new evidence that Deringil adduces here marks an important addition to the scholarly discussion on the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship. Deringil is certainly correct to emphasize the ways the Ottomans could view the Sanusiyya as champions of civilization and Islamic piety in an otherwise inhospitable fringe of the Empire, which Le Gall largely downplays. Yet Deringil is off the mark when he attempts to argue based on his limited sample that “this cultivating of the Sanusi paid off in the long-term, since the order cooperated with the Ottoman policies and in fact proved instrumental in recruiting ‘local sons’ into the Libyan Ottoman bureaucracy.”\footnote{Ibid., 323.} As Le Gall demonstrates in detailed fashion, the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship certainly became far more complicated than Deringil allows, as the Government only grew increasingly suspicious of Sanusi

\footnote{The latter part of this quote is directly attributed to Lisa Anderson’s monograph, which we have already mentioned is extremely problematic in its assessment of Sanusi cooperation with Ottoman administrators.}
activities over time. Ultimately, any proper characterization of the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship must thread the needle between these opposing views. The Ottomans relied on or considered the advantages of Sanusi assistance more—and in different contexts and geographic areas—than Le Gall ever acknowledges, even as they grew increasingly wary of Sanusi recalcitrance and the Brotherhood’s potential political designs. At the same time, the Ottoman Government’s more straightforwardly brutal policies towards Benghazi’s Bedouins in the 1880s and 1890s—a development that Deringil completely fails to account for—did not undermine the Order or sap tribal loyalty to it to the extent that Le Gall contends. Ottoman policy towards the Sanusiyya in the last decades of the nineteenth century was ever evolving, never entirely consistent, and almost always rooted in the particular practical exigencies of the moment.

Pushing the Spatial and Conceptual Bounds of the Ottoman-Sanusi Relationship

Little is known about the relationship between the Ottomans and the Sanusiyya prior to around 1880, when Yıldız Palace began to commission a number of fact-finding reports about the Order. Le Gall allows that “as early as 1870, the Sanusiya had become a force with which the Ottomans had to reckon beyond the coastal towns,” making it difficult for the Benghazi merchants to control trade in the interior or for the provincial government to extend its administrative reach beyond “a handful of small towns.” But in his view this did not alter the fact that—especially up until the Porte initiated a series of official exchanges with the Sanusis in the mid-1880s—the Brotherhood essentially remained an “enigma” in the eyes of Ottoman officials in Istanbul during the first decades of its rise and spread.150

One short document from 1867 offers a small window onto a very different reality for this earlier (pre-1880) period, however. In a memo to the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, an unnamed official reports that the usually vibrant caravan trade between Wadai and Benghazi had recently been “completely cut off” due to some recent instances of violence. In order to revive the trade, one of the “notable Sanusi Sheikhs” named Fazıl Efendi had been sent to Wadai to give the “requisite assurances and encouragements” (temınat ve teşvikat-ı muktazıye). As a result, Fazıl Efendi managed to have a very large caravan brought back to Benghazi, which effectively re-opened commerce there.\(^{151}\)

Moreover, in a gesture that further restored confidence in the trade, Fazıl Efendi even allegedly managed to send a lion and five antelopes up from Wadai to market in Benghazi.\(^{152}\) Although it is by now well accepted that the Sanusiyya were the de facto overseers of the lucrative caravan route between Wadai and Benghazi—which actually boomed starting in the 1860s as the other major traditional trans-Saharan routes began to decline precipitously\(^{153}\)—this is the first document to suggest that the Ottomans had anything to do with the trade along this route in this period, let alone even hold some sway with the Sanusi notability in managing it. It also underscores how the Ottomans would have seen, from an early period, that the scope of Sanusi authority extended all the way into central Africa (even if, according to this document’s author, Wadai is erroneously said to be “in Benghazi”).

\(^{151}\) I have not translated this verbatim, but the Ottoman line is as follows: Bingazi’ye bir büyüük karıbân celbine gayret edilerek, pazar-ı dâd ve sitâd açılmış.
\(^{152}\) BOA: A.MKT.MHM 388/98 (Draft memo to Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, Aug. 18, 1867/17 Rebiülevvel 1284).
\(^{153}\) Cordell, “Eastern Libya”; Ahmida, Making of Modern Libya, 32-4. Cordell’s article is an excellent portrait of the symbiotic relationship that emerged between the Sanusiyya and what he suggests was the most important Saharan trade route of the late-nineteenth century. But he seems to suggest that the Sanusiyya’s role took form at the expense of any Ottoman control. This document cannot prove any longer-term Ottoman involvement in the Wadai-Benghazi trade; it only suggests involvement at a stage during which we typically discount any possibility of Ottoman-Sanusi interaction.
If it is difficult to ascertain the degree of involvement between the Ottoman Government and the Sanusiyya in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, there can be no doubt that the Sanusiyya were solidly on the Sultan’s radar screen by the mid-1880s. Le Gall suggests that the prevailing Ottoman view of the Sanusiyya at this time was mediated by Sheikh Sanusi’s biggest rival, Sheikh Muhammad Zafir al-Madani, who had managed to become a close advisor and confidant of Abdülhamid in Istanbul; as such, documents on the Sanusiyya from the period as well as a biography on the Sanusi founder commissioned by Yıldız always downplayed the stature of the Sanusiyya, never referring to them as an independent Islamic tariqa.154 Be that as it may, other evidence indicates that the Ottoman Government was becoming well acquainted with the scope and authority of the Sanusiyya among the Bedouin tribes of Benghazi, and the Brotherhood’s capacity to pacify the region through religious education. The set of documents that Deringil references to make his case about the Sanusiyya as allies in the Ottomans’ internally colonial civilizing mission certainly underlines this theme, though to my mind Deringil actually neglects some of the more suggestive passages.

According to the author of the 1884 report that Deringil cites, it is not simply that the Sanusiyya were providing a service to the state in the form of religious or moral education and civilization for the tribes that was reassuring and praiseworthy; it was also the fact that the Sanusi sheikhs had evinced a clear inclination to “avoid interfering in the affairs of the Government,” choosing instead to encourage a life of “asceticism and piety” for their followers and preoccupy themselves with “providing hospitality for guests and travelers.” Moreover, the report praises the Sanusiyya for “keeping occupied with their own affairs” and urging their brethren to stay loyal to the Sultan, rather than pay any heed

to recent circumstances in Sudan surrounding the self-acclaimed Mahdi. Another passage also reveals the Ottomans’ basic understanding that the Sanusiyya were not just a Benghazi phenomenon: if they had some bearing on events in Sudan, they also had clout in Egypt, given that their Zawiyas were said to extend all the way up to “the borders of Alexandria.” What is so illuminating about this document, then, is the way it brings together so many important themes regarding Ottoman perceptions of the Sanusiyya at this critical juncture: the Brotherhood had wide-ranging authority well beyond the borders of Benghazi, and this potentially troubling situation could be brooked only insofar as its sheikhs refrained from intervening in the political affairs of the Empire, instead limiting their activities to strictly moralistic and religious pursuits.

In one instance, at least, the Sanusi leadership actually turned the Ottomans’ own logic against them. In June 1884, during the height of tribal resistance to the first of Reşid Paşa’s tax campaigns, Reşid implored Muhammad al-Mahdi to “use his influence and power” to compel the Bara’sa tribe—which had temporarily resettled “in the vicinity of the Egyptian frontier”—to return to their native camping grounds and “deter other tribes from joining them.” Muhammad al-Mahdi refused, however, informing Reşid that, “being a man of peace and not a warrior he would only place at the Vali’s disposal the sole means in his power—prayer—and not material aid.” According to the British proconsul who reported on this exchange, this refusal to admit that the Sanusiyya were anything more than a pious organization was a calculated move on Muhammad al-

\[155\] BOA: Y.A.RES 25/14 (doc. 2—Aug. 15, 1884/2 Ağustos 1300). A report from the British proconsul of Benghazi at the time also mentions that the Sanusi leadership was inveighing against the Sudanese Mahdi: “‘The Great Marabout’ el Mehey Eseunossey [sic], head of the Senoussy Brotherhood, has despatched messengers from his residence at Djaghaboob with letters to the Sheikhs of his numerous Zawias in this Vilayet, informing them...that the Mehey or Prophet now devastating the Soudan is nothing more than a shameless imposter; and warning all...Musulmen to avoid the eternal punishment which will be the portion of his the false prophet’s followers.” NA: FO 101/72 (Wood to Granville, Jan. 22, 1884).

\[156\] BOA: Y.A.RES 25/14 (doc. 2).
Mahdi’s part not to appear too close with the Ottomans, out of fear of “risking his influence with the Arabs.”

In April 1886, Muhammad al-Mahdi sent the director of Benghazi town’s Sanusi lodge, Sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahim, to Istanbul in what would be the first of five “high-level exchanges” that took place between Ottoman officials and the Sanusiyya. According to Le Gall, this was the “first of several attempts by Yıldız to court Muhammad al-Mahdi and win his support for the drive to collect greater taxes.” This was followed up in October 1887 with the official dispatch of a Sultanic aide-de-camp, Sadik el-Müeyyed ‘Azimzade (of the notable Damascus ‘Azm family), to Sanusi headquarters in Jaghbub; the outcome of this visit is not well-known.

In the spring of 1889, around the time that Reşid Paşa had begun his successful campaign against the ‘Awagir and the Zuwaya tribes, the Palace and Muhammad al-Mahdi were engaged in an “extended correspondence” that culminated with Reşid Paşa’s two-week stay in Jaghbub. The British proconsul Cameron interpreted Reşid Paşa’s return to Benghazi and dealings with the Sanusiyya at this time as evidence of “a desire on the part of the Porte to pay attention to the Arab question in this province,” which made sense given his earlier assessment that “Senousi’s [sic] spiritual supremacy is complete in this province…Every Arab is his follower. Owing to Turkish misrule he is a dominant political factor.”

---

157 NA: FO 101/74 (Wood memo, June 28, 1884).
158 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 229.
161 NA: FO 101/79 (Cameron to Salisbury, May 7, 1889).
162 NA: FO 101/79 (Cameron Memo, Apr. 26, 1889). This particular Foreign Office file is filled with documents on the Sanusiyya. The reason for this is that Reginald Wingate (adjutant-general of the intelligence branch for the Egyptian Army) had dispatched a spy to Jaghbub as well as to several of the
It is at this point in the narrative that Le Gall sees the beginnings of a marked rift between the Ottomans and the Sanusiyya: by around 1890, he writes, it was becoming clear to Ottoman officials that the Sanusiyya could not be trusted. In April 1891, envoys sent by the Sultan were turned away from Jaghbub, yet “there had already been signs several months earlier that the Palace was becoming frustrated in the negotiations with the Sanusiya and was leaning towards other measures to guarantee its control over the Bedouin”—most notably a resumption of more extensive military action. In 1894, ostensibly increasingly disenchanted with Muhammad al-Mahdi, the Sultan opted to put pressure on the Sanusiyya by issuing an İrade that ordered a military garrison to occupy the oasis of Kufra—a sacred Sanusi stronghold, and another key node along the Wadai-Benghazi trade route that the Order controlled. Muhammad al-Mahdi took swift action in response, commanding all of the Sanusi Zawiya leaders to assemble at Jaghbub, where he revealed his plan to relocate the Brotherhood’s headquarters to Kufra. As Le Gall notes, the İrade, “more than the taxation campaigns, made clear to Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi that the Palace had concluded that the negotiations had run their course.”

The Sanusiyya’s abrupt move to Kufra in 1895 came as a shock to the Ottoman government and consequently compelled both “a reassessment of Ottoman policy and renewed high level contacts between the Palace and Muhammad al-Mahdi.” In October 1895, the Palace once again dispatched Sadik el-Müeyyed ‘Azimzade to Sanusi headquarters, this time with the objective of mending the Ottoman Government’s

Brotherhood’s Zawiyas in order to investigate whether or not the Sanusiyya had anything to do with the Mahdi movement in Sudan.

164 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 29-34.
165 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 234.
166 Ibid., 236.
relations with the Brotherhood. The results of the visit were not particularly auspicious, however, and Muhammad al-Mahdi refused Sadik el-Müeyyed’s orders to fly an Ottoman flag over Kufra. Upon his return to Istanbul, Sadik el-Müeyyed filed a detailed report to Yıldız in which he offered a sympathetic summary of the Sanusi position: Muhammad al-Mahdi could not possibly allow an Ottoman garrison to occupy such a vital territory such as Kufra without losing face. In light of this Sanusi obstinacy, Sadik el-Müeyyed continued, “the establishment of a kaymakamlık in Kufra would be ‘difficult’ and ‘without benefit.’” He suggested instead that, rather than putting such acute pressure on the Brotherhood, the proper course of action for the Government was further general reform in the province: the Ottomans should focus on the lingering issues of infrastructure development and court jurisdiction, and also strive to remedy the inequitable tax regime that had driven so many Bedouins to migrate either to Egypt or further into the interior. In retrospect it is clear that Sadik al-Müeyyed’s recommendations were extremely daring and far-sighted for the period, yet there is no evidence that the Palace took any of them to heart. Instead, the Ottomans continued to fixate over their “disagreements with the Sanusiyya over taxation of the Bedouins” to the degree that “relations with Muhammad al-Mahdi had reached a low point.”

Some new evidence from the Ottoman archives suggests that a few key aspects of Le Gall’s narrative need to be revised. First, the downward trajectory of Ottoman-Sanusi relations was not so linear as Le Gall suggests; at several points throughout the 1890s—when Le Gall argues the Sanusiyya were largely a tariqa non grata—we can observe various Ottoman officials seriously entertaining the idea of harnessing Sanusi authority to solve different sorts of administrative problems. Second, through these new documents

167 Ibid., 241-2.
we can glimpse the Ottoman government turning to the Sanusiyya for assistance in regions that Le Gall suggests the Ottomans either were not so concerned about at the time, or else did not consider to be at all receptive to Sanusi influence. If Le Gall is right to emphasize the salience of Ottoman-Sanusi disagreements over Bedouin tax policy as a fundamental aspect of the relationship, we must still consider how the exigencies of the impinging colonial presence in the region pushed the Ottomans to deal with the Sanusiyya, however begrudgingly.

One episode that took place shortly after Muhammad al-Mahdi’s move to Kufra in 1895 suggests that the Ottomans were still working with the Sanusiyya in some capacity to control the Egypt-Benghazi borderland region, even if the two parties did not always see eye-to-eye. Upon learning that some European travelers were planning to cross the border from Siwa to Jaghbub, the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi at the time, Taher Paşa, sent a letter to Muhammad al-Mahdi in order to ascertain the objectives and details of the Europeans’ expedition. Muhammad al-Mahdi’s response was simultaneously reassuring and exasperated. On one hand, he emphasized the loyalty of his Order and its Zawiyas in the region to Abdülhamid and emphasized that they were controlling the borderland as a token of such loyalty. He even struck a tone of surprise in view of Taher’s letter, reminding the Mutasarrıf that, on behalf of the Sultan, the Sanusiyya naturally fulfilled its obligations to uphold order, enforce the law, and keep tabs on foreigners in the region without needing to be warned to do so by the government.168

On the other hand, Muhammad al-Mahdi took this opportunity to complain about a number of local officials who lately had begun to investigate the number of animals kept at several Sanusi Zawiyas, for the purposes of tax collection. In a letter to the Grand

---

Vezir, Taher confessed that he was fuzzy about the substance of Muhammad al-Mahdi’s complaint, but he resolved to appeal to the Kaimakam of Derna for more information. Taher then wrote to Muhammad al-Mahdi, asking him to clarify his complaint and submit a list of the offending officials; he also urged Muhammad al-Mahdi to return to Jaghbub, which would be the “most appropriate” course of action for the Brotherhood. It seems clear that even though Taher and Muhammad al-Mahdi were leery of each other, they were still resigned to working together to control the borderland and watch the movements of foreigners; more than that, Taher was also willing to take the Sanusi leader’s grievances seriously under consideration. The exchange also contradicts Le Gall’s assertion that the Ottomans were never very concerned about European political designs in Benghazi throughout the 1890s, or that “the Sanusis were never part of, nor privy to, the Ottoman diplomatic or military strategy in this regard.”

Other evidence indicates that in late 1891 or early 1892—the height of Reşid Paşa’s second round of tax campaigns against Benghazi’s Bedouin—the Ottoman Government was considering different ways to take advantage of the scope of the Sanusiyya’s authority in the Sudan and central Africa, no matter how leery it might be of the Order’s larger political ambitions. In January 1892, a long memo regarding various affairs in the Sudan and Central Africa was forwarded to Yıldız Palace for the Sultan’s perusal. Among other issues, the anonymous author of the memo cautioned the Sultan against the penetration of various European powers into the Congo region as well as Sudan. In response to this potential threat, the author urged the Ottoman Government to

---

171 Not only does this finding challenge Le Gall’s assertion that this early-1890s period marked the nadir of Ottoman-Sanusi relations, but it also revises his contention that the Ottomans would never turn to the Sanusiyya for assistance in the African Sahara. See Le Gall, “Ottoman Government,” 96.
consider “widening the influence” of the administration in Tripoli and Benghazi and making use of the “Islamic influence” pervasive in central Africa generally. Later in the memo, the author goes on to mention the wide influence of the Sanusiyya in the region, and points out that the Sultan had already sent several envoys to him in the past with various gifts (but never weapons, which were deemed to be too dangerous by some Ministers in Istanbul). The author ultimately suggests that the Sanusiyya should be involved in the formation of special irregular military units—the same locally sourced Hamidiye Alayları that we typically associate with the Kurdish tribes used to fight in eastern Anatolia—that would be based in Tripoli but could be deployed elsewhere around the region. In response, the Sultan instructed the Grand Vezir to make further investigations into whether it was worth the risk of patronizing Muhammad al-Mahdi along the lines laid out in the memo.

About a month later, an ‘alim from Tripoli named Ömer bin Zeynelabidin el-Mevrani sent a detailed letter to the Palace, in which he reported on conditions around the region and offered his recommendations concerning the establishment of Hamidiye regiments in Tripoli. In the letter, el-Mavrani begins by mentioning his familiarity with Muhammad al-Mahdi: he had visited the Sanusi leader five times, and had recently gained a great deal of information during a lengthy stay with him. El-Mavrani goes on to break down the inhabitants of the region into five general groups, ranging from those

---

172 BOA: Y.EE 122/3 (Attached memo, dated at some point before Jan. 20, 1892/8 Kanun-u Sani 1307).
174 BOA: Y.EE 122/3. The file begins with two key documents that I have cited: the original memo from an author investigating conditions in Central Africa; and the Palace’s response, in the form of a summary and further instructions to the Grand Vezir. Only the date of the latter is clear: Jan. 20, 1892/8 Kanun-u Sani 1307.
175 This document could very well be part of the follow-up to the Sultan’s aforementioned request for more information concerning how Ottoman administration could be extended further into the Saharan interior.
under full Ottoman administration (predominantly in cities and towns), to those who are under “autonomous administration” (idare-i mustakille), who tended either to live nomadically (hime nişin) or else to ally with central African governors such as those of Wadai or Kano; he also mentions several “well-known tribes” living along the borders with Egypt, as well as the large Tuareg population, as cases of more ambiguous administration. El-Mavrani naturally saw no need to form units in the coastal regions that were under firm government administration, but he urged the government that it would be both desirable and possible to form Hamidiye regiments to control the more unruly segments of the population in Tripoli and Central Africa. To this end, el-Mavrani argues that Muhammad al-Mahdi should be called upon to take charge of the Hamidiye units, given his Order’s expansive authority in the region, and the benefits the Sanusiyya had brought to its inhabitants in terms of improved morals and religious piety.176

We can see this same general pattern at play in one more document, this time at a moment when there was no longer any question that Great Britain and especially France were threatening Ottoman sovereignty in central and northeastern Africa. In November 1899, an ‘âlim from Alexandria named Sheikh Muhammad Suleyman Pasha wrote a letter to Muhammad al-Mahdi, warning him that various foreign powers were striving to create a rift among African Muslims by setting up a rival Arab Government that would oppose the Caliphate. He continues by praising the good works of the Sanusiyya in

176 BOA: Y.PRK.AZJ 21/24 (El-Mavrani memo, Feb. 14, 1892/15 Receb 1309). Unfortunately I was not able to find any documents that offered a direct follow-up to this exchange. According to British consular documents, however, there is clear evidence that the idea of establishing Hamidiye units in Tripoli and Benghazi never went away. In February 1899, for instance, Benghazi proconsul Justin Alvarez reported that the Mutasarrıf had ordered “Members of the Council and the Courts, civil officials and notables and many of the inhabitants” to participate in military drills twice a week, by Sultanic decree.” Ultimately, “The Imperial Government intended the formation of a regiment (to be called the Hamide [sic]) of 4 battalions, each battalion to consist of 1000 men.” NA: FO 195/2054 (Alvarez memo, Feb. 26, 1899).
northeast Africa: owing to the “enlightenment” that he had brought to this region where previously only “the darkness of ignorance” had prevailed, the Bedouins had become pious. At this point, he informs Muhammad al-Mahdi that—even though important officials in Istanbul knew of these good deeds, and that the Sultan was generally happy with the piety of the local population—it would behoove him to write to Abdülhamid explaining his recent activities; this would only strengthen the Porte’s sympathies with the Brotherhood. Clearly, then, Istanbul was still suspicious of Muhammad al-Mahdi, but—in light of the clear and present danger the Ottomans now faced in Africa—the Sultan still hoped for a clear affirmation of his loyalty.177

All of this is not to suggest that the Ottomans ceased to be suspicious of Muhammad al-Mahdi, but rather that they continued to entertain the possibility of working with his Brotherhood in certain cases where the alternative of not having key local power brokers to turn to was deemed more antithetical to the government’s interests. The Sanusi connection might very well have been seen as the lesser of two evils: arming and ceding some authority to this elusive Brotherhood in Tripoli and central Africa was risky, but leaving the unruly kingdoms and tribes of the region to their own devices—or, worse, to the influence of the European powers—was even riskier.

*Into the Twentieth Century: the Sanusiyya and the Question of Ottoman Taxation*

I have been arguing in the second half of this chapter for a revised conception of the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship—one that emphasizes much more continuity than the prevailing historiography typically acknowledges. Whereas Anderson claims that the Sanusiyya had largely shed their tribal identity upon their incorporation into the reformed

---

177 BOA: Y.PRK.MŞ 7/10 (Sheikh Muhammad Suleyman Pasha to Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi—no date given, but the general file is from November 1899/Receb 1317).
Ottoman bureaucracy by the turn of the century—and Le Gall argues that Ottoman policies severely disrupted the Sanusis’ base of authority in Benghazi, so that their re-emergence onto the political scene after the Young Turk revolution can only be seen as oddly atavastic, their having inexplicably “weathered the storm”178 of the past two decades—I suggest that the Ottoman government was always more realistic about, and beholden to, the Brotherhood’s de facto power in northeastern Africa than these authors allow. The Ottomans might have had serious misgivings about allying with the Sanusiyya to serve their interests in the region, and there is no doubt that they periodically stepped in at key moments during the 1890s to keep the Brotherhood in check. At the same time, however, the Ottomans could not deny the extensive authority that the Sanusiyya continued to wield over the tribal population in this period not just in Benghazi, but also in western Egypt, central Africa, and parts of the Sudan. Regardless of how suspicious they rightly were of the Brotherhood’s political activities or ambitions, the Ottoman Government still demonstrated a striking reluctance to antagonize it completely, no matter how unruly the situation in the province became.

To drive home this point, I will present one last bit of new archival evidence that enables us to re-interpret a pivotal series of events in 1905 leading to the dismissal of the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, Zühdü Paşa. These documents are striking for a number of reasons. For one, they demonstrate the persistence of the Benghazi government’s chronic shortcomings in managing provincial administration and raising tax revenues, despite its efforts at reform over the previous two and a half decades. For another, they illustrate the extensive authority that the Sanusi Brotherhood continued to wield over the province’s tribes early in the twentieth century—precisely the period when Le Gall suggests they

178 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 251.
were still reeling from the re-assertion of Ottoman control, not to mention their struggles with the French in central Africa.\textsuperscript{179} Based on a more limited subset of documents, Le Gall in fact points to the 1905 episode as a moment in which the central Ottoman government clarified that the Sanusiyya were \textit{not} entitled to any special treatment with respect to taxes.\textsuperscript{180} Upon a new investigation into Benghazi’s fiscal situation, Le Gall explains, the Ottoman Finance Bureau’s final report on the matter concluded that “neither the Sanusi lodges nor their lands had ever been granted, nor had a claim to, a blanket exemption from taxes;”\textsuperscript{181} this finding buttresses the argument Le Gall makes based on the text of a \textit{firman} he located in the archive from 1860, which “lauds the good works which Sheykh Muhammad b. Ali al-Sanusi undertook” but never grants the Sanusiyya tax exempt status, nor the right to collect tithes from the Bedouin tribes.\textsuperscript{182}

If we peek under the hood, however, and look not just at the Finance Ministry’s final verdict but also at some of the more detailed correspondence between Benghazi and Istanbul prior to Zühdü’s dismissal, a very different picture of this episode emerges. In September 1905, Zühdü sent a long memo to the Grand Vezir in which he compiled information from district officers’ reports as well as the petitions of some local notables to offer a detailed summary of the province’s internal affairs. Zühdü laid out a number of major grievances against the Sanusiyya. First, he claimed that the Sanusi zawiyas were not actually providing proper religious education to rank-and-file tribesmen, and that some of them did not even possess a room for daily prayers; this discovery was

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 243-47.
\textsuperscript{180} Le Gall, “Ottoman Government,” 97; Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 204.
\textsuperscript{181} Le Gall, “Ottoman Government,” 97. The document Le Gall cites here (f.n. 39) was from Jan. 4, 1906 (BOA: MV 112).
\textsuperscript{182} Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 201-3. Le Gall has transcribed the full text of the 1860 \textit{firman}.
particularly unsettling given that, as we saw above, Ottoman officials had long justified their patronage of the Sanusiyya on the basis that the Brotherhood civilized a broad swath of benighted Bedouins by inculcating basic Islamic moral principles. Second, Zühdū charged the Sanusiyya with having provoked the Bara’sa (among other tribes) to rebel against the government by refusing to pay their mîrî as well as shariʿi taxes; he feared that the rebellion might in fact spread throughout the whole province if left unchecked. Third, with the exception of the residents of Benghazi and Derna, the province’s population had largely been refusing to go to Ottoman shariʿia courts to settle basic cases of personal status, turning instead to their local Sanusi sheikhs to resolve all their legal matters. In Zühdū’s view, this particular problem stemmed in large part from the the provincial government’s neglect of its administrative infrastructure in the hinterland: even at this late date, there was a complete dearth of government offices in most of the province’s district centers, and those that had been built were now in a state of utter disrepair. Finally, Zühdū lamented the extent to which the zawiya Sheikh in the town of Benghazi had started to intervene in the provincial government’s affairs and act as a de facto official for the province.\footnote{BOA: DH.MKT 1004/43 (doc. 6—Mutasarrıf of Benghazi Zühdū Paşa to Grand Vezir, Sept. 19, 1905/19 Receb 1323).}

It is clear from Zühdū’s testimony that Sanusi influence around the province was perhaps more pervasive at this moment than ever before, and that the disorder being wrought by the Sanusi-inspired intransigence among the tribes posed a serious threat to the government’s ruling authority. Zühdū therefore urged the Grand Vezir that immediate action was required to stem the tide of affairs, recommending in particular that the government should work to prevent Bedouins from taking all their shariʿi and nizāmi
cases to the zawiyas, and that officials must finally attempt to register all waqf properties as well as zawiya lands. Only by taking such measures could the Ottoman administration wrest some of this increasing political influence away from the Sanusiyya. At the same time, Zühdü addressed the issue of the Sanusis’ purported exemption from taxes. On one hand, he was extremely concerned about the possible repercussions of condoning any tax exemption, arguing that—since over a third of the province’s population adhered to the Brotherhood—such a policy would create a major strain on the government’s finances.\footnote{Ibid.} On the other hand, he acknowledged the existence of certain Sultanic decrees that granted tax exemption strictly to those lodges established during the lifetime of the Order’s founder, Muhammad bin ‘Ali al-Sanusi. He even claimed to have presented the requisite firmans to the Sanusiyya’s representative in Benghazi as proof that the privilege of tax exemption was by no means applicable to all the Brotherhood’s lodges and properties.\footnote{Ibid.}

In another memorandum to Istanbul, Zühdü reports on having taken a firmer line towards the Sanusi sheikhs. His decision to act came on the heels of yet another instance of Sanusi-led tribal opposition to the Ottoman government. In this case, according to Zühdü, several Sanusi sheikhs had managed to provoke the Bedouins of the district of Râtasa into a state of all-out rebellion. Whereas before these tribesmen had been won over to the side of the government, even at one point assisting with the construction of a telegraph line between Benghazi and Derna, they now had apparently “forgotten the pain of Reşid Paşa’s disciplinary measures” and were refusing to pay either their mîrî or shar‘i taxes to the government. They also had staged some “unruly public demonstrations”
Zühdü summoned a Sanusi zawiya sheikh named Salih—who had been “disturbing the public opinion of the people” in his district (ezhân-il-ahâli teşvişe sebeb olan)—to appear before Benghazi’s administrative council. Salih attempted to deny the involvement of any Sanusi sheikhs in the recent disorder, but Zühdü countered by reading aloud the testimony of a zawiya sheikh from the district of Merj that asserted otherwise. Zühdü then threatened Salih that “if the seditious activity continues, then the Order will naturally lose the special favor and compassion of the Sultan” (eğer bu fesâd devâm eder ise, tarîka hakkındaki teveccüh ve merhmet-i şehriyâriyi kayb etmeleri tabiî olacağı). In the end, Zühdü decided to dispatch several zawiya sheikhs and their followers, along with two members of Benghazi’s administrative council, to present the rebellious tribesmen with an Arabic copy of an official decree to return to their tents and pay their state taxes in peace; he also requested an imperial decree that would resolve the issue of religious tithes between the Government and the zawiyas once and for all.  

Zühdü’s two accounts of the extremely precarious state of affairs in Benghazi that the Sanusiyya had engendered, and the measures he took to counter it, throw Istanbul’s decision to dismiss him in an entirely new light. Le Gall writes that Zühdü was removed from his post after Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi—the Grand Sheikh of the Brotherhood since Muhammad al-Mahdi’s death in 1902—complained to the Porte about Zühdü’s recent efforts to tax the province’s zawiyas, but that otherwise the central government still came down on the side of denying the Sanusiyya any special tax privileges. These new documents reveal a very different side of the story, however. First, they demonstrate

---

186 BOA: DH.MKT 1004/43 (doc. 4—Undated memo from Mutasarrif of Benghazi Zühdü Paşa to Dahiliye Nezâreti).
187 Le Gall, “Pashas, Bedouins, and Notables,” 204-5.
that local Benghazi officials (if not the Porte) were willing to concede at least *partial* tax exemption to the Order—allowing those original zawiyas to slide on the basis of what they at least believed were the Sultan’s orders from long ago. The documents also reveal that local officials understood full well that the Sanusiyya continued to receive the “special favor and compassion” of the Sultan, even though they clearly posed such a serious danger to Ottoman interests in Benghazi, given the extensive power they wielded over the province’s tribes. Finally, it is extremely illuminating that—on the basis of Ahmad al-Sharif’s one recent complaint—the Ottomans so summarily removed an official who was taking such great strides to remedy a truly treacherous situation in the province. It can only be concluded from the foregoing evidence that the Ottoman central government remained, as ever, extremely reluctant to make enemies of the Sanusiyya—that they were resigned to putting up with some baseline disorder in this province out of hope that the Brotherhood might yet prove friendly and useful in any impending conflicts against the Europeans.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have set out to advance the historiography of Ottoman borders and borderlands by focusing on how sovereignty was conceived and practiced in the emergent Egypt/Benghazi borderland in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, long before there was any attempt to delineate the internal border. In this period, an amorphous desert region linking two territorially abstract Ottoman provinces began to evolve into a contested borderland, marked by the emergence of a newfound sense of borderedness on the part of the local Bedouin population—an awareness that claiming to be either in Egypt or in Benghazi *mattered*, insofar as each offered its own unique
 advantages at different historical moments. Likewise, I have sought to demonstrate that Bedouin mobility was perhaps the key factor forcing the local Ottoman Government in Benghazi to confront the limits of their own sovereign jurisdiction vis-à-vis Egypt, which—albeit still an Ottoman province—began to represent an entirely different legal-political climate to the local inhabitants of the region at this time. Even if it is true that the Ottoman state in many cases acted first, initiating a vicious cycle whereby intensified efforts at tax collection drove many tribesmen across the border, it remains the case that it was the consequences of such mobility that, for the Ottomans, cemented the idea of Egypt as a rival political entity in an emergent contested borderland.

I have also argued that the political dynamics of the region as they evolved throughout the period serve as an apt lens through which to view sovereignty as multivalent and overlapping. First, there is the practice of Bedouin mobility itself—a key example of a non-centralizing mark of sovereignty that had always defined the spatial practices of local actors in the region, but which now took on a new political valence in light of Ottoman attempts to ramp up the tax burden on the tribesmen. Second, the Sanusiyya exercised far-reaching sovereignty throughout the region, linking up various social groups from Egypt to the Sudan, Benghazi to Wadai. As such, Ottoman attempts to bolster their authority in the region necessarily hinged on their ability to deal through the aid of these powerful local power brokers. Third, the Derbend-i Defne tax constituted a particular jurisdictional mark of sovereignty that the Benghazi authorities—so fundamentally weak in exercising other basic functions of administration in the province—harnessed in order to keep tabs on the movement of those engaged in a lucrative trade with Egypt. The tax was apparently so vital to local officials that they
continued to enforce it despite orders from Istanbul (under pressure from the European embassies) to abolish it.

Ultimately, I suggest that it is this emphasis on the multivalent nature of sovereignty in an internal borderland of the Ottoman Empire that provides the key for advancing the historiography on Ottoman borders and frontiers beyond its traditional one-dimensional emphasis on state centralization and local resistance or incorporation. Rather than view the relationship between the Ottoman Government and local society in Benghazi’s eastern borderland as one of straightforward encroachment and resistance, we see instead the increasing awareness on the part of state and non-state actors alike that their region was transforming into a zone wherein Ottoman sovereignty existed only in relational terms—vis-a-vis the burgeoning Egyptian state, on one hand, and local non-state actors such as the Bedouins and Sanusiyya, on the other. By pushing both the spatial and conceptual bounds of our notion of Ottoman sovereignty in this way, the study of internal borderlands within the Empire enables us to view Ottoman peripheral zones not as the final frontiers of state centralization, but rather as complex meeting points where an array of social and spatial practices project political authority in multiple directions.
Chapter 5—The Origins of Egypt’s Western Border Conflict, 1902-11

“If there is a single history to the boundary and the borderland, it must take into account this multitude of voices, many of which can barely be heard.”¹ – Peter Sahlins, Boundaries

On December 21, 1911, a small Ottoman garrison that had been stationed at the frontier settlement of Sollum ever since July 1902 evacuated its post. By this time, the Ottoman-Italian War was already more than two months old: the Italian naval blockade in the Eastern Mediterranean was fully operational, and—on October 3—Italian forces initiated a campaign to bomb and occupy several key towns along the coast including Tripoli, Benghazi, Derna, and Tobruk. On October 10, Italian warships arrived at Sollum and began to take soundings around the harbor, though the local Ottoman authorities refused them permission to land;² two Italian destroyers nonetheless continued to patrol the Bay of Sollum on a daily basis.³ Although the Ottoman commanding officer at Sollum was initially cavalier about the prospects of his garrison fending off any impending Italian siege—claiming that “he was not afraid of the Italians,” and that his orders were “to hold the post at all costs”⁴—the Ottoman Government ultimately decided to move the troops further west and provisionally cede custodianship of Sollum to the Egyptian Government.⁵ Despite the fact that the evacuation orders came from on high, the Ottoman commanding officer at Sollum was nonetheless extremely reluctant to

² NA: FO 141/634/1 (Memo from Egyptian Coast Guard station at Sidi Barrani, Oct. 12, 1911).
³ NA: FO 141/634/1 (Memo from Hunter, Nov. 12, 1911).
⁴ NA: FO 141/634/1 (Memo from Hunter, Nov. 6, 1911).
⁵ See BOA: MV 162/87 (Ottoman Cabinet Minutes of Mar. 16, 1912); and NA: FO 141/634/1 (British Foreign Office Aide-Memoire of Jan. 9, 1912). The decision came after some diplomatic wrangling on the part of the British, who apparently sought to prevent the Italians from occupying the post themselves (see NA: FO 141/634/1 – Memo to Hunter, Nov. 11, 1911). The Ottomans, for their part, seemed to agree that the Egyptians were better equipped than they to defend the post for the duration of the war.
abandon the post, at first refusing to relocate any further than two miles west of Sollum. George Hunter Pasha—the Director-General of the Egyptian Coast Guard Administration, who was in charge of overseeing the transfer of authority at Sollum—wrote that “it was the funniest procession he had ever seen—a long-legged Coast Guard Officer pacing while the Turkish Officer stopped every 100 yards to protest that he would die sooner than give up more territory” to the Egyptians.⁶

Within a month of the Ottomans’ departure from Sollum, Lord Kitchener—the British Consul-General in Egypt since July—seized the opportunity opened up by the uncertain political climate in the western Egyptian borderland to stake a new claim for his government with regards to where the actual boundary line should be located. After making a short visit to Sollum, Kitchener ordered the Egyptian Survey Department⁷ to issue a special reprint of an old “school map” of Egypt with all its boundary lines purposely left blank, so that new ones could be drawn in by hand. This map—upon which Kitchener drew two hypothetical boundary lines representing both a more maximalist territorial claim, beginning some 10 kilometers west of Sollum and encompassing Jaghbub as part of Egypt, on one hand (Line A); and a more conventional and limited one originating from the heights of Sollum, on the other (Line B)—became the basis for what the British authorities in the Egyptian Government began to refer to as

---

⁷ Ibid.
⁸ The Survey Department was established in June 1898, under the direction of British Geologist H.G. Lyons, bringing together a variety of different institutions: the old Revenue Survey, the Hydrographical Survey, the Geological Survey, and the Map Drawing Office of the Ministry of Public Works. Two years later, the Survey Department added the Astronomical and Meteorological Observatory at Abbasiyya. Until 1905, the Survey Department was under the auspices of the Egyptian Government’s Ministry of Public Works, at which point it became subject instead to the Ministry of Finance. The Survey Department was responsible for the “first systematic survey of a large desert area in Egypt,” which took place in the Northern Sinai between 1908-14. No comparable surveying project was undertaken in the Western Desert prior to the First World War. See G.W. Murray, The Survey of Egypt, 1898-1948 (Cairo: Ministry of Finance and Survey of Egypt, 1950): 1-3.
the “latest Western Frontier of Egypt.” Kitchener apparently told military officer Lee Stack⁹ that this was the sort of object he wanted “to hang in his room.”¹⁰ By the end of 1911, reference to the so-called “Kitchener lines” had become de rigueur for the British in any diplomatic discussion concerning the western boundary of Egypt; one British agent in the Egyptian War Department urged a colleague that he “had better inform the Mapping Section of this boundary [Line A, cutting west of Jaghbub] as all [current] maps have it wrong.”¹¹

Taken together, the Ottoman military evacuation of Sollum, and the cartographic inscription of the new Kitchener boundary lines—two seemingly discrete events that arose amidst the climate of uncertainty and wartime exigency that the Italian occupation engendered—heralded the onset of a new phase in the formation of Egypt’s western borderland. Although the Ottomans could not have known it when they opted to hand Sollum over to the Egyptian authorities for the duration of the war, they would never again assume administrative or military control of any of the Libyan provinces after 1911. The Ottomans’ defeat in the war thus meant that the British would henceforth deal exclusively with the Italians to settle the question of Egypt’s western boundary; gone in one fell swoop was the precarious situation whereby the politics of the borderland could best be described as the Ottoman Government’s power struggle with one of its provinces (albeit an amorphously defined one) that was stubbornly insisting on acting like an independent nation. At the same time, once Kitchener laid down his new proposed

---

⁹ This is the same Lee Stack with whose assassination in 1924 I opened Chapter 1.
boundary lines, the British were now firmly committed to the idea of a formal border resolution in a way that they had not been even a mere couple years prior. Although the outbreak of the First World War would prolong and complicate the situation for a period, an agreement with Italy over the delimitation of the border was basically a foregone conclusion the moment that Kitchener drew his lines in the sand.

Political geographers typically identify three distinct phases of border formation: allocation, delimitation, and demarcation. According to J.R.V. Prescott, allocation refers to the first, most tentative stage of border definition in which the interested parties settle upon loose, often arbitrary boundaries to serve as basic dividing lines through relatively unknown regions. Delimitation, by contrast, “is designed to eliminate this inconvenient uncertainty” of allocation, and thus usually entails the dispatching of an official survey commission into the field in order to map a specific boundary trajectory. Contending political actors typically agree to delimit a boundary when a borderland region is mutually understood to have acquired some palpable economic or strategic value; accordingly, as Prescott points out, most border disputes occur during this phase of the process. Finally, demarcation is the act of inscribing on the ground the final boundary line as agreed upon by state authorities in the map rooms and proclaimed in the official policy papers; techniques of demarcation run the gamut, ranging from the

12 Most significantly, the War provided the Ottomans with an opening that they sought to exploit in order to regain the Libyan provinces from Italy. While the British were distracted in their attempt to defend against the Ottomans in the East, Ottoman officers such as Enver Bey worked with the Sanusiyya and Bedouin chiefs in eastern Benghazi in order to provoke a short-lived rebellion against the British in various locales throughout the Egyptian West. For a detailed account of the Sanusi rebellion and the Western Desert campaigns, see Russell McGuirk, The Sanusi’s Little War: The Amazing Story of a Forgotten Conflict in the Western Desert, 1915-1917 (London: Arabian, 2007).

13 For a clear definition of these terms – and a general overview of how borders and frontiers are treated in the field of political geography – see J.R.V. Prescott, Political Frontiers and Boundaries (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

14 Prescott, Political Frontiers, 72.
construction of draconian security fences to the mere placing of cairns (stone piles) at regular intervals along the designated boundary route. Once demarcation occurs, the border is effectively settled; after this, it is up to the states on either side of the border to administer and police the new line (what Prescott simply terms border “administration”).

Many if not most academic contributions to the massive interdisciplinary field of comparative border and borderland studies focus on the significance and consequences of newly formed boundary lines only after they have been delimited and demarcated. This is particularly true for political scientists—who tend to fix their gaze on the complex and evolving relationship between borderland society and various institutions of the modern centralizing state—as well as for anthropologists, who are primarily interested in studying how borderland populations negotiate their cultural and social identities vis-à-vis fixed international boundaries. As such, both disciplines tend to emphasize borders and borderlands in the twentieth- and even twenty-first centuries, often paying particular attention to how border meanings and identities may have shifted in a new context of

---

15 Ibid., ch. 3.
globalization and postmodern culture.\textsuperscript{17} At the same time, many historical studies of borders and borderlands (including several that have been hugely influential for this project) devote significant attention to the latter two phases of border formation—either recounting the diplomatic wrangling that inevitably precedes the signing of a boundary treaty, for instance, or else bringing new interpretive tools to bear on the evidence left behind by explorers and survey commissions in order to reveal the degree to which a nation-state’s final boundary maps inevitably betray the human and physical landscapes they seek to represent.\textsuperscript{18}

The story I aim to tell in this chapter is quite different. Throughout the decade under scrutiny—the period commencing with the Ottomans’ arrival at Sollum in July 1902 and ending with the Italian occupation of Libya in late-1911—the formation of Egypt’s western border never evolved beyond the abstract allocation phase. Even Kitchener’s proposed lines, which certainly upped the diplomatic ante and started Egypt down the inexorable path towards the ultimate signing of a western border treaty in 1925, still left the picture extremely fuzzy, thus merely foreshadowing a delimitation stage that

\begin{footnotesize}

\begin{footnote}
17 \textsuperscript{17} It is also true for most geographers, including those human geographers (such as those in Rumley and Minghi’s volume) who prefer to speak of “border landscapes” to which boundary formation gives rise. It is precisely the recent above-mentioned scholarly trend towards questioning the staying power of modern nation-state boundaries in light of new discourses of transnationality and postmodernity that spurred Donnan and Wilson to produce several studies re-focusing their field’s gaze firmly on borders and the modern territorial nation-state (see footnote above).

\begin{footnote}
\end{footnotesize}

291
was still far-off. What we see instead throughout the 1902-11 period are multiple and competing attempts at what Prescott terms “definition in principle”—one of two approaches to border allocation, whereby political actors assert territorial claims in an abstract, haphazard manner, often without any meaningful knowledge of “the exact distribution or location of the physical features or cultural attributes” of the region in question.\(^\text{19}\) In the case of Egypt’s western borderland, what this meant in practice was that an array of interested political contenders—the Italians, the Ottomans, the Egyptians, and the British—all began to contemplate ways to transform an ill-defined *hatt-i intityaz* ("line of distinction") between two adjacent Ottoman provinces into a *de facto* international border line.\(^\text{20}\)

Rather than recount the path to delimitation that the drawing of the Kitchener lines set in motion, or analyze the impact of the demarcated boundary on the local borderland population after 1925—both certainly worthy endeavors, though they lie outside the scope of this dissertation—in this chapter I will look closely at how a sense of borderedness in the Egyptian/Libyan borderland continued to crystallize in spite of a prolonged and messy allocation process that never actually resolved any territorial questions. If the Italian occupation marked a surefire turning point, we must still go back in time several years to see how the situation had evolved up to that decisive moment. What, for example, was at stake in the Ottoman occupation of Sollum, and why was the commanding officer there so loathe to abandon his post to the Egyptians? What tricks

\(^{19}\) Prescott, *Political Frontiers*, 72.

\(^{20}\) Prescott indeed notes that some boundaries never evolve from allocation to delimitation, including many such cases where internal imperial boundaries are “promoted” to international ones. He argues these situations often lead to ongoing border disputes, since the internal boundaries had never really been defined with any rigor. Prescott, *Political Frontiers*, 74-5. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the various terms typically used to describe internal borders in the Ottoman Empire, in general, and the particularly thorny designation of Egypt’s borders, in particular.
did Kitchener have up his sleeve in laying out a purposefully aggressive boundary proposal—the “Line A” on the aforementioned map—and why might he have moved to act so quickly after the Italian occupation to undertake such a re-mapping?

By paying close attention to this oft-overlooked period to which we can, in fact, date the origins of a modern border conflict in Egypt’s western borderland, I aim to draw out a number of themes that I hope are as surprising as they are challenging to the ever-evolving literature. First, I argue that the continuing emergence and articulation of the borderland in this period must be understood as the product of the complex interactivity between a number of different political actors: agents formally representing the interests of the Italian, Ottoman, and British-occupied Egyptian states, to be certain, but also the Khedive (again a sort of in-between quasi-state actor), as well as various non-state actors including Bedouin tribes, local merchants, and the Sanusiyya. It is here that Adelman and Aron’s more specific conception of “borderland” that I spelled out in the dissertation’s introduction comes in particularly handy. To recapitulate briefly: Adelman and Aron argue that the term “borderland” must not be conflated with “frontier,” but rather should be reserved to refer to zones of “intense imperial rivalry” that afforded indigenous populations “room to maneuver and preserve some element of autonomy.”

In other words, “frontiers”—which Adelman and Aron define simply as “borderless” zones of cultural and geographic intermixing—emerge as borderlands when the interactivity between various imperial powers transforms the region into one of open political contestation. Adelman and Aron ultimately bring their case studies forward in order to account for their transition from fluid “borderlands” into ossified “bordered

---

lands,” which I do not attempt here. Yet their framework remains particularly compelling for understanding the final stage of the emergence of a bona fide borderland between western Egypt and eastern Benghazi/Libya, given the way that it was precisely the interactivity and contestation between several different state actors—as well as these actors’ involvement with the local population of the region—that gave the emergent borderland more definition. If Egypt and Libya had not yet emerged as “bordered lands” by 1911, the events and exchanges of the previous decade still had the effect of inscribing a local sense of territorial distinctiveness or borderedness in the region, and etching the idea of a competitive borderland in the social and spatial sensibilities of the local population.

If the new context of intensified imperial rivalry after 1902 was a decisive factor in opening up new channels for Bedouin agency in the borderland, the converse was also true: local Bedouin affairs could have the effect of drawing the imperial powers further into the fray. A second central theme that emerges from my analysis in this chapter is thus the key role that local social relations and, in particular, the experience of mobility and conflict among the region’s Bedouin tribes played in the evolution of the borderland.22 We have already seen the beginnings of this process in the previous chapter, as various Bedouin tribes inhabiting the borderland in the late-nineteenth century used their mobility to invoke and effectively reify a border when it was in their interest to do so. Bedouin mobility remained a key catalyst for the crystallization of the borderland

---

22 In emphasizing the role of local agency in the articulation of the border, I am once again inspired by Peter Sahlins’s work. Political Scientist Inga Brandell raises the point that even for Sahlins, the onset of the modern state (in France and Spain) is what provides the necessary preconditions for local agents to make claims regarding belonging and citizenship. In my case the role of the centralizing state is obviously much less clear-cut: the issue of whether local Bedouin agency compels – or is compelled by – state projects remains a fundamental tension throughout this dissertation. See Brandell, “Introduction” in State Frontiers, 12.
in the first decade of the twentieth century. Historian David Ludden argues that—in spite of the well-known tendency of modern territorial nation-states to view mobility as a marker of “disorder” that they must strive to contain by constructing rigid boundaries—it is precisely the “transactions between mobility and territorialism” that actually “make and remake boundaries.”23 This insight helps us move conceptually beyond those works that view the phenomenon of border crossing as mainly reactive—as one of several tools available to borderland dwellers to undermine the authority of the modern state by subverting the borderline it has carefully delimited and demarcated.24 Taking Ludden’s lead, I argue that the steady stream of cross-border tribal conflicts that erupted during the 1900s played a crucial part in the crystallization of a contested Egyptian/Libyan borderland, by deepening the sense of a territorial crisis among the involved state powers and in turn compelling them to hone their thinking about the contours of political membership in the region.25

This chapter’s final major contribution to the literature on comparative borderlands is to challenge the prevailing notions of linearity and teleology that scholars typically see as intrinsic to the process of border formation. I have already mentioned that my analysis will stop short of adopting the full chronology of the “borderlands to bordered lands” approach that Adelman and Aron posit, even as I embrace their general model for how to conceive of competitive borderlands. More generally, my examination

23 Ludden, “Maps in the Mind,” 1064 [f.n.].
24 Many of these are from the political science literature. See, for example, Migdal, “Mental Maps,” 12-14; Brandell, “Introduction.” Ateş also devotes a lot of attention to local tribal resistance to the drawing of the Iranian-Ottoman border in the mid-nineteenth century.
25 As was the case with the previous chapter, however, it remains extremely difficult to capture the voices of the Bedouins as historical actors given the nature of the documentary evidence; it is thus necessary once again to represent Bedouin agency as best as I can primarily by reading official sources against the grain. Ateş faced an identical problem in his research: “When it comes to recovering the voice of the people of the borderland, the historian has no choice but to rely on official documents.” Ateş, “Empires at the Margins,” 31.
of the 1902-11 period also eschews the more widely held view that the territorialization of borderlands in the modern world always entails a simple chronological movement from fuzzy, ill-defined zones of overlapping sovereignty (which is how “frontiers” are most commonly defined) to the neat and rigid lines that bound the sovereignty of the nation-state. Although this model might ultimately hold true in the Egyptian/Libyan case for the long term, my close-up analysis of the decade before the Italian occupation reveals a much subtler and more abstract process at work. For precisely at the moment when, as I have said, the Egyptian/Libyan borderland was gaining more definition and crystallizing in the sensibilities and social and spatial practices of state and local actors in the region, agents of the Ottoman, British, and Egyptian governments each at different moments evinced a keen desire not to delimit the border, but rather to keep the situation open and fluid for as long as possible (only the Italian government expressed a consistent desire to clarify and fix the boundary definitively). This chapter is therefore in part a case study in the uses of ambiguity: how and why was it both possible and desirable for different political actors to leave the settlement of the boundary’s location unresolved, even as some key underlying sense of borderedness and territorial conflict steadily intensified?

I am by no means the first to contest the conventional narrative of the movement from zonal frontiers to linear boundaries. Sahlins has argued that this model “fails to explain much of anything” in the case of Europe (France in particular), given how it ignores “two critical dimensions of political boundaries: first, that the zonal character of the frontier persists after the delimitation of a boundary line; and second, that the linear

---

26 This is of course what Ludden also takes issue with in his essay “Maps in the Mind.”
boundary is an ancient notion.”  

My critique of the conventional narrative in some ways mirrors both of Sahlins’s points here: if the more fluid zonal qualities of a borderland region persist after delimitation (which they surely did in the case of Egypt and Libya after the boundary treaty of 1925, and still do to this day), I suggest that what is so remarkable about my case in the pre-1911 period is the salience of some abstract notion of a linear border in the minds of the contesting state powers and local population long before there was any real attempt to define and delimit one. In short, the period under examination in this chapter represents a formative stage in which we can observe the uneasy co-existence of two opposing models of borderland territoriality (fluid/zonal and linear), both of which could be readily invoked by a wide array of state and non-state actors depending on their given interests or needs of the moment. If, in reaching this conclusion, my analysis remains close to Sahlins’s takeaway point that border formation should be seen “as the complex interplay of two notions of boundary (zonal and linear) and two ideas of sovereignty (jurisdictional and territorial),”  

I argue that my case study nonetheless constitutes a departure from his work given the way it emphasizes the interactivity between more than a pair of state actors (two of which—the Egyptians and Ottomans—were working out their own ambiguous political relationship to one another), as well as the fact that there was no clear-cut conception of “national interests.”  

---

28 Ibid., 8.  
29 Ibid., 8–9. In this regard I am echoing Ateş’s own critique of Sahlins’s conflation of linear boundary formation and nation-state formation. Ateş argues that the drawing of boundaries must be seen first and foremost as a means for “controlling…space and facilitating the geographical expansion of social systems and their surveillance capacity, rather than as attempts to make the nation and its boundaries congruous.” I take issue, however, with Ateş’s insistence on remaining wedded to a “frontier-to-boundary” framework, as well as the way in which he seems merely to replace Sahlins’s conception of nation formation with a more or less straightforward account of the tools and mechanisms of modern state formation and institutionalization. More generally, I question Ateş’s interchangeable usage of the terms border, frontier, and boundary, and would suggest that his definition of “borderland” is too constraining given the way the
throughout the period to serve as the necessary precondition for territorialization in the region.

In what follows, I will break up my analysis into three rough chronological periods that I argue represent distinct phases in the intensification of a political border conflict within the Egyptian/Libyan borderland. A number of common narrative threads run throughout the different sections, however. First, the Egyptian authorities proved far better equipped than their Ottoman counterparts to capitalize on the opportunity presented by the constant Bedouin unrest that erupted throughout the decade, which provided the real catalyst for change in how the different actors perceived and contested the borderland at this time. In this regard, the Egyptian Coast Guard steadily came into its own throughout the period, transforming itself from a small-scale quasi-state institution into the paramount arm of Egyptian state authority in the West. At the same time, the Ottoman authorities—gravely alarmed by the Egyptian Government’s enhanced sovereign capabilities and apparent expansionist designs—grew increasingly desperate to stem the tide of their waning position vis-à-vis an Egypt that was now acting more like an independent nation. Meanwhile, the Bedouin tribes reacted accordingly to the obvious differences between the two sides’ sovereign capabilities in the region, appealing more and more to the Egyptian Government for protection and redress for their grievances.

Second, the period witnessed a key tension between disparate notions of sovereignty in the borderland. The Italians consistently invoked the idea of clear-cut territorial sovereignty by pushing for delimitation and other geopolitical settlements that term gains its meaning only after a boundary line is actually drawn. Ateş, “Empires at the Margins,” 4-6; 15-6.

30 This feeling of paranoia only became more acute after the Ottomans—whose territory across the empire had gradually been shrinking throughout the nineteenth century—were forced to cede their territorial claim to the Sinai Peninsula in 1906 after a prolonged diplomatic dispute with the British.
would neatly carve up the region. The Ottoman and Egyptian Governments, though for their own different reasons, were both reluctant to delimit a border, preferring a more fluid situation in which they could continue to exercise different marks of sovereignty among the region’s population without provoking a major diplomatic dispute that would raise much thornier questions inherent in the Egyptian-Ottoman relationship. We will see this tension at play below, for example, with the Italians’ particular concern over circumscribing the territorial limits of a regional caravan route.

Although the events recounted here never resulted in anything close to a definitive, mutually shared understanding of the border’s true location—in fact, precisely *because of* that very lack of agreement or territorial certainty—the strange brew that was the political life of the borderland gradually came to a slow boil over the course of the decade. By the time of the Italian occupation, the basic contours of a modern political border had already emerged and begun to crystallize in the minds of all the various actors involved—even if that dividing line was still impossible to draw on a map.

**Phase 1: Defining the Contours of the Border Conflict, 1902-5**

*Prelude to a Conflict: Italian Designs and Demands, 1902*

After the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881, the Italian Government began to focus its attention on the three Ottoman Libyan provinces as a potential fourth shore for the expansive Italian imperial state. In order to clear the way for the incorporation of this swath of North Africa into its sphere of influence, the Italian government sought to gain the assurance of various European powers that they would maintain a hands-off policy in the event of an Italian occupation. Italy thus signed a *rapprochement politique* with France in December 1899, through which it gained the blessing of the French government
to do as it pleased in the Libyan provinces in exchange for a promise not to intervene in France’s colonial project in Tunisia; a similar (if less consequential) deal had been made with Germany in 1887.31

When the Italian Government turned to the British in order to procure a similar assurance, the situation proved somewhat more complicated. In January 1902, the Italians requested a formal declaration from the British Government that would clarify that it had absolutely no designs on territory beyond Egypt’s western border.32 Italy was especially keen to obtain such a promise from the British given that a Convention they had signed with the French in March 1899 concerning their respective spheres of influence in north-central Africa had neglected to take Italy’s African interests under consideration, and also had left the matter of the frontier region north of Lake Chad particularly vague; Italy thus feared that the British might one day overstep the actual terms of the Convention and extend its sphere northwards into Cyrenaica.33 It is for this reason that Italy demanded that the British revise the terms of the Anglo-French Convention so that it would also address Cyrenaica and clarify that the British would “remain now and hereafter disinterested in that province.”34

The British were reluctant to make any such promise. On one hand, they seemed to understand at this stage that it was beyond their legal authority to make diplomatic decisions with regard to territory that was still Ottoman. As such, the British Foreign Office felt that any official declaration along the lines demanded by Italy “would…be

31 Vandewalle, Modern Libya, 21.
33 NA: FO 101/94 (Foreign Office Memo, Jan. 17, 1902).
34 NA: FO 101/94 (Lansdowne to Currie, Jan. 31, 1902).
opposed to the spirit of our treaty engagements to Turkey.”\(^{35}\) Given that the Sultan was already extremely unnerved by the recent Italian-French accord over Tripoli, the British wanted to make sure not to take any action that might cause him any more consternation, or provoke a serious diplomatic conflict.\(^{36}\) On the other hand, the Italian demand alerted the British to just how little they actually knew about the political situation in the Egypt-Cyrenaica borderland—a fact that made them loathe to take any decisive action regarding territory there. Lord Cromer noted that the “Western frontier of Egypt has never been very clearly defined,” and that the Anglo-French Convention of 1899 had settled “nothing…respecting the frontier North of the Tropic of Cancer.”\(^{37}\) The British were in fact so ignorant about the situation along Egypt’s western borderland that—when the Italians requested that the British should refer to the contested territory in any declaration as “Cyrenaic Tripoli,” rather than the “Province of Tripoli”\(^{38}\)—a special investigation by the Intelligence Office in Cairo was required to establish that “Cyrenaica and Tripoli are two different things.”\(^{39}\)

In light of the uncertainty that the British felt vis-à-vis the Egypt-Cyrenaica borderland at this time, the Foreign Office deemed it “impossible” to give Italy the declaration it so urgently requested, opting instead to make an informal “positive assurance” that the British had “no aggressive or ambitious designs” on the Libyan provinces.\(^{40}\) On March 11, 1902 the British Ambassador in Rome passed on a dispatch from Foreign Secretary Lansdowne assuring the Italian Government that the British had

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) NA: FO 101/94 (O’Conor to Lansdowne, undated).

\(^{37}\) NA: FO 101/94 (Cromer memo, Jan. 14, 1902). It should be noted that in this and many other British writings at the time, the term “frontier” was used interchangeably with “border” and “boundary.” See Curzon, *Frontiers*.

\(^{38}\) NA: FO 101/94 (Cromer memo, Feb. 20, 1902).

\(^{39}\) NA: FO 101/94 Cromer memo, Feb. 21, 1902.

\(^{40}\) NA: FO 101/94 (Lansdowne to Currie, Jan. 31, 1902).
“no aggressive designs” on either the Vilayet of Tripoli or the subprovince of Benghazi\(^{41}\) (the British had decided against using the term “Cyrenaic Tripoli,” which—even though it had been used in the parallel French-Italian accord—they deemed incorrect\(^{42}\)).

According to the evidence I have seen, this is all that the Italians would get at this stage; upon further investigation into the situation, the British maintained that it would be “inadvisable” to stake any specific claims as to the “exact frontier between Cyrenaica and Egypt” or to the “amount of hinterland to be accorded to Tripoli and Cyrenaica.”\(^{43}\)

Official British declaration in hand or no, the Italians did not hesitate to begin making their presence felt in the coveted Ottoman Libyan provinces. By 1900 Italy, like Great Britain and France, had already been maintaining a consular corps in Tripoli and Benghazi for decades. And it seems as if one key function of the Italian vice-consulate in Benghazi, at least, was to keep an eye out for any British intrigues: in May 1899, for example, the Benghazi Vice-Consul reported on the “trespassing” or “border crossing” \((sconfinamento)\) of 60 British soldiers past Sollum into the territory of Cyrenaica.\(^{44}\) By 1902, the Italians were becoming more cavalier about pursuing their designs on the Libyan provinces. In early February, British proconsul Alvarez reported on the arrival of an Italian steamer to take soundings in the harbors of Derna and Bomba.\(^{45}\) Throughout May, according to Alvarez, several Italian agents acting “presumably under the auspices of their government” arrived in Benghazi “for the purpose of setting on foot various enterprises of more or less public utility,” including, among other projects: “a distillery;

\(^{41}\) NA: FO 101/94 (Currie to Lansdowne, Mar. 15, 1902).
\(^{42}\) NA: FO 101/94 (Intelligence Division memo, Feb. 26, 1902).
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) MAE: ASMAI, v. II: 101/1/8 (Vice-Consul at Benghazi to Riccardi Motta, Italian Consul in Tripoli, May 1899).
\(^{45}\) NA: FO 101/94 (Alvarez memo, Feb. 12, 1902).
stores or warehouses; the dredging of the harbor and completion of the breakwater; [and] the construction of a railway along the coast from Benghazi to Derna.”⁴⁶ A few months later, in August, a handful of Italian warships made several stops along the Tripolitan and Cyrenaican coastline; an Italian admiral visited with the European consulates in Benghazi; and Alvarez noted several officers taking measurements and making other observations for the surveying of the port.⁴⁷ It seems that from this point forward, Italian warships patrolling the coastline of the Libyan provinces would be a regular occurrence.⁴⁸ At the same time, this period witnessed the beginnings of various Italian schemes to bypass Ottoman restrictions on large-scale European land acquisition in Tripoli and Benghazi.⁴⁹

The impending threat of an Italian colonial occupation of Tripoli and Cyrenaica was not lost on the local population. Early in June 1902, Alvarez learned that some 500 merchants from the province of Tripoli had forwarded a petition to Egyptian Khedive Abbas Hilmi II requesting him to annex their country and make it part of Egypt. The impetus for taking such a bold step was apparently the “great hatred of the Italians freely expressed” in both Libyan provinces “on account of their [the Italians] making no secret of their designs on this country.” The delegates sent to Egypt on behalf of the merchant assembly apparently reported that they had been received quite favorably by the Khedive.⁵⁰ A few months later, after yet another Italian naval fleet visited Benghazi, a group of local notables began to meet frequently to discuss the province’s political situation. Once again, this group considered the potential annexation of Benghazi and

---

⁴⁷ NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez memo, August 6, 1902).
⁴⁸ See NA: FO 101/92 (Alvarez memos of Aug. 21, 1902; Sept. 21, 1902).
⁴⁹ See, for instance, NA: FO 101/94 (Findlay to Lansdowne, Sept. 14, 1902).
⁵⁰ NA: FO 101/94 (Alvarez memo, June 7, 1902).
Tripoli by the Egyptian Khedive the best possible solution, given that both Ottoman and Muslim “susceptibilities would be thereby spared” if the Libyan provinces were prevented from falling into the hands of a European power. Even the Sanusiyya were rumored to be willing to accept this arrangement.\textsuperscript{51}

It is unknown what ultimately came of this surreptitious annexation movement, though the Intelligence Department of the Egyptian War Office reported a year later that the “agitation is still more or less alive, and that the Khedive is interested in it.”

Regardless of the final outcome, the annexation movement—however short-lived—indicates that at least certain segments of the local population in the Libyan provinces certainly saw the writing on the wall, anticipating that their lands were “going to be swallowed up”\textsuperscript{52} by Italy before long. As such, they began to envisage alternative territorial arrangements that would enable them to preserve Muslim, and indeed Ottoman, rule.

\textit{Ottomans on the Horizon: Sollum, Marsa Matruh, and the Transformation of the Border Question, 1902-5}

On July 9, 1902, the captain of a small Greek vessel informed an Egyptian Coast Guard commandant that an Ottoman flag had been raised at Sollum.\textsuperscript{53} This news, once it finally reached Cairo,\textsuperscript{54} immediately stirred the British diplomatic establishment to action, jump-starting a flurry of correspondence through which various officials sought to ascertain whether or not the Ottomans had any rightful claim to Sollum. To find suitable

\textsuperscript{51} NA: FO 101/94 (Alvarez to Lansdowne, Aug. 20, 1902).
\textsuperscript{52} NA: FO 101/94 (Gleichen memo, Cairo Intelligence News, May 31, 1903).
\textsuperscript{53} NA: FO 78/5490 (Findlay to Lansdowne, July 18, 1902); NA: FO 78/5227 (Findlay to Lansdowne, July 20, 1902). He also mentioned seeing a similar Ottoman presence at “Borg Suleiman,” by which presumably he was referring to the coastal town known commonly as Port Suleiman.
\textsuperscript{54} The two documents cited in the footnote above are the first reports about the occupation that I have seen.
evidence, one official went straight to the crucial Ottoman *firmans* of investiture that had been issued to Mehmed ‘Ali in 1841, but discovered upon close examination that there was “nothing in them to throw light upon the precise line of frontier between Egypt and Tripoli”—only some vague gestures towards the “ancient limits of Egypt as laid down in a map” that “has never been forthcoming.” 55 Another officer went to the British Museum in London in order to consult its map collection and try to “determine what frontier was shown as the ‘ancient limit’ of Egypt in the map attached to the Firman of 1841.” Upon perusing every one of the Museum’s Egypt maps printed between 1770 and 1860, he determined that “very few maps…show a western frontier to Egypt” at all, finding only a French map from 1827 that indicated a clear-cut borderline (running from Sollum in a southwesterly direction). 56

From amidst all the confusion, British pro-consul in Benghazi Justin Alvarez emerged as a voice of reason. Alvarez, it turned out, had actually been aware of the prospect of an Ottoman advance on Sollum for months. Back in May, Alvarez reported to his superior in Tripoli that the Ottoman Governor of Benghazi had recently commanded the Qaimaqam of Derna to proceed to “the Turco-Egyptian frontier, with an escort of 100 men.” Deeming this escort to be suspiciously large in number, Alvarez had warned Cromer (though to no avail) that Egypt ought to step in and occupy Sollum as a precautionary measure. 57 A month later, Alvarez learned of an Ottoman plan to establish a “sanitary cordon” at Sollum that would consist of some 600 soldiers. 58 This latter news item prompted Alvarez to meet with the Ottoman Governor of Benghazi in order to

---

55 NA: FO 78/5490 (Oakes memo, July 19, 1902).
56 NA: FO 78/5490 (Major Hills memo, July 21, 1902).
impress upon him the fact that Sollum was in Egyptian territory, and that the Egyptian Government already exercised its authority there through periodic Coast Guard patrols. The Governor refused at first to admit any of this, contending instead that “ancient official maps” held in the Imperial Divan in Istanbul clearly showed the limits of Egypt to go no further west than Ras ‘Alam Rum, a point close to Marsa Matruh (about 130 miles east of Sollum). Alvarez was unfazed, however, and retorted by pointing out that all European maps, ancient and modern, that he had ever seen (as he “had always taken great interest in political geography”) marked Sollum as the point of departure for the Egyptian boundary. Ultimately, by Alvarez’s account, the Governor came around to accepting the British position regarding the border, even admitting that “Jaghbub was Egyptian”; he also “readily promised” not to advance any Ottoman troops beyond any point already their control.59 But this last bit was a blatant lie: within two weeks, the Ottoman occupation of Sollum proceeded as planned.

The Ottoman Government had in fact been considering such a move for over a year, as part of a broader initiative to beef up its military presence along the Cyrenaican coastline. Unbeknownst to Alvarez and other British officials, however, the Ottoman decision was prompted less by outward aggression than by a sense of confusion and defensive paranoia similar to what the British were also feeling towards the Benghazi/Egypt border issue. In the spring of 1901, the Sultan ordered a special meeting of the Ottoman Cabinet (Meclis-i Vükela) upon learning that some thirty Egyptian soldiers had purportedly been sent to the mouth of the Sollum harbor in order to establish a military outpost there (apparently in response to news that the Ottoman Government was commencing with plans to construct new military bases nearby at Port Suleiman and

Given the perceived threat such Egyptian actions posed to Ottoman interests in eastern Benghazi, the Sultan was especially horrified to discover that previous instructions to transfer funds to Benghazi for the establishment of new coastal garrisons had never been implemented. He therefore ordered the Cabinet to ensure that the necessary funds and troops would finally be procured in order to establish a small military post (karakolhane) in Sollum, which—according to the Cabinet minutes from that session—was considered to be at the “extreme limit of the border” (münteha-yı hudud).

The Ottoman Government’s commitment to taking defensive measures at key locales in the Egypt/Benghazi borderland intensified in the first months of 1902, once the Sultan received news from the Ottoman High Commissioner in Egypt, Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, that the British claimed the port of Marsa Matruh as Egyptian territory and were embarking on new settlement and construction projects there. The Sultan ordered his military staff officers (erkân-ı harbiye) to investigate the correct location of Marsa Matruh; based on the map they consulted—presumably a copy of the original 1841 map—they confirmed that Marsa Matruh was in fact “inside the Sanjak of Benghazi,” a finding that contradicted the Cabinet decision just a half year prior. The Sultan then issued an İrade proclaiming that errors of this sort, involving contested territorial claims within the empire, must never be made again—what was in effect a chastisement of the various branches of the imperial bureaucracy that should have been better informed about

---

60 It is possible that this news was actually apocryphal. Although, as Alvarez had argued, the Egyptians periodically sent a patrol ship to Sollum to investigate the situation there, Egyptian Coast Guard officials and Foreign Office agents consistently held in later the discussions that they never had a permanent presence any further west than the small settlement of Sidi Barrani, some 50 miles east of Sollum. See, for example, DWQ: MNW 0075-011200 (Purvis to Egyptian Ministry of the Interior, May 13, 1907); and NA: FO 101/94 (Memo from Aug. 10, 1903).

61 BOA: MV 102/28 (Cabinet minutes from May 14, 1901/25 Muharrem 1319).
the political situation along the disputed stretch of Mediterranean coastline. 62 This İrade provoked the Ottoman Cabinet members to take swift action: they at once appealed to the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi for information regarding the administrative and police apparatus at Matruh, at the same time that they wrote to the Interior and Naval ministries for precise details concerning the names of civil officials in Marsa Matruh, the number of gendarmes stationed there, and even the name of the port director. 63

The Ottomans’ decision to stake a claim to Sollum was therefore the product of more than a year of deliberation at various levels of the bureaucracy. On the initiative of the Sultan—who admonished his Cabinet that the perceived Egyptian threat on the horizon was too serious for them to flout any longer—the Ottomans organized by the summer of 1902 at least enough to establish a small but permanent garrison at Sollum. Officials were also now armed with the conviction that the key 1841 map actually showed the eastern limits of Benghazi to extend well beyond Sollum, up to the area around Marsa Matruh—the very same spot that the Egyptian Coast Guard was just beginning to transform into a more permanent settlement. 64 If, as we saw before, the

---

62 BOA: MV 103/67 (Cabinet minutes from Feb. 26, 1902/18 Zilkade 1319).
63 BOA: MV 104/13 (Cabinet minutes from May 4, 1902/25 Muharrem 1320).
64 It is perhaps not widely known that Marsa Matruh owes its growth and development to the Egyptian Coast Guard, and that the town’s raison d’etre for the first decade and a half or so after its formal establishment in 1903 was to serve as the premier Coast Guard base in the Egyptian West. Before the Coast Guard arrived, Marsa Matruh was essentially a sleepy village that served as a home base for some Bedouin tribes and witnessed the seasonal arrival of an onslaught of mostly Greek sponge fishermen each year. The Coast Guard transformed Marsa Matruh into something of a western boomtown, and basically ran the show up through World War I. According to the terms of what amounted to a sort of ‘charter’ for the town of Marsa Matruh, issued on March 16, 1903, the Coast Guard officer in charge of the outpost there would double as the town’s ma’mur (See DWQ: MNW 0075-008640 – note from Egyptian Finance Minister to the Council of Ministers, Nov. 22, 1904).

Also, as Dumreicher demonstrates, the Coast Guard was instrumental in carrying out many of the building and public works projects that marked the towns’ transformation. The Coast Guard also actively petitioned the Government to provide additional support to implement these infrastructural reforms, finally securing the requisite funds for boring a deep well, surveying and dredging the harbor, and deepening several channels. The Egyptian Ministry of Finance also provided Dumreicher with funds to compensate local Bedouins for the land they sought to purchase in order to expand the settlement; Dumreicher provides a colorful account of the three-day-long negotiations, led by Shalabi Mustafa, that the Coast Guard
burst of activity on the part of the British to address the situation at the border was a direct reaction to the Ottoman presence at Sollum, then ironically enough the Ottomans, too, only finally mobilized in the borderland as a reaction to a perceived British-Egyptian threat. In this way—borne out of mutual confusion, mutual suspicion, and mutual ignorance of the facts on the ground—the Ottoman-Egyptian border conflict escalated into a new, more acute phase.

British officials were, on the whole, far less confident than Alvarez about how to determine the actual position of the boundary line, and largely felt at a complete loss for how to respond to the recent territorial claims by the Ottomans. One official questioned Alvarez’s contention that Jaghbub could possibly be Egyptian, suggesting instead (on the basis of an Intelligence Department report) that Jaghbub was legally Sanusi territory by Ottoman decree. The same official also took serious issue with the Ottoman claim to Marsa Matruh, “the most important point on the Egyptian coast line west of Alexandria”; no matter how suspicious he was of the Benghazi “Governor and his ‘ancient maps,’” however, he lamented the fact that as long as “the only known copy of the map annexed to the Firman” was in Istanbul, Egypt’s western boundary would remain shrouded in doubt. Cromer for his part observed that although it had “always been fully understood that Sollum is Egyptian territory,” he was not “aware of any document having the formal law that lays down the frontier.” Finally, an intelligence memo from the Egyptian War

undertook with Bedouin notables in order to secure the desired land. With the help of a wanted French anarchist who was an expert architect and chemist, Dumreicher and his Coast Guard men oversaw the construction of a whole administrative infrastructure in Marsa Matruh, including a police station, prison, school, post office, and hospital. Also, with the apparent backing of the Khedive’s Daira Khassa, the Coast Guard actually undertook the construction of a new impressive mosque overlooking the harbor – the Mosque of Sidi Awam (completed in 1909). See Dumreicher, 8-13; “Iftitah Mesjid Marsa Matruh” (Cairo: Diwan ‘Umum al-Awqaf, 1910).

65 NA: FO 78/5227 (Findlay to Lansdowne, July 12, 1902). In Chapter 4 I addressed the open question of which, if any, Ottoman firmans accorded the Sanusiyya any special privileges.

66 NA: FO 78/5227 (Findlay to Lansdowne, July 20, 1902).
Office similarly conceded that it was merely “consensus of opinion” that established Sollum as the boundary’s starting point, since—again—the only map ever to define the boundary was no longer extant.\(^67\)

This lack of certainty compelled some officials to argue that the British government should move at once to appoint a commission to delimit the border. Ultimately, though, the British stopped short of taking any such extreme measures. A reconnaissance mission conducted by the Coast Guard revealed that the Ottoman post had been established on a ridge overlooking Sollum Bay that appeared “to be on, and not over, the generally accepted frontier line.”\(^68\) The Coast Guard men also determined that the garrison was extremely small, consisting of only four men (though twenty more were stationed further west along the coast at Port Suleiman). Even though one Coast Guard officer heard a rumor that the purpose of the occupation was for the Ottomans to begin collecting taxes in the environs of Sollum,\(^69\) the British let the matter slide for the time being. The crisis had been temporarily averted.

But not for very long. On the morning of October 5, 1904 Shalabi Mustafa—a Coast Guard officer who had recently been appointed \textit{ma’mur} of Marsa Matruh—had only just anchored his steamer in the Sollum harbor when two Bedouins swam out to the ship asking to have a look around. Shalabi Mustafa let them on board, but—suspicious of some ulterior motives on their part—went ashore to investigate. Speaking directly to the Ottoman commanding officer posted at Sollum, Shalabi Mustafa promptly learned that the two Bedouins were actually Ottoman spies who had been sent out to the ship in order to snoop around for evidence and ascertain whether or not the Coast Guard

\(^67\) NA: FO 78/5490 (Cover sheet to Intelligence Division memos, July 21, 1902).
\(^68\) NA: FO 78/5490 (Findlay memo, July 25, 1902).
\(^69\) NA: FO 78/5490 (Hogg report, July 23, 1902).
intended to build a new military base by the harbor. At the same time, Shalabi Mustafa saw firsthand that the Ottoman garrison at Sollum was no longer the tiny, innocuous outpost that the Coast Guard men had observed two years prior. The Ottomans had already erected two permanent stone structures at different strategic vantage points and were in the process of constructing what was to be a “big station” on top of the hill that could purportedly quarter around 100 men; this was evidently part of a grander scheme to streamline the government infrastructure at Sollum so it would be more like other Ottoman coastal garrisons, with a customs house as well as a regular “port office.” Moreover, the Ottoman officer informed Shalabi Mustafa that he had received strict instructions to “prevent the Egyptians from building at Salloom [sic] as they have no rights in the harbor or any part of Salloom, which are within the limits of Tripoli.” Shalabi Mustafa tried to argue against these points, but his protests fell on deaf ears.  

The disturbing results of Shalabi Mustafa’s fact-finding mission to Sollum slowly made their way up the chain of command. Andre von Dumreicher—Shalabi Mustafa’s commanding officer, at that time the Staff Inspector of the Coast Guard’s Western Directorate—feared that the Ottomans’ renewed claim that the border reached as far as Marsa Matruh would have a detrimental impact both on the revenue the Egyptian Government was collecting from sponge-fishing licenses, and also “on the minds of Bedouins” in the region. He thus wrote to acting Director-General of the Coast Guard Administration, George Purvis Bey, strongly recommending that a survey commission be assembled in order to delimit the boundary immediately.  

Purvis, in turn, forwarded all the pertinent information about Shalabi Mustafa’s voyage to Cromer in Cairo, echoing

70 NA: FO 78/5490 (Shalabi Mustafa report, Oct. 6, 1904).
71 NA: FO 78/5490 (Dumreicher to Purvis, Oct. 7, 1904).
Dumreich’s desire to dispatch a border commission, and urging the Government to take steps to stop the Ottoman building projects at Sollum at once.\footnote{NA: FO 78/5490 (Purvis memo, Oct. 11, 1904).}

In light of his professed uncertainty about the location of the western boundary two years prior—as well as the persistence of other voices within the Foreign Office holding that “the only apparent reason for fixing Sollum as the boundary is tradition”\footnote{NA: FO 78/5490 (Undated memo from the Director of Intelligence of the Sudan Government).}—Cromer’s reaction to this recent episode was strikingly cocksure. He argued in a memo that “the western frontier of Egypt has always been considered as beginning at Ras Jebel Sollum…to follow the crest of the ridge, and then to run in a south southwesterly direction, including the oases of Siwa and Jerhboub [sic]”; as such, the construction of buildings by the Ottomans on the south or southeast side of the ridge now suddenly constituted a surefire act of “encroachment on the part of the Turkish troops in Tripoli.” Moreover, Cromer asserted that the Ottoman claim to territory as far east as Marsa Matruh was “quite inadmissible,” and that the Ottomans must be called upon “to immediately withdraw the detachment which has been sent to Sollum, and which is attempting to exercise jurisdiction over what has always been regarded as Egyptian territory.” Cromer ultimately decided that the British Ambassador in Istanbul should file a formal complaint with the Sublime Porte, though he stipulated that no “allusion should be made” to the telltale 1841 map, which might provide evidence that was “more favorable to the claims of the Ottoman Government.” He also urged the Ambassador to take care to “avoid arousing the susceptibilities of the Italian Government who
are…extremely suspicious of any action taken by the Egyptian Government on the frontier of Tripoli.”

In the meantime, the Egyptian Coast Guard Administration took matters into its own hands. On October 20, Coast Guard officer Sheehan Bey led a commission to Sollum in order to remonstrate with the Ottoman officials in charge of the garrison. Sheehan first handed the Ottoman commanding officer a formal document of protest spelling out the British position that the Ottoman construction projects currently underway were illegal, since they were “on territory which was regarded as belonging to Egypt,” and that the Ottomans had no right to control the harbor. Sheehan also accompanied the Ottoman officers to the top of the ridge in order to point out where the proper border was thought to commence. At the same time, Sheehan conducted more reconnaissance of the area and confirmed Shalabi Mustafa’s observation that the new buildings would be of much higher quality than the old outpost, and that by virtue of the expansion the Ottomans now had a good command over both the inner and outer harbors.

The Ottoman Government took umbrage at Sheehan’s presumptuous attempt to compel Ottoman forces to stop building their karakolhane and withdraw from Sollum. After learning of Sheehan’s visit, officials at the Ottoman Interior Ministry affirmed the Government’s conviction that Sollum was in fact within the bounds of the subprovince of Benghazi, so that the Egyptian position was bogus to begin with. More than this, however, the Ottomans used the Sheehan declaration as an opportunity to chastise the Egyptians for subverting the proper chain of command—for dealing with the matter as

---

74 NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer memo, Dec. 15, 1904).
75 NA: FO 78/5367 (Coast Guard memo, Oct. 25, 1904; undated Sheehan memo; Cromer to Lansdowne, Oct. 29, 1904).
anything other than a strictly internal Ottoman one. After all, one official wrote, “Egypt is among the domains of the Imperial Sultan”; even if the Egyptian administration had something to say about the Ottoman karakolhane being built in the “border region” (hudud cevarnda), it was still necessary to take it up with the Sublime Porte.\footnote{BOA: Y.MTV 268/166 (Dahiliye memo, Dec. 1, 1904/23 Ramazan 1322).}

The British Ambassador received a similar lecture when he finally got his audience with the Grand Vezir in Istanbul. According to the Ambassador, Walter Townley, the Grand Vezir opened the meeting by expressing his dismay that “an English officer in the service of the Egyptian Government should have been selected to convey to protest,” since Egypt was still effectively under Ottoman sovereignty. The Grand Vezir then “proceeded to explain that he could not understand the contention that there had been an encroachment on Egyptian territory,” since an Ottoman garrison had in fact been posted at Sollum for several years past,\footnote{The Grand Vezir even pointed out that the Khedive could confirm the Ottoman establishment at Sollum, given that he had visited the port “not so very long ago.”} and reminded Townley that “Sollum was clearly marked in the map attached to the Firman” as belonging to the Sanjak of Benghazi.\footnote{NA: FO 78/5490 (Townley to Lansdowne, Nov. 29, 1904).} Not only were the Ottomans unwilling to back down, then, but the Sultan—upon hearing of the British protests against the Ottoman occupation of Sollum—also issued orders to complete the construction work there “as hastily as possible.”\footnote{NA: FO 78/5490 (Townley to Lansdowne, Nov. 22, 1904).} The British remained undeterred, however: a few months later, on February 13, 1905, Townley passed on another official declaration to the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs ordering the Ottomans to “step down and stop with their pretention to exercise jurisdiction over territory that was always recognized as part of Egypt.”\footnote{NA: FO 78/5490 (Townley to Tewfik Pasha, Feb. 14, 1905; Townley to Lansdowne, Feb. 14, 1905).} Cromer was willing to concede
that the Ottomans could “occupy the ridge overlooking the harbor…this ridge having always been regarded as the frontier,” but he remained adamant that the Egyptian Government would “not recognize the right of the Turks to construct buildings on the beach,” nor their claim to administer the harbor.”

The two sides were clearly at loggerheads, but the issue of precisely defining the border was once again tabled—this time on account of the Bedouin troubles that had started to brew.

**Phase 2: The Crystallization of the Border Conflict, 1904-1908**

*Tribal Warfare, Political Membership, and the Assertion of Egyptian Sovereignty in the Borderland: 1904-5*

If, in Chapter 4, we saw that various Bedouin conflicts across both sides of the putative boundary line had been a steady occurrence in the Egypt/Libya borderland ever since the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the situation intensified significantly in 1904 when a feud erupted between the Benghazi-based ‘Awagir and Shehebat tribes. This new round of hostilities undeniably marked a turning point in the politics of the

---

81 NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 28, 1905). Cromer even went so far as to propose that the Egyptian Government “would be prepared to lease the ground on the beach” for a nominal fee.
82 Historian Fatima ‘Alam al-Din ‘Abd al-Wahid suggests that – whereas the Ottoman Government did not give any weight whatsoever to the British diplomatic memos of November and February spelling out the Egyptian Government’s position on the western border – the British “considered the [Ottomans’ subsequent] silence as a sign of the Ottoman state’s acceptance” of the claim. See ‘Abd al-Wahid, *Hudud Misr al-Gharbiyya*, 27-8. As we will see later in the chapter, the British did in fact return periodically to the Townley declarations of 1904-5, though particularly with a view to arguing their position to the Italians.
83 ‘Abd al-Wahid includes an analysis of this period in her monograph on the Egyptian Western Border, yet she curiously restricts her analysis to an interpretation of one small subset of British archival materials (FO 407 – Confidential Prints). Although her analysis is helpful for its detail, and noteworthy for being the only secondary work I have encountered to treat the subject – she seems to misread certain aspects of these conflicts by jumping around within the chronology; by conflating discrete conflicts among different tribes; and by making a false link between the Bedouin troubles of the period and the later Sanusi-led rebellion against the British during World War I. Her treatment of the subject is also marred, in my opinion, by her insistence on treating the western border as if it were already more firmly established than it actually was, thereby reifying the Ottoman/Egyptian distinction before it is appropriate to do so—in effect imposing nationalist assumptions onto the period. See ‘Abd al-Wahid, *Hudud Misr al-Gharbiyya*, ch. 2.
borderland, and yet the origins of the feud are actually not entirely clear. According to the testimony of various Shehebat tribesmen—which would become the official line of the Egyptian Government—a notorious ‘Awagir sheikh named ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza instigated the feud in September 1904 when, along with a force of 400 of his kinsmen, he commanded the Shehebat to vacate their ancestral territory in the region around Wadi al-Bab. When the Shehebat refused, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza launched a violent attack that resulted in the murder of five Shehebat, as well as the death of his own son. Although the veracity of this event is not disputed, Ottoman records reveal that there might be a back-story to the conflict. According to the Benghazi Mutasarrıf at the time, it was actually the Shehebat who were responsible for igniting the blood feud: along with a group from the Meryam family, a contingent of Shehebat raided and pillaged some 200 camels from the al-Kazza family in their home territory near Soluk. By this account, then, the campaign that ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza launched at Wadi al-Bab was actually conducted in retaliation. 

Regardless of who was ultimately to blame for instigating the feud, it is clear that ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza and his fellow tribesmen quickly gained the upper hand. Within a few weeks of the initial confrontation, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza led another attack on the Shehebat, killing 34 of their tribesmen (including one woman) and plundering 400 camels and 1,000 ardebs of barley. This second siege was apparently intended to punish the Shehebat for their decision to appeal to the Ottoman authorities for protection. The

---

84 NA: FO 78/5490 (Shalabi Mustafa to Officer Commanding of the Coast Guard Administration’s Western District, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905).
85 BOA: DH.MKT 914/6 (doc. 3 – Benghazi Mutasarrıf to Dahiliye Nezâreti, Sept. 21, 1904/11 Receb 1322).
86 NA: FO 78/5490 (Shalabi Mustafa to Officer Commanding of the Coast Guard Administration’s Western District, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905); Dumreicher, Trackers and Smugglers, 48.
87 Dumreicher, Trackers and Smugglers, 48.
Shehebat had in fact pleaded their case to the Ottoman Mutasarrîf in Benghazi, but they were told that the local Government could do nothing to help them, and that they should instead turn to the Sanusi leadership for assistance. The Sanusiyya, too, ostensibly proved unable or unwilling to deal with ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza and his men.\(^{88}\) Clearly running out of options, then—and understanding full well that “they were relatively weak compared to their adversaries”\(^{89}\)—the Shehebat decided to seek refuge across the “border” with a section of the Awlad ‘Ali.

Rather than stem the tide of events, however, the Shehebat’s migration only served to widen the conflict, implicating the Egypt-based Awlad ‘Ali in what had begun initially as a more localized affair between two neighboring Benghazi tribes. Soon after the Shehebat took flight, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza led a raid on a group of Awlad ‘Ali who were pasturing in Benghazi, plundering 85 of their camels. This act had the effect of sending a strong message to the Awlad ‘Ali: the ‘Awagir, in the course of acting out their role in the blood feud, would henceforth refrain from making any meaningful distinction between the Shehebat and their Awlad ‘Ali protectors. Alarmed by this prospect—and also aggrieved by the fact that this recent act of aggression against them broke the terms of a settlement that they had reached (through Ottoman mediation) with the ‘Awagir four years prior—the Awlad ‘Ali sent a group of notable sheikhs to Benghazi in order to appeal in person to the Ottoman authorities for recompense. As was the case with the Shehebat before them, however, the Ottomans could not offer any assistance.\(^{90}\)

\(^{88}\) NA: FO 78/5490 (Shalabi Mustafa to Officer Commanding of the Coast Guard Administration’s Western District, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905).
\(^{89}\) BOA: DH.MKT 914/6 (doc. 6 – Egyptian Interior Ministry memo to Ottoman Interior Ministry, Feb. 7, 1905/2 Zilhicce 1322).
\(^{90}\) NA: FO 78/5490 (Petition from Kateefa group of the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouins to Shalabi Mustafa, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905; Shalabi Mustafa memo).
Awlad ‘Ali retorted by threatening to pillage any livestock caravans from Benghazi that passed through their territory en route to market in Egypt.\textsuperscript{91} In the meantime, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza amassed a considerable force—by some estimates upwards of 3,000 men\textsuperscript{92}—in order to continue the war against the Shehebat and Awlad ‘Ali. By the middle of January 1905, Bedouins throughout the borderland were bracing themselves for an imminent raid from the west.\textsuperscript{93}

It was at this point that the British and Egyptian authorities managed to step in and attempt to stabilize the political situation.\textsuperscript{94} Shalabi Mustafa was the key figure in this regard. On January 20, Shalabi Mustafa left on a routine Coast Guard patrol from Marsa Matruh, arriving several days later at a small Awlad ‘Ali village near Sidi Barrani called al-Khur, where many of the Shehebat had settled. It was here that Shalabi Mustafa first learned of the full scope of the violence of the preceding months, as well as the impending threat of attack by ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza’s forces. As he was making further inquiries, Shalabi Mustafa received two separate petitions from different groups of Awlad ‘Ali. The first—signed by followers of the “Katifa” family—enumerated the tribe’s aforementioned grievances against the ‘Awagir, and complained of the Benghazi Government’s inability to help them recover their stolen camels. The main objective of this petition was to implore Shalabi Mustafa—who, in the authors’ words, represented

\textsuperscript{91} NA: FO 78/5490 (Shalabi Mustafa to Officer Commanding of the Coast Guard Administration’s Western District, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905; Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 28, 1905).
\textsuperscript{92} NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 6, 1905; Petition from Bedouin Sheikhs of Marsa Matruh to Shalabi Mustafa, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905).
\textsuperscript{93} BOA: DH.MKT 914/6 (doc. 6 – Egyptian Interior Ministry memo to Ottoman Interior Ministry, Feb. 7, 1905/2 Zilhicce 1322); NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 6, 1905).
\textsuperscript{94} It should be pointed out here that, at least according to one key source in the British Foreign Office, it was the local Ottoman Government in Benghazi that “drew the attention of the Egyptian Government to these quarrels.” If, as we will see in the following analysis, the opportunistic Egyptian response was a huge boon for the Government’s administration in the west, then it is especially ironic that it might never have gotten involved at all if it were not for the Ottomans informing them of the situation. NA: FO 141/634/1 (“Note Upon Present Situation, Western Frontier,” May 15, 1907).
“our Government”—to compel the Egyptians to represent their interests to the Ottoman authorities. They concluded by warning that “if this cannot be done, we are prepared to take revenge ourselves and carry away a number of their camels equal to that taken from us,” thus abiding by the traditional Bedouin code. 95 The other, shorter Awlad ‘Ali petition was even more demonstrative in its show of allegiance to the Egyptian Government, claiming that the victims of ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza’s impending depredation would be those “Bedouins living at the boundaries of Egypt and belonging to the Egyptian Government [emphasis added].” 96

Fearing for the “public security” in the region, Shalabi Mustafa acted swiftly. First, he convened all the Awlad ‘Ali heads of family and “explained to them that the Egyptian Government is taking steps with the authorities of Benghazi for the recovery of the camels” plundered by ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza”; as such, he was able to gain a promise from them that they would temporarily refrain from taking any retaliatory measures. Shalabi Mustafa then essentially “deputized” various tribal notables, appointing them as Sheikhs and assigning each “a certain beat, granting them the powers of Bedouin Sheikhs, and holding them responsible for any disorder in their respective beats.”

Moreover, upon hearing that some Ottoman officials from Benghazi had recently crossed into Egyptian territory to collect absentee taxes on tribes residing there, Shalabi Mustafa issued sharp instructions to the Bedouin sheikhs to refrain from paying any such taxes; instead, they were to “inform such collectors that if they have any claim to make they are to communicate with the Egyptian Government,” and then report to him at once. In this

95 NA: FO 78/5490 (Petition from Kateefa group of Awlad ‘Ali Bedouins to Shalabi Mustafa, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905).
96 NA: FO 78/5490 (Petition from Bedouin Sheikhs of Marsa Matruh and environs to Shalabi Mustafa, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905).
way, Shalabi Mustafa “intended to show the Bedouins the influence of the Government.”

Shalabi Mustafa’s overtures to the Awlad ‘Ali at this time—even though he was acting largely on his own, without guidance from Cairo—marked a significant departure from the laissez faire policy that had defined Egyptian administration in the westernmost reaches of the state throughout the nineteenth-century (as we saw in Chapters 1 and 2). Taking full advantage of the extremely tense political situation in the borderland—marked both by the Ottoman Government’s apparent unwillingness or inability to address the escalating Bedouin war, as well as the Awlad ‘Ali and Shehebat tribesmen’s acute sense of vulnerability at this time—Shalabi Mustafa managed to advance the idea that the Egyptian Government was a strong and willing partner for those “Bedouins belonging to us,” looking out for their interests and wielding the requisite authority to go to bat with the Ottomans. In turn, even if it was driven primarily by fear and necessity, the Awlad ‘Ali and their neighbors seemed more than willing to consider themselves Egyptian subjects—at least for the time being. This was a surefire turning point in the relationship between the Bedouins and the Egyptian Government, which was now acting increasingly like a sovereign power.

Shalabi Mustafa paved the way for a more hands-on government policy for the region in other ways as well. First, he recommended the construction of a permanent Coast Guard station at Sidi Barrani, which would consist of around fifty men; this

97 NA: FO 78/5490 (Shalabi Mustafa to Officer Commanding of the Coast Guard Administration’s Western District, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905). Dumreicher for his part heaps praise on Shalabi Mustafa for his gift in dealing with the various Bedouins of the West. See Dumreicher, Trackers and Smugglers, 6, 48.

98 NA: FO 78/5490 (Shalabi Mustafa to Officer Commanding of the Coast Guard Administration’s Western District, enclosed with Cromer memo, Feb. 28, 1905).
proposal was quickly approved. Not only would this new garrison help the Government preserve public security and prevent conflict between the Bedouins on both sides of the border, it would also ensure that the “Bedouins will see the influence of the Government”; at the same time, it would give the Egyptians a better vantage point from which to block the “interference of the Turkish authorities with Bedouins of Egyptian territory.” Shalabi Mustafa also engaged in some local diplomacy, meeting with the Ottoman officers stationed at Sollum to gain their assurances that the garrison would remain especially vigilant against any potential movements by ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza.99

The exchanges between various British officials that followed the receipt of Shalabi Mustafa’s news from the borderland are particularly revealing for two main reasons. First, they serve as the first major indication that Cromer and other Residency officials were internalizing the notion of clear and distinct political membership among the Bedouin tribes of the borderland, adopting the language of belonging that Shalabi Mustafa himself had used. In his first memo in response to the Bedouin crisis, Cromer referred rather nonchalantly to those “Bedouins residing on the Egyptian side of the frontier”;100 three weeks later, however, Cromer spoke openly about exercising control over “our Bedawin [sic]” (or “Egyptian Bedouins”), as well as the need to resolve the disputes “between Bedouin tribes belonging respectively to Turkey and to Egypt.”101 Consul Alvarez, for his part, described the Awlad ‘Ali in a memo as “Egyptian subjects.”102

99 Ibid.
100 NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 6, 1905).
101 NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 28, 1905).
102 NA: FO 101/96 (Alvarez memo, Mar. 1, 1905.)
Second, the response of British officials to the news from the borderland indicates that they were beginning to fold the recent Bedouin strife together with other grievances against the Ottomans in the region, thereby fostering a deeper sense of there being one overarching border conflict between the Egyptian and Ottoman governments. The new Coast Guard post that would be constructed at Sidi Barrani thus had the dual purpose of bolstering Egyptian authority over the Bedouins there and “preventing encroachments on the part of the Turks.” These were seen as two distinct but related “questions involved in the dispute with the Turkish Government respecting the Western frontier of Egypt in the neighborhood of Sollum.”

Largely following Shalabi Mustafa’s lead, the British redoubled their diplomatic efforts to force the Ottoman Government’s hand: holding the local Ottoman authorities responsible for the actions of their province’s Bedouins, the British commanded the Porte to take decisive steps in order to prevent another raid by ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza. After all, in their view, the entire “dangerous situation” had been prompted in large part by “the license permitted to Bedouin on the Tripoli side of the frontier to raid Egyptian Bedouin with impunity.” At the same time, local Ottoman officials in Benghazi were under pressure from local livestock merchants who were still unable to move their goods overland to Egypt on account of the ongoing threats they were receiving from the Awlad ‘Ali. This local agitation in turn induced the Ottomans to appeal to the Egyptian Government to guarantee the safe passage of their merchants’ flocks and herds. The

103 NA: FO 78/5490 (Two memos from Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 28, 1905).
104 NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 6, 1905; Townley to Lansdowne, Feb. 14, 1905; Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 28, 1905).
105 NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 28, 1905).
106 NA: FO 101/96 (Alvarez memo, Mar. 1, 1905). According to Alvarez, this remained a serious a problem due to the fact that high fees and freight charges rendered the sea route to Alexandria wholly unprofitable.
Egyptians replied that it would “be happy to do so,” though only if the Ottomans agreed to ensure that the 85 plundered camels be returned to their rightful owners in Egypt; but if the Ottomans were “unable to keep order among the Bedouin on their own side of the frontier, they cannot expect the Egyptian Government to shield them from the reprisals which are usual among Bedouin in such cases.”

The various pressures brought to bear on the Ottomans seem to have been effective. Around mid-March, news arrived in Cairo that the ‘Awagir had finally returned the 85 plundered camels to the Awlad ‘Ali, and that the three main feuding tribes had reconciled. With that crisis situation ostensibly defused, some British officials began to ponder the efficacy of a proper border demarcation at this time. Yet the idea was vetoed on the grounds that the issue of overlapping Egyptian and Ottoman sovereignty in the borderland was still extremely slippery. According to the British Ambassador in Istanbul, “With respect to the demarcation of the frontier in the neighborhood of Sollum, I venture to put forward that the direct intervention of His Majesty’s Embassy in affairs touching the sovereignty of Egypt is always a delicate matter, and does not fail to arouse the susceptibilities of the Porte.” The border conflict had certainly evolved and crystallized as a result of the recent Bedouin feuds, but the notion of resolving the problem definitively with an official boundary commission was still far-off.

107 NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 28, 1905).
108 NA: FO 101/96 (Alvarez memo, Mar. 19, 1905); NA: FO 78/5490 (O’Conor to Lansdowne, Mar. 21, 1905). Unfortunately the documents I have perused do not provide more precise details about the nature of this settlement. Dumreicher indicates that the ‘Awagir/Shehebat feud never really subsided even despite the March reconciliation; I will consider his interpretation below in regards to the flare-up in the feud that occurred in 1907. For the purposes of my narrative of this key moment, however, the return of the 85 camels in March does seem to have brought about a temporary resolution and abatement of hostilities.
109 NA: FO 78/5490 (O’Conor to Lansdowne, Mar. 21, 1905).
Tensions Building: The Borderland’s Intermezzo Period, 1905-6

At the same time that the British were ramping up their diplomatic pressure on the Ottomans, they also made an arrangement with a Bedouin ‘umda from Beni Suef named Lemlum Bey al-Sa‘adi, who—as a brother-in-law of ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza—they felt would make a “trustworthy emissary” to the ‘Awagir, and could help negotiations along.\(^\text{110}\) After the initial settlement of mid-March, Lemlum apparently stayed on in Benghazi at the behest of both the British and Ottoman governments in order to help mediate between many different tribes en route to a more lasting resolution of the region’s Bedouin troubles.\(^\text{111}\) Alvarez noted in early April that Lemlum’s longer-term mission was “proceeding very satisfactorily,”\(^\text{112}\) but Coast Guard officer Andre von Dumreicher interpreted Lemlum’s presence in the borderland quite differently. According to Dumreicher (writing with the advantage of hindsight) Lemlum’s “mission as far as Egypt was concerned was a failure,” as “he seemed to have been more anxious to smooth out the many differences between the Awagir and the Turkish Government than to occupy himself with the object of his mission.” By Dumreicher’s estimate, Lemlum managed whilst in Benghazi to convince the Ottoman Government to pardon around 150 ‘Awagir tribesmen who had been apprehended after the last round of hostilities.\(^\text{113}\) Unfortunately many details surrounding Lemlum’s stint in Benghazi remain obscure, though one report from the Benghazi Mutasarrıf claims that Lemlum was

\(^{110}\) NA: FO 78/5490 (Cromer to Lansdowne, Feb. 25, 1905). Curiously, perhaps, Cromer initially wanted to keep the Lemlum mission a secret from the Ottoman Government, fearing that they would only “interfere” and try to impose their own propensity for “stirring up mischief between the frontier tribes.” Other documents indicate that the Ottomans were privy to Lemlum’s arrival in Benghazi and even welcomed him with open arms. See, for instance, NA: FO 101/96 (Alvarez memo, Mar. 19, 1905). It should also be added that Lemlum seems to have played some role in bringing about the cessation of hostilities in March, although the details of this are not certain.

\(^{111}\) NA: FO 101/96 (Alvarez memo, Mar. 19, 1905).

\(^{112}\) NA: FO 101/96 (Alvarez memo, Apr. 7, 1905).

\(^{113}\) Dumreicher, Trackers and Smugglers, 49.
“profiting” from his role as head of the Bedouin commission, thereby perhaps underscoring Dumreicher’s observation that Lemlum had taken on the assignment primarily to benefit himself as well as his kinsmen.\textsuperscript{114}

News of the Lemlum commission\textsuperscript{115} came to Italian officials in Benghazi on the heels of two other events in the borderland region they found equally perplexing and disturbing. The first of these was the Khedive’s visit to Siwa in the winter of 1906 (see Chapter 3), which caused the Italians considerable consternation given early intelligence (later disproven) claiming that the Khedive had also visited Jaghbub, in what was indisputably Cyrenaican territory.\textsuperscript{116} The second was a small, “almost unobserved” event from the previous year that the Italian Vice-Consul in Benghazi could only see as evidence of some diabolical scheme on the part of the Egyptians: for the first time in memory, he wrote, “one of the usual large caravans” from Wadai had deviated from its typical route through the Cyrenaican oases of Kufra, Jalo, and Awjila up to its terminus in Benghazi, opting instead to travel through Upper Egypt, via the western Egyptian oases. Even if the motives behind this diversion remained unclear, the Vice-Consul still worried that “a new route has been inaugurated between Wadai and the Mediterranean that cuts outside of Cyrenaica.” Putting together “the significance of these three facts, now associated with one another”—the Lemlum mission, the Khedive’s voyage out west, and the re-routing of the Wadai-Benghazi caravan route—the Vice-Consul concluded that the British must be taking measures to incorporate a large swath of Cyrenaica into their

\textsuperscript{114} BOA: DH.MKT 914/6 (doc. 7 – Undated memo from Benghazi Mutasarrıf Zühdü Paşa to Dahiliye Nezâreti).

\textsuperscript{115} For whatever reason, Italian intelligence concerning what they referred to as the “Egyptian mission” came many months after the fact. The Italians also struggled to learn many pertinent details about the mission.

\textsuperscript{116} MAE: ASMAI, vol. II 103/3/16 (Report from July 13, 1906).
sphere of influence—thereby breaking their agreement from 1902. The Italian Government, then—much like the British under Cromer—was also connecting the dots between several discrete political phenomena in the borderland, viewing them as different manifestations of one comprehensive border conflict that threatened their vital interests in the region. These fears would henceforth loom large in Italian thinking.

In the meantime, the Ottoman and Egyptian governments continued to squabble over each other’s respective shows of authority and territorial claims in the borderland.

In the spring of 1905, the Ottoman Government learned that the construction of the new Egyptian Coast Guard station at Sidi Barrani (known locally as “Bamba”) was already underway. Moreover, a report from the Interior Ministry revealed that segments of “the local population” had started to express the feeling that “the area between Marsa Matruh and Sollum has been left [metrük] to the Egyptians.” All this was cause for great alarm in the eyes of Ottoman officials, who now feared that the Egyptian Government, by rapidly extending its military administration as far as Sollum, intended to seize even more territory that did not “belong” to it. In order to defend the disputed stretch of coastline encompassing Sollum and Bamba from such encroachment, then, the Ottoman Government made arrangements to provide the funds and manpower necessary to bolster

---

117 MAE: AIE 108 (Vice-Consul in Benghazi to Vice-Consul in Tripoli, Apr. 26, 1906; MAE to Italian embassy in Cairo, May 28, 1906). Alvarez, for his part, observed a similar departure from previous patterns in the caravan trade as far back as November 1904. See NA: FO 101/95 (Alvarez memo, Nov. 3, 1904).

118 This local place name should not be confused with the port-town of Bomba located between Derna and Tobruk in Benghazi. As we will see below, however, even the Ottomans and Egyptians could mistake the two. See DWQ: MNW 0075-011200 (Purvis memo, May 13, 1907).


120 BOA: MV 111/31 (Cabinet minutes of May 4, 1905/28 Safer 1323).
its military outposts at Sollum, Tobruk, and Derna.\textsuperscript{121} Moreover, the Ottoman Cabinet argued once again that the 1841 map, since it placed the starting point of Egypt’s western boundary line at a point near Marsa Matruh, clarified beyond any doubt that the Egyptian administration’s latest advances were out of bounds. As such, the Cabinet resolved not to permit any Egyptian building projects or military detachments in Bamba or Sollum, and decided to convey this message to the Egyptian Government at once.\textsuperscript{122}

The Ottomans’ objection baffled the Egyptian administration, which retorted that the “aforementioned Port of Bamba is inside the Province of Benghazi, and is located a considerable distance to the West of the Port of Sollum,” so that “there has not been any act of encroachment, nor even the slightest intention of encroachment.”\textsuperscript{123} In this way, the Egyptian Government—either cagily sidestepping the issue, or else merely revealing its continued state of ignorance regarding the geography of the borderland region—was conflating “Bamba” (the alternate local name for Sidi Barrani, which the Egyptian Coast Guard was in fact occupying) with “Bomba,” which was indisputably within the jurisdiction of Ottoman Benghazi. Perhaps equally curious, in their official response to Istanbul the Egyptians made the paradoxical claim that Sollum was both “inside the bounds of Egypt,” at the same time that “it is the line of demarcation between Egypt and Benghazi [emphasis added].”\textsuperscript{124} The finer points of these territorial quibbles aside, the upshot of this exchange was that the Egyptian Government—by referring only to

\textsuperscript{121} BOA: Y.A.RES 132/17 (doc. 2 – Dahiliye Minister to the Grand Vezir, Apr. 5, 1905/29 Muharrem 1323).
\textsuperscript{122} BOA: MV 112/58 (Cabinet minutes of Dec. 11, 1905/13 Şevval 1323).
\textsuperscript{123} DWQ: MNW 0075-011210 (Egyptian Interior Ministry to Grand Vezir, Jan. 15, 1906).
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid. The language of the text is as follows: Sollum alledhi huwwa dakhil al-hudud al-Misriyya, wa alledhi huwwa al-khatt al-fasîl bayna Bingazi wa Misr.
Ottoman Bomba (not Bamba), and refusing to budge on the Sollum issue—seems to have managed to forestall further conflict for the time being.

In light of the foregoing, I suggest that the eighteen months or so following the tribal conflicts of 1904-5 constituted a sort of “intermezzo” period in the emergent border conflict: without any sort of lasting resolution in sight, several of its various ingredients were left to simmer, so that the tension continued to build and be felt on all sides. One more ingredient should be added to the stew at this stage: although much unfortunately remains unknown about the Sanusiyya’s activities after Muhammad al-Mahdi’s death in 1902, there is some evidence that the Brotherhood started to re-imagine its political role as the winds of change continued to blow more noticebly throughout the borderland. According to the new British Pro-Consul in Benghazi, Raphael Fontana, the Sanusiyya were at the center of a burgeoning contraband weapons trade. Writing in October 1906, Fontana observed that within the past month alone, several different vessels (many of them Greek) had landed large shipments of arms and ammunition at various points on the Benghazi coastline, which were then taken and transported by various Bedouin groups. The Ottomans were powerless to stop these activities and thus had “no option but to wink at the smuggling,” given that the Bedouins were “better armed and more numerous than they were.”

According to Fontana, it was clear that the Sanusi-led Bedouins’ “doubt and anxiety as to the near political future of the country” had propelled them into the illicit arms trade; seeing the writing on the wall, the tribes were bracing themselves for an inevitable conflict with the Italians. More than this, however, the Sanusiyya’s compulsion to arm themselves in this period was also arguably a function of their awareness that a major power vacuum in the region might emerge for them to fill in the

---

125 NA: FO 371/156 (Fontana memo, Oct. 29, 1906).
event that the Italians unseated the Ottoman authorities in the Libyan provinces once and for all.\footnote{Ibid.}

With all this tension building, it would not take much to re-ignite the fuse. The fateful spark in fact came at the end of 1906, when a second intense wave of Bedouin conflicts erupted in the borderland. Once underway, these Bedouin struggles quickly set in motion a dense chain reaction of events that coalesced in such a way as to push the borderland even further along the path towards the emergence of a clear, shared sense of bordered-ness and political division. Again, all this occurred, paradoxically, long before the idea of conducting a proper delimitation and demarcation of the actual borderline was ever seriously considered.

\textit{A Confluence of Events: Major Borderland Developments, 1906-7}

If the agreement between the ‘Awagir and Shehebat in March 1905 had ushered in a period of relative calm in the borderland, this did not mean that the feuding between the various tribes of the region ever ceased entirely. Beginning around January 1906, the ‘Awagir began to carry out a steady string of small-scale thefts of livestock, targeting various tribes on both sides of the border. The ‘Awagir ramped up these activities in November of that year, at one point plundering approximately 100 camels from three different tribes.\footnote{NA: FO 371/346 (Letter from Egyptian Minister of the Interior to Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, Feb. 4, 1907/20 Zilhicce 1324).} Seeing the direction things were headed, the ma’mur of Marsa Matruh warned of the serious consequences that might arise from the ‘Awagirs’ “insistent attacks made upon Bedouins living in Egyptian territory and under Egyptian protection.”\footnote{NA: FO 141/634/1 (“Note Upon Present Situation Western Frontier,” May 15, 1907).} At the same time, a separate cross-border feud—between the Awlad ‘Ali and the Bara‘sa—

\footnote{126 Ibid.}

\footnote{127 NA: FO 371/346 (Letter from Egyptian Minister of the Interior to Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, Feb. 4, 1907/20 Zilhicce 1324).}

\footnote{128 NA: FO 141/634/1 (“Note Upon Present Situation Western Frontier,” May 15, 1907).}
was starting to heat up. By the end of the year, then, a general climate of tribal strife had once again set in throughout the borderland.

From amidst this rising tide of Bedouin hostilities, one episode in particular caught the attention of the Italian authorities in Benghazi. In the final days of 1906, the Benghazi Vice-Consul (R. Tritonj) learned from a Bedouin informant that six Egyptian soldiers, accompanied by six “Arab-Egyptians” of the Awlad ‘Ali tribe, had recently crossed into Cyrenaican territory in order to pursue a group of Mogharba tribesmen who had purportedly stolen a large number of camels from the Awlad ‘Ali. The Egyptian team pursued the Mogharba “all across the Cyrenaican hinterland,” finally catching up with them in the outskirts of Ajdabiya, where—after a couple of firefights—they managed to apprehend the thieves. Shortly thereafter, however, the sheikh of a nearby Sanusi Zawiya where the Egyptian soldiers had stopped for two days intervened on behalf of the Mogharba and secured their release.

The Italians were concerned less with the fate of the particular tribesmen involved than with what this episode revealed about the flimsiness of Ottoman authority in Benghazi. In their view, the idea that an Egyptian military unit could cross over into Benghazi territory and carry out such an operation “on their own devices, without the Ottoman authorities” was a clear indication of the striking “impotence” that had befallen the Ottoman government in the Libyan provinces. After all, this was no mere instance of “trespassing” on the part of the Egyptians, but rather constituted a “veritable incursion.” Moreover, the Egyptian unit ostensibly felt it could act with complete impunity on Ottoman soil: although the local Ottoman official at Ajdabiya had formally requested to

130 MAE: ASMAI, vol. 2 101/2/33-4 (Tritonj to Italian Consul at Tripoli, Jan. 2, 1907).
meet with the Egyptian soldiers about the operation, they refused to receive him, asserting that they were merely following their government’s orders.131

As was the case before, the Italians could not view this recent episode in isolation, but rather folded it together with rumors of other recent political developments in a way that allowed them to see a broader pattern emerging in the borderland. By “bringing together…this circumstance” with the Khedive’s purported visit to Jaghbub (which had, apparently, not yet been proven apocryphal) as well as recent news about the progress of the western railway, the Italians could only conclude that the Egyptian Government was acting out its ambitions for the “proposed expansion of Egypt towards Cyrenaica,” thereby placing their own plans for the region in jeopardy. It was in this context of paranoia that the Italians decided they must push the British Government’s hand to agree to a definitive border settlement once and for all.132 And so at the very beginning of February 1907, the Italians inaugurated a new round of discussions with the British Government regarding the “delimitation of the Tripoli frontier…between Great Britain and Italy.” The British response was non-committal: Cromer informed the Italian Consul-General in Tripoli that while he personally had no objection to the idea, “any delimitation to which the Turkish Government was not a party would not be of very much value.”133

* * *

Meanwhile, the Egyptian and Ottoman governments were taking decisive steps towards tackling the long-standing feud between the ‘Awagir and Shehebat, which by February 1907 had once again reached a fever pitch. A bit of background is in order. As

131 Ibid.  
133 NA: FO 371/247 (Cromer to Grey, Feb. 1, 1907).
it turned out, the aforementioned settlement of March 1905 had only been a temporary palliative to the bellicose state of affairs between the two tribes, ushering in a cold peace that was not built to last. Although at some point in 1905 or 1906, through the mediation of Lemlum Bey, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza acquiesced to signing a tribal bond of reconciliation (mazbata) with the Shehebat—in which he committed to pay a suitable sum of blood money—it appears that he did not do so in good faith.\(^{134}\) According to one source, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza actually ordered the ‘Awagir to pursue the Shehebat delegates as they were traveling back to Egypt after signing the accord, in order to obtain and destroy the mazbata and thus erase the only written evidence of his debt.\(^{135}\) Although the Shehebat managed to get away, it did not really matter in the end: ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza quickly broke the terms of the agreement, refusing to make the first payment by the designated time.\(^{136}\) This breach of the terms of the mazbata in turn provoked the Shehebat to stage a series of reprisals across the border that culminated in the murder of ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza’s brother, ‘Omar Abu Yunus, in January 1907. The ‘Awagir retaliated with a raiding campaign of their own, which only begot more threats of reprisals from their adversaries in Egypt. Before long, the battle lines had been clearly re-drawn, and the Awlad ‘Ali and Shehebat were once again on the brink of an all-out cross-border war with the ‘Awagir. As one Egyptian Government official put it, “What has actually taken place is the very thing that the Coast Guard, under instructions from the Ministry, have for the last four years been trying to prevent.”\(^{137}\)

\(^{134}\) Dumreicher, *Trackers and Smugglers*, 49-50. According to Dumreicher, the agreed upon sum was 2,200 Egyptian pounds, to be paid over eight installments. The same amount is also cited in a memo that the Grand Vezir wrote to the Khedive (see DQW: MNW 0075-011200).

\(^{135}\) NA: FO 371/346 (Fontana memo, Feb. 23, 1907).


\(^{137}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Interior Ministry to Cromer, Mar. 18, 1907; Cromer to Grey, Mar. 20, 1907).
In order to prevent hostilities from escalating further, the Egyptian and Ottoman governments agreed to convene a joint commission that would seek to bring the warring tribes together in order to educe a swift settlement.\(^{138}\) On February 10, the Egyptian Coast Steamer *Abbas* left Alexandria for Benghazi, carrying on board a delegation of Awlad ‘Ali and Shehebat sheikhs under the command of the sub-mudir of Beheira (Sa‘id Bey Fahmy) and the ma‘mur of Marsa Matruh (Muhammad Efendi Na‘im). The mission had several specific objectives. First, the Shehebat delegates sought to collect the blood money owed to them by ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza; this, Egyptian and Ottoman officials all agreed, would hopefully enable the attainment of a more lasting peace negotiation between the two warring tribes.\(^{139}\) The matter of blood money was a tricky one, however, given that the murder of ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza’s brother apparently vitiated the *mazbata* in one fell swoop.\(^{140}\) Second, both governments hoped that this joint commission might pave the way for the “repatriation” of the Shehebat and other Benghazi Bedouin who had been residing on the Egyptian side of the border. Since the Shehebat refused “to leave Egyptian territory, or to return to their old homes, until satisfactory guarantees” of their safety had been obtained, it was necessary to convince the ‘Awagir to return to the negotiating table, this time in good faith.\(^{141}\) Both the Egyptian and Ottoman governments seemed to agree that such a step was crucial for restoring “public security” to the region.

---

\(^{138}\) NA: FO 371/346 (Letter from Egyptian Minister of the Interior to Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, Feb. 4, 1907/20 Zilhicce 1324).

\(^{139}\) NA: FO 371/346 (Fontana memo, Feb. 23, 1907). According to Fontana, the Shehebat had actually taken some initiative towards the resolution of the conflict by petitioning the Khedive, who in turn communicated their grievances to the Sultan, who then issued an *irade*. Fontana’s account does not gel completely with other documents, however, so it must be taken as one possible explanation for the timing of the Benghazi delegation.

\(^{140}\) DWQ: MNW 0075-011200 (Grand Vezir to the Khedive, Apr. 4, 1907).

\(^{141}\) NA: FO 371/346 (Letter from Egyptian Ministry of the Interior to the Mutasarrıf of Benghazi, Feb. 4, 1907/20 Zilhicce 1324). This document was a response to a letter that the Mutasarrıf had sent on October 10, 1906. Given that it was the Ottoman side that broached the idea of a resolution along these lines, we cannot rule out the possibility that they were hoping to repatriate the Shehebat for the purpose of collecting taxes from them.
By taking this position, of course, they were underscoring the burgeoning notion of
distinct Bedouin political membership in the borderland: by this standard, peace and
security essentially stemmed from the two governments’ ability to keep the tribes on their
respective sides of the border.

There was therefore much on the line with the joint commission; to the chagrin of
the Ottomans and Egyptians alike, it did not proceed at all as planned. Soon after the
arrival of the Egyptian delegation, the Benghazi Mutasarrıf sent Mansour Kekya—a local
‘Awagir notable and Ottoman official, and another of ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza’s brothers-
in-law—to induce ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza to participate in the commission. When
‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza refused, the Mutasarrıf dispatched six gendarmes with orders to
bring him forcibly to Benghazi. This, too, proved ineffectual.\textsuperscript{142} Ultimately, even though
‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza resided only some ten hours away, the Ottoman Government
lacked the power to compel him to come to Benghazi.\textsuperscript{143} In light of this major setback,
the Ottoman Government recalled the Mutasarrıf, who had worked so doggedly with the
Egyptians to organize the joint commission on behalf of the Shehebat; his replacement
was, by all accounts, either too incompetent to handle the situation, or else too afraid to
make any major decisions without approval from the Porte. The joint commission was
soon dissolved, and on March 18 the Egyptian delegation returned by ship to Alexandria,
their weeks-long mission having been completely for nought.\textsuperscript{144} One official in the
Interior Ministry registered his severe disappointment at this recent turn of events: he had
thought that the joint commission should have had “a reasonable probability of success,”

\textsuperscript{142} NA: FO 371/346 (Fontana memo, Feb. 23, 1907).
\textsuperscript{143} NA: FO 371/247 (Memo from Egyptian Interior Ministry to Cromer, Mar. 18, 1907; Cromer to Grey, Mar. 20, 1907); Dumreicher, 48-50.
\textsuperscript{144} NA: FO 371/247 (Memo from Egyptian Interior Ministry to Cromer, Mar. 18, 1907; Cromer to Grey, Mar. 20, 1907); Dumreicher, 48-50.
given that the Shehebat and ‘Awagir had both initially “shown a willingness to come to terms,” as well as the fact that the broader tribal population of Benghazi had apparently been pressing for a peaceful settlement to this feud since it had consistently disrupted their commerce in livestock to Egypt (still “the only market for their surplus camels and sheep”).

At the very same time that the Egyptian delegation was holed up in Benghazi, waiting to find out if ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza would ever arrive, the conflict between the Awlad ‘Ali and Bara’sa tribes was reaching new heights. In early March, the Egyptian Government received a petition from an Awlad ‘Ali tribesman complaining of a recent raid by members of the Bara’sa: around 300 of his sheep, as well as a cache of weapons, had been seized, and he was asking the Government either to take measures to restore the plundered goods to him, or else to relax its prohibition on Awlad ‘Ali reprisals. In contemplating a suitable diplomatic response to this episode, Cromer articulated for the first time his fear that the recent eruption of cross-border Bedouin fighting would inevitably compel the Government to deal with the thorny question of defining Egypt’s western border: he wrote that “the question of the western frontier is one which I am most anxious not to see raised, but, if this contingency is to be avoided, the Turkish Government must of necessity exert themselves seriously to put an end to the raids now being made by Turkish Bedouins on those dwelling on the Egyptian side of the frontier.”

When the British probed further into the recent flare-up of the Awlad ‘Ali/Bara’sa feud, however, they discovered a deeper back-story that needed to be addressed

---

145 NA: FO 371/247 (Memo from Egyptian Interior Ministry to Cromer, Mar. 18, 1907).
146 NA: FO 371/247 (Cromer to Grey, Mar. 7, 1907).
immediately. Apparently the raid on the Awlad ‘Ali tribesman that initially called Cromer’s attention to the conflict was actually a reprisal carried out to avenge a murder of one of the Bara’sa that the Awlad ‘Ali had carried out in Benghazi by mistake (taking the victim to belong to another sub-group of the Bara’sa).\textsuperscript{147} Ever since, the two sides had been embroiled in several rounds of back-and-forth raiding across the border, which were only growing more intense and violent; according to one source, the Bara’sa were threatening to raise a force of “1,500 men armed with good modern rifles,” while the Awlad ‘Ali were steeling themselves for further retaliatory incursions into “Turkish territory.”\textsuperscript{148} The British ultimately decided that urgent measures were necessary to prevent this feud, too, from escalating further. Aside from the obvious detrimental impact that “such barbarous deeds…inconsistent with rules of justice and humanity” had on public security in the borderland between two “civilized countries,”\textsuperscript{149} the British also regretted that the fighting had all but stopped the vital export trade of livestock to Egypt from Benghazi.\textsuperscript{150}

This explosion of a multi-layered Bedouin conflict across the borderland in the early spring of 1907 deeply disquieted the Egyptian Government. Cromer, declaring that “the Turkish Bedouins are out of control,”\textsuperscript{151} argued that a vigorous new approach was necessary in order to put a swift stop to this moment of crisis: in his view, this scenario whereby two different, powerful Benghazi tribes were once again attacking the Awlad ‘Ali and Shehebat in Egyptian territory with abandon was perhaps the gravest threat to

\textsuperscript{147} NA: FO 371/247 (Proces-Verbal of Mar. 18, 1907; Report by Yuzbashi Ahmed Effendi Fahmy, Ma’mur of Marsa Matruh to the Governorate of Alexandria, Mar. 1907).
\textsuperscript{148} Dumreicher, 45-7.
\textsuperscript{149} NA: FO 371/247 (Report by Yuzbashi Ahmed Effendi Fahmy, Ma’mur of Marsa Matruh to the Governorate of Alexandria, Mar. 1907).
\textsuperscript{150} NA: FO 371/247 (Fontana to Grey, Mar. 20, 1907).
\textsuperscript{151} NA: FO 371/247 (Cromer to Grey, Mar. 21, 1907).
Egyptian interests in the borderland he had witnessed. The policy that Cromer adopted in response is particularly noteworthy for the language he used to describe the Egyptian Government’s commitment to the tribes on its side of the border. Arguing that the Government “will be morally bound to protect the Awlad ‘Ali,” he conceded that they might finally have to raise a major diplomatic dispute with the Ottomans—presumably implying that he might have to broach the matter of delimitation, after all. Even though “nothing could be further from the wishes of the Egyptian Government,” he added, “the duty of the Government to defend its subjects from attack in Egyptian territory is clear.”

In the end, Cromer ordered an ultimatum of sorts to be issued to the Ottoman Government: if they could not “maintain order” and do their part in preventing the “chaos now existing in Tripoli,” then the Egyptian Government would consider itself “bound to protect” the Awlad ‘Ali, and could not be expected to prevent any reprisals back across the border any longer. After all, it was only the “restraining influence of the Egyptian Government” on the so-called Egyptian tribes that had staved off even further violence and disorder in the borderland region. At the same time, Cromer wished to remind the Porte that “Egypt earnestly desires to avoid any risk of dispute with the Suzerain Power,” and that accordingly it hoped that the Ottoman Government could take “vigorous steps to restore order among the Bedouins of Tripoli, and to prevent them from invading Egyptian territory.” If the Ottomans were unable or unwilling to undertake such “energetic measures,” however, then “the question of the Western frontier must almost inevitably

152 NA: FO 371/247 (Cromer to Grey, Mar. 20, 1907).
153 Ibid.
On or around March 23, the British Ambassador in Istanbul passed on this urgent message to the Grand Vezir, who chalked the maladministration along the frontier up to the personal “incompetency” of the former Mutasarrif.\textsuperscript{155} The Grand Vezir seemed to take the British Government’s charge very much to heart: in a letter to Khedive Abbas Hilmi II, he promised that the Ottoman Government had instructed the new Mutsarrif in Benghazi to implement all necessary measures to present such disturbances between the tribes, which are a “result of their ignorance.”\textsuperscript{156}

The British adopted some other measures to stem the rising tide of Bedouin hostilities at this time. First, the Government established a new Coast Guard camel corps, comprising around 100 men, “for the sole purpose of keeping the peace between the two sets of Bedouins.”\textsuperscript{157} After all, as Cromer noted, “the want of such a camel corps was greatly felt” the year before, “during the acute phase of the Sinai Peninsula question.”\textsuperscript{158} This was a subtle but important upgrade to the policing authority of the Egyptian Coast Guard: whereas before the Coast Guard had been instructed to maintain order in the Western Desert to the best of its abilities, the recent fighting between the borderland tribes compelled the Government to increase and regularize the Coast Guard’s patrolling capabilities. In this way, a “regular force” would be “ready for service without withdrawing the Coast Guard from their regular work, for which their numbers are no more than adequate.”\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{154} NA: FO 371/247 (Cromer to Grey, Mar. 21, 1907).
\textsuperscript{155} NA: FO 371/247 (O’Conor to Grey, Mar. 23, 1907).
\textsuperscript{156} DWQ: MNW 0075-011200 (Grand Vezir to Khedive, Apr. 4, 1907).
\textsuperscript{157} NA: FO 371/245 (Grey to O’Conor, Mar. 25, 1907).
\textsuperscript{158} This is a reference to the diplomatic struggle between the Ottomans and British over the delimitation of the Sinai peninsula alternately referred to in the historiography as the “Taba affair,” “Taba crisis,” or “Aqaba incident.” The upshot of the dispute was that the British finally forced the Ottomans to begrudgingly cede territorial claim over the Sinai.
\textsuperscript{159} NA: FO 371/247 (Cromer to Grey, Mar. 23, 1907).
The Egyptian Government also charged the Coast Guard establishment at Marsa Matruh with the task of trying to elicit a lasting reconciliation between the Bara‘sa and Awlad ‘Ali. Towards the end of March, Egyptian Yuzbashi Ahmed Effendi Fahmy (the commanding officer and new ma’mur of Marsa Matruh) went to investigate the situation. Though the details of his mission are not entirely clear, it does seem as if Fahmy was able to convince the sides to agree to sign a *mazbata*, whereby the Awlad ‘Ali consented to pay a certain amount of blood money to the bereaved sub-group of the Bara‘sa. Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the Government’s engagement with the Bedouin strife at this juncture was Fahmy’s decision to appeal to the Sanusiyya for assistance, given his sense that the Sanusi Zawiyas in the region had a “great influence over the Bedouins of both Egyptian and Turkish territories.” And so Fahmy dispatched a delegation to the Sanusi Zawiya in Bara‘sa territory in Benghazi, in order to obtain letters from the sheikh there addressed to the aggrieved Bara‘sa, “inducing them to make and accept peace.” Fahmy deemed the Sanusi option a more expedient and promising solution than the prospect of “entering in long and futile correspondence with [the Ottomans at] Benghazi.”

Sanguine about the possibility of a successful resolution to this one feud, at least, Cromer cited Fahmy’s efforts as an example of how “the influence of the Egyptian Government over these tribes is due to moral and not to physical force.” He also hoped that the Ottoman authorities would appreciate these initiatives and in turn do their part to quell the still ongoing disturbances along the borderland. He was less optimistic about this, however, reminder Foreign Secretary Grey in a memo that recent consular reports

---

“represent Turkish influence over their tribes to be practically non-existent,” so that “until the Turkish Government succeed in properly controlling their Arabs no lasting pacification of the border districts can be expected.”\textsuperscript{161} A month later, however, the Ottomans were keen to report to the British that they had in fact played a key role in helping resolve the Bara’sa/Awlad ‘Ali feud—so much so that a group of Awlad ‘Ali sheikhs in Egypt had sent the Benghazi Mutasarrıf a telegraph “thanking him for settling the matter so satisfactorily.”\textsuperscript{162}

* * *

Meanwhile, when the Italian Government discovered that an official Egyptian delegation had landed at Benghazi, it only compounded its sense of paranoia about Britain’s ambitions to occupy Cyrenaica. Although Italian intelligence reports posited that the delegation was in fact on a mission in connection with one of the cross-border Bedouin feuds, Italian officials did not seem to believe them; fearing that the purpose of the summit might be the signing of a delimitation treaty that they were not privy to,\textsuperscript{163} the Italian Government wished to be “confidentially informed as to the real reasons” of the delegation’s presence in Benghazi.\textsuperscript{164} At the same time, it appears that the Italian press had begun to publish frequent “unfounded reports that Egypt was going to occupy some oasis or other,” thereby further fueling the Italian Government’s suspicions.\textsuperscript{165}

In light of these renewed fears, the Italian Government once again lobbied the British to approve a joint border delimitation commission that would exclude the Ottomans altogether. At the same time, the Italians seized upon the moment to articulate,
for the first time, precisely where they felt the final boundary line should lie. As was the case earlier, maintaining control of the Benghazi-Wadai caravan trade remained of paramount importance in Italian thinking: in a report to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Consul-General in Tripoli explained that a boundary that started well east of Sollum was “in effect the only one to be proposed,” as it would ensure that all of the key nodes along the caravan route were incorporated “into Cyrenaican territory.” Drawing the line in this way would also be the best means to counter the Italians’ fear that the Egyptian Government intended to use Siwa to “divert—in Egypt’s favor—all the caravans that now come from Darfur and Wadai to Benghazi.”¹⁶⁶ It is here in particular that we see two disparate notions of sovereignty in fundamental tension with one another. The Italians were insisting on a notion of territorial sovereignty that would effectively circumscribe the caravan trade, keeping it inside the bounds of the province they intended to occupy and control. This was very different than the way the Ottomans had sought to exercise sovereignty over the livestock caravan route from Benghazi east into Egypt, which—as we saw in Chapter 4 with the case of the Derbend-i Defne toll tax—hinged on the idea of jurisdiction over movement, not territoriality.

In June, the Italian Government—despite not having any formal authority in which to do so—made a formal boundary proposal to the British, marking a line commencing from a point east of Sollum that made sure to include both Jaghbub and Kufra as part of Cyrenaica.¹⁶⁷ The British found this attempt to allocate the border completely unacceptable: not only were they unwilling to give up Sollum, but they also took issue with the fact that the proposed line extended too far south into their sphere of

¹⁶⁶ MAE: ASMAI, vol. 2 101/2/33-4 (Consul-General of Tripoli to MAE).
¹⁶⁷ NA: FO 371/247 (Italian Ambassador to Grey, June 12, 1907). The Ambassador attached a map to his communiqué that clearly delineated the proposed boundary.
influence as outlined in the 1899 Anglo-French declaration. One Foreign Office official was so shocked by the proposal that he argued (albeit erroneously) that “the Italians are now claiming…apparently more than is claimed even by the Turks.”\(^{168}\) Although the British had wanted to “allay the feeling of unrest and suspicion”\(^{169}\) that the Italians had been harboring against them, there was no way they could accept such a brazen territorial claim—especially from a power that as yet had no official stake in the region.

Indeed, the other main reason why the British turned down the Italians’ proposal was that they were still reluctant to take any diplomatic measures in the borderland that might provoke a serious political dispute with the Ottomans. On one hand, the British wished to avoid a repeat of the heated and drawn-out standoff with the Ottomans they had found themselves embroiled in a year prior, over the delimitation of Egypt’s Eastern boundary line in the Sinai. At the same time, the British understood that the Ottomans would refuse to acknowledge the legality of any delimitation commission in which they were not themselves involved. As Britain’s Foreign Secretary Lord Grey put it, “for a year and a half it had been my endeavor to prevent the question of the Western frontier of Egypt being raised with the Turkish Government.”\(^{170}\) This was essentially a policy of upholding ambiguity as a stopgap solution. Suspecting strongly that delimiting and demarcating the border at this stage would only do more harm than good, the British accordingly sought to avoid a border definition at almost any cost—conceding that they

\(^{168}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Foreign Office notes enclosed with memo from Italian Ambassador to Grey, June 12, 1907).
\(^{169}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Grey to Gorst, June 7, 1907).
\(^{170}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Grey to Des Graz, July 18, 1907).
would only ever consider the possibility if they were “compelled to do so by Turkish raids.”\(^{171}\)

After temporizing for most of the summer, despite the Italians’ persistent nagging, the British finally issued their official response to the Italians’ boundary proposal in late August. Grey informed the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs (the Marquis di San Giuliano) that the British would not accept the proposal on account of “the peculiar position in which Egypt stands with regard to Turkey, and of the existing sensitiveness shown by the Turkish Government last year respecting any definition of the frontier between Egypt and portions of the Turkish Empire.” Instead, Grey once again offered the Italians his “general assurances” that the British would not encroach upon Cyrenaican territory, and then referred the Marquis to former Ambassador Walter Townley’s official memo to the Ottomans from November 1904, which he argued was the definitive statement on the matter.\(^{172}\) The Italians responded by making a special appeal to the British to at least agree to cede Jaghbub and, especially, Kufra to some future hypothetical Italian colony, as it would be “disastrous” for the latter oasis not to be included within Cyrenaica; as long as the Italians could be “reassured about Kufra,” they were “willing to let the [larger border] question drop.”\(^{173}\) Ultimately, in late December, Grey passed on a memo to the Marquis intimating that the British Government would “regard Kufra as being in Turkish territory, and that the Egyptian Government have never claimed it as belonging to them.”\(^{174}\)

\(^{171}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Undated Foreign Office note).
\(^{172}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Grey to Marquis di San Giuliano, Aug. 20, 1907; Grey to Des Graz, July 18, 1907).
\(^{173}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Grey to Des Graz, Aug. 27, 1907; Grey to Gorst, Dec. 16, 1907).
\(^{174}\) NA: FO 371/247 (Grey to Marquis di San Giuliano, Dec. 24, 1907). The Italian request that the British also concede Jaghbub as part of a future Italian sphere in Cyrenaica proved more complicated. Gorst (Cromer’s replacement as Consul-General in Egypt) had apparently told the Ottomans of late that the British regarded Jaghbub as Ottoman, though this openly contradicted Cromer’s pronouncements in 1904.
While the British were hashing out their border policy towards the Italians, the Ottomans continued their game of chicken with the Egyptian Coast Guard in the disputed coastal territory beyond Sollum. At the end of May, the Ottoman commanding officer at Sollum led a force of 40 soldiers (accompanied by ten Bedouin sheikhs) to the settlement of Baqbaq, approximately twenty miles east of Sollum. After first sending a Bedouin named al-Mabri Abu Yassin to Baqbaq on a reconnaissance mission, the Egyptian Coast Guard officer at Sidi Barrani, ‘Ali Effendi Shaheen, went in person to inquire as to the purpose of the Ottoman presence there. The Ottoman officer informed Shaheen that he had been sent by his government to investigate the rumor—which the Sultan himself was privy to—that the Egyptian Government intended to erect permanent barracks at Baqbaq (this rumor was in fact well-founded).  

Shaheen additionally learned that the Ottomans also sought to pursue the matter of collecting taxes from some of the Bedouin tribes who had refused to pay what their kinsmen in Benghazi did, on account of their being outside the limits of the province. The Ottoman officer asked Shaheen directly if the Egyptians had actually “ordered” the Bedouins not to pay, or if the “refusal was on their own accord,” to which Shaheen responded that, as “these Bedouins were now living in Egyptian territory…of course they

---

175 MNW: DWQ 0075-004339 (Marshall to Mustafa Pasha); 0075-011200 (Egyptian Interior Ministry to Muhafazat Iskendriyya, June 3, 1907). NA: FO 371/248 (Gorst to Grey, June 8, 1907). There seems to be some confusion in these documents about whether or not the Ottomans had come to inquire about a Coast Guard post at Baqbaq or at Sidi Barrani. I think it more likely that it is the former, since the Egyptians had already constructed their post at Sidi Barrani back in 1905. Also, ironically, the Coast Guard’s motives had been discovered even despite strict orders “to avoid all contact with the Turkish Government” by fixing the western limit of their patrols to be approximately 10-14 miles from Sollum. See DWQ: MNW 0075-011200 (Purvis to Interior Ministry, May 13, 1907).
should not pay.”¹⁷⁶ The Ottoman force returned to its base at Sollum on June 1, but the short visit had already made a lasting impact. Some Bedouin tribesmen residing near Baqbaq and Sidi Barrani complained to Egyptian Coast Guard officials about the Ottoman presence there and asked Dumreicher to prevent them from returning “to Egyptian territory.”¹⁷⁷ Ultimately, the matter went up the chain of command all the way to the Khedive, who wrote directly to the Sultan about the matter. In his letter, he argued that the recent Ottoman mission “troubles the spirit of the Bedouins who live in this locality, and draws attention to the security and public order that the Egyptian Government strives to maintain there.” The Khedive concluded by expressing his conviction that “it is necessary to prevent, in the future, the Egyptian frontier line from being crossed” by local Ottoman officials.¹⁷⁸

A month later, the Ottomans were back: towards the end of July, a force of around twenty men occupied a settlement known as ‘Alam Tagdida, located about 15 miles east of Sollum. This time around, the Ottomans proved more aggressive in pursuing the Bedouins who had come to the region in order to evade taxation on the Benghazi side of the border. According to the Egyptian Commanding Officer at Marsa Matruh who was sent to investigate the Ottoman force, Ahmed Abu Shadi, the Ottomans had been “frightening the Bedouins by saying that forces are coming by sea and land” to collect what they could in arrears. Moreover, the Ottoman officer at ‘Alam Tagdida made a show of complaining about the role the Egyptian Coast Guards had played in galvanizing

¹⁷⁶ NA: FO 141/634/1 (Report from ‘Ali Shaheen, June 1, 1907).
¹⁷⁷ NA: FO 141/634/1 (Dumreicher to Director-General of the Coast Guards, June 8, 1907).
¹⁷⁸ DWQ: MNW 0075-011200 (Khedive Abbas Hilmi II to the Ottoman Sultan, June 9, 1907).
the Bedouins not to pay their taxes, and thus ordered them to stay away from the Ottoman camp, as “the Bedouins living there belong to the Turkish Government.”

It was not long before this situation devolved into yet another round of territorial posturing and informal wrangling over which government had legal title to what. As long as the Ottomans remained at ‘Alam Tagdida, the Egyptian Government refused to remove the Coast Guard troops stationed at Baqbaq; but if the Ottomans would withdraw the garrison, then the Egyptians would be happy to let go of Baqbaq. The Ottoman Government retorted by claiming once again that the Egyptians were occupying and building on territory that was to the west of the true boundary, and even apparently showed a British embassy official some documents at the Ministry of War in Istanbul that proved their case. As with similar occasions in the past, however, both sides seem to have backed off at this stage, ensuring that matters did not progress to the point that a more serious crisis would arise. This time it was the Ottomans who articulated the position that they were “most anxious to avoid the possibility of creating a political question in regard to the Turco-Egyptian frontier,” given that “‘they had not forgotten the Akaba incident.’” The Ottomans, too, thus appreciated the uses of ambiguity with respect to the territorial bounds of Egypt, one of its so-called “privileged” (mümtâze) provinces. The lesson of the previous year’s Sinai debacle was clear: to delimit and demarcate a fraught internal boundary within the empire was to risk losing any flexibility

179 NA: FO 371/248 (Translation of undated report from Ahmed Abu Shadi, Officer Commanding at Marsa Matruh).
180 NA: FO 371/248 (Graham to Grey, Aug. 3, 1907).
181 BOA: İ.MTZ(05) 32/1866 (Serasker memo, Aug. 12, 1907/3 Receb 1324).
182 NA: FO 371/248 (O’Conor to Grey, Aug. 27, 1907). The “Akaba incident” is a reference to same 1906 conflict over the delimitation of the Sinai between the Ottomans and British that was mentioned above.
and freedom of action the Ottoman Government still had with which to protect its interests in the borderland and project its authority among its inhabitants.

* * *

Just as this latest round of Ottoman-Egyptian wrangling was drawing to a close, government authorities were confronted with another eruption of tribal violence in the borderland. Towards the end of August, a group of Shehebat staged two separate raids into Benghazi territory, both of which resulted in the murder of an ‘Awagir tribesman as well as the plunder of a substantial amount of cattle; mere months after their supposed reconciliation settlement, then, the two tribes were once again at blows. If such incidents of cross-border raiding had become fairly prosaic in the borderland by this time, this episode stands out for the way it drew the attention of Egyptian Government officials to the question of the Shehebat’s political-legal status. Having apprehended the offending tribesmen and detained them at the markaz in Marsa Matruh, government officials had to figure out the best course of action for bringing them to justice.

The answer was not initially clear. Officials were willing to entertain three different options. The offenders could be brought to Alexandria for trial in a government court; they could be tried by a special tribunal of tribal sheikhs, under the supervision of a Coast Guard officer; or they could be handed over to the Ottoman authorities in Benghazi for punishment. Choosing the most appropriate of these options was contingent on identifying the appropriate legal status of the Shehebat. One official noted that the Alexandria option might be desirable “assuming that they are ‘Egyptians, sujets locaux,'” but worried that the fact that the crimes were committed outside of Egypt might

---

183 NA: FO 371/247 (Graham to Grey, Aug. 26, 1907; Graham to Grey, Sept. 1, 1907).
184 NA: FO 371/247 (Graham to Grey, Sept. 1, 1907).
complicate matters.\textsuperscript{185} Upon further investigation, the Government came to the conclusion that the “men accused were ‘Turkish Bedouins’\textsuperscript{186} who had “migrated from Turkish into Egyptian territory” three years prior.\textsuperscript{187} As such, the Government men opted to turn the Shehebat captives over to the Ottoman Government, acting on the conviction that “such administrative action…might forestall reprisals or an exaggerated importance being attached to the incident,” and also that “a proceeding so unwelcome to the delinquents would act as a powerful deterrent” to other belligerent tribes.\textsuperscript{188} On September 15, Egyptian Coast Guard officers loaded the offending Shehebat as well as the plundered cattle they had recovered onto a steamer and sailed first to Sollum, then—at the behest of the Ottoman commandant there—to Tobruk, at which point they wiped their hands clean of the matter.\textsuperscript{189}

The decision to hand over the Shehebat criminals to the Ottomans was not without its critics. One anonymous official in the Foreign Office, seeing the entire Bedouin conflict as a matter of “border policy,” warned against “relying on the Turkish authorities to keep the peace of your border [emphasis in original]” and suggested that the incident exposed the Government’s lack of “adequate powers” for controlling the border on its own.\textsuperscript{190} Ultimately, however, the officials’ keenly felt drive to ensure that the offenders were “dealt with according to law” this time, rather than be left to the vagaries

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{185} NA: FO 141/634/1 (Note to Cecil, Aug. 27, 1907).
\textsuperscript{186} NA: FO 141/634/1 (Undated note to Cecil; Cecil to Graham, Sept. 7, 1907).
\textsuperscript{187} NA: FO 371/247 (Graham to Grey, Sept. 15, 1907).
\textsuperscript{188} NA: FO 371/247 (Graham to Grey, Sept. 1, 1907).
\textsuperscript{189} NA: FO 371/247 (Graham to Grey, Sept. 15, 1907; Sept. 22, 1907; Sept. 23, 1907). The decision to travel by Coast Guard cruiser was evidently motivated by a desire not to have to pass by the Ottoman garrison stationed at ‘Alam Tagdida, in “disputed territory” (See NA: FO 141/634/1 – undated note to Cecil).
\textsuperscript{190} NA: FO 141/634/1 (Note to Cecil, Aug. 27, 1907).
\end{quote}
of traditional Bedouin justice, won the day. It was a revealing moment. If, on one hand, the Egyptian Government had proved willing to adopt a new approach to this episode by seeking to extend the rule of law into the borderland, the fact of the Shehebat’s political membership as Ottoman subjects (who had merely been interloping on Egyptian soil for a time) proved more decisive. And so in the end Egyptian officials opted to allow the Benghazi Government deal with the criminals, regardless of what we have seen was their palpable distrust of the Ottoman authorities’ ability to control their own Bedouin.

* * *

What the British could not know when they decided to defer to the Ottoman authorities in the recent Shehebat/Awagir episode was that the Ottoman Government was on the verge of redefining its relationship with ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza. This surprising turn of events marks yet another constitutive element of what we have seen was an extremely momentous year in the crystallization of a bona fide border conflict within the Egypt-Benghazi borderland.

The story begins not with the Ottomans, however, but with the Italians. As far back as 1905 (though presumably even longer than that), ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza had been serving as an informant for the Italian authorities in Benghazi. The Italians turned to him for news about the Khedivial visit to Siwa, for instance, as well as the Lemlum commission; Tritonj, the Italian Vice-Consul, considered their friendship with ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza to be “undoubtedly precious” and hoped that it “could become even more so, with his being one of the most influential chiefs of the Awagir.” In fact, in order to affirm this cordial relationship, Tritonj recommended that the Government follow

through with a promise his predecessor had made, to give ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza a “good modern rifle” as a gift. After a long series of exchanges with Rome in order to gain approval for the rifle purchase, settle on an apt model, and confirm all the logistics, the Italians imported a Winchester rifle into Benghazi in February 1907, along with 500 cartridges. Tritonj then arranged for the cargo to be secretly transported to ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza by a consular guard that traveled only by night, disguised as Bedouins.

The Italians apparently flubbed the gift, bringing the wrong cartridges for the caliber of rifle they had purchased. They had already begun to order a new set of cartridges from the United States when news came that ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza had actually betrayed the Italian Government to the Ottomans. One night in November 1907, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza traveled by camel to the residence of the Benghazi Mutasarrif. When he finally got a hearing with the Mutasarrif, ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza presented him with the rifle and (wrong) cartridges, arguing that the items were proof that the Italian Government had been trying to employ him to provoke the tribes of the Benghazi interior into an open rebellion against the present regime, “with the promise of nominating him head of Cyrenaica the moment we took charge of the region.” The Mutasarrif, in turn, passed on the information to the Sublime Porte, which then “promoted” ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza and awarded him with the Order of the Mejidiye—what was in fact a fairly high military decoration.

194 MAE: ASMAI, vol. 2 101/2/30 (Consul-General of Tripoli to MAE, Dec. 2, 1907). According to the Consul-General, many locals in Benghazi were as surprised as he was about the decoration, asking “how and why a person who for a long time...had shown nothing but hostility towards” the local authorities “could now, in a moment, be in their good graces, so much so as to merit an official distinction.”
There is evidence to suggest that the Ottoman Government’s attempt to win ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza’s favor at this time paid some dividends. At the beginning of March 1908, the British received news that ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza finally agreed to pay what he owed in blood money to the Shehebat, and had already given a deposit of 27,500 piasters to the Benghazi Mutasarrif to this end.\(^{195}\) Although some questions remained as to how best to transfer this sum to the Shehebat, it seems as if the Ottomans’ rapprochement with ‘Abdel Qader al-Kazza in the aftermath of the Italian rifle fiasco helped pave the way for an important shift in the fraught relationship between the ‘Awagir and Shehebat.\(^{196}\)

**Phase 3: Marking Time, Italy Rising, 1908-1911**

*Business as Usual in the Borderland: 1908-9*

In the period of relative calm that followed the protracted year of tumult and confusion that had beset the borderland from the last days of 1906, all of the state actors involved sought to pick up the pieces and pursue their own respective interests as per usual. The Italians redoubled their efforts to sidestep Ottoman restrictions and buy up large swaths of land (as well as livestock) in the Libyan provinces; these activities got a huge boost when the Banco di Roma opened branches in Benghazi and Tripoli in 1907.\(^{197}\) The Italian vice-consulate in Benghazi also oversaw the establishment of three different schools—one of which taught free evening classes in the Italian language, often to local merchants—as well as a new Catholic mission. The local population in and around the town of Benghazi continued to interpret all of these initiatives as a sign of an impending...
Italian colonial occupation, even though—in part due to their knowledge of Italy’s disastrous Ethiopian campaign—they apparently evinced very little respect for the Italian nation and deemed Italians a “people of no value.”  

The Ottomans, for their part, increased their troop levels in eastern Benghazi, at one point dispatching 400 men of their First Battallion in the direction of the Egyptian frontier; they also established another small outpost at Bir Angereen, in disputed borderland territory, with the aim of preventing tribes from their side of the border from “evading the payment of customs dues on the export of sheep to Egypt.” When the British asked the Ottomans to withdraw from the post, the Ottoman commandant refused. The matter was then tabled, as others like it had been in the past: despite their disapproval of the Ottoman advance, the British tacitly condoned it for the time being and then set up a small post nearby (at a place called Bir Sebil) for observation. Finally, in May 1908 the Ottoman commandant at Sollum apparently sent five men into “Egyptian territory” in order to collect taxes from Shehebat tribesmen still resident there. When questioned by Shalabi Mustafa, the commandant replied that he should “not ignore the habit that the Bedouins have of always moving around from once place to another,” and that the orders to collect the taxes had actually been given by the Qaimaqam of Ajdabiya on the request of a Shehebat sheikh in Benghazi who was responsible to the government for raising his tribe’s full share of the tax burden. The Ottoman commandant assured Shalabi Mustafa

---

198 NA: FO 371/539 (Fontana memo, Feb. 21, 1908).
200 NA: FO 371/452 (Graham to Gey, Aug. 31, 1908).
that he would “denounce them to the requisite authorities,” and there the matter seemed to end.\footnote{DWQ: MNW 0075-003230 (Letter from Ahmed Muhammad Sawan to Shalabi Mustafa, May 4, 1908/2 Rebiülahir 1326).}

At the same time, there were some clear signs that the Ottomans remained in a state of grave anxiety regarding their authority in the borderland. In March 1908, for instance, an Ottoman campaign to shore up the government’s influence over the Sanusi stronghold of Kufra once again failed; even though the Ottoman delegate—Haji Suleyman Effendi, the former “mayor of Benghazi” and a personal friend of Ahmad al-Sharif’s uncle—brought many gifts in order to “impress upon the Sanusi” that the Ottoman government held the sect “in high esteem,” the Sanusiyya refused to allow the Ottoman flag to be raised over the oasis.\footnote{NA: FO 371/540 (Fontana memo, Mar. 15, 1908; Fontana memo, July 18, 1908).}

More than this, however, the Ottoman Government was particularly sensitive about its authority relative to the increasingly strident Egyptian Government. We can glimpse this attitude by examining a Yıldız document written in 1909 that tackles the slippery question of Egypt’s political status head on. According to the anonymous author of this document, the Ottomans were in the process of rethinking a long-standing policy of devolving certain aspects of ruling authority to the Egyptians. Whereas in the past, the Ottomans had allowed Egyptian gendarmes both to protect pilgrimage caravans traveling through Sinai to Mecca and to administer other regions “not shown as Egypt” on the original 1841 map, the situation had changed completely now that the British army was in control Egypt, rendering the province “not fully independent”; it was simply too risky to leave the Egyptian gendarmes to their own devices, now that the country was no longer “under the full control of the Khedive.”
The objective of the memo was apparently twofold. First, the author affirmed that, although the Firmans of 1841 certainly granted many privileges to Mehmed Ali, Egypt remained “an integral part of the Ottoman Empire” (Devlet-i Aliye’nin ecza-yı mütemmimesindendir); this fact is what justified such a re-evaluation of Ottoman policy in the wake of the sustained British occupation, and motivated the Ottoman Government’s decision to send its own military divisions to the Hijaz. Second, the author addressed the consequences of any prospective boundary delimitations now that the British were running the show in Egypt. In his view—especially in light of the situation in the former Ottoman-Egyptian provinces of Messawa and Suakin—203—the lesson to be learned was that the determination of fixed boundaries in various Ottoman domains inevitably led to serious misunderstandings between the “sovereign and vassal state.” And so in the case of Egypt, a boundary treaty “would be tantamount to recognizing Egypt as a foreign country,” and could only lead to more “disastrous consequences.” 204

Although it is perhaps curious that the document pins all blame for the precarious new political situation in Egypt on the British occupation—and thus does not allow that certain institutions of the Egyptian Government might have been acting with some degree of autonomy (the Khedivial Palace foremost among these)—the underlying message of the document is clear enough. The Ottomans were extremely nervous that Egypt was breaking away from Istanbul and had started to assert itself as a “foreign country”; it was therefore necessary for the government to do all in its power to reverse this trend,

203 Suakin (in present-day Sudan) and Messawa (in present-day Eritrea) were two Red Sea port towns that had been under loose Ottoman control ever since 1517. In 1865, the Ottoman Sultan granted ruling authority over the two colonies to the Egyptian Khedive Ismail; the Egyptians controlled the ports until the Sudanese Mahdist revolt. After Kitchener’s victory over the Mahdists in 1898, the colonies fell under British military control. See Ghada Hashem Talhami, Suakin and Massawa under Egyptian Rule, 1865-1885 (Washington, D.C., 1979), and Shamil Jeppie, “Constructing a Colony on the Nile, circa 1820-1870” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1996).

204 BOA: Y.EE 128/93 (Memo from Apr. 27, 1909/6 Rabiülahir 1327).
including upholding a policy of border ambiguity, in order to avoid any major diplomatic
disputes that—by virtue of bringing the imprimatur of international law to bear on
territorial claims—would force the Ottomans to lose whatever freedom of action in
Egypt’s borderlands they still had left.

‘The Second Time as Farce’: The Abortive Bedouin Summit of 1909

In the spring 1909, the Ottoman authorities attempted yet again to resolve the now
long-standing feud between the ‘Awagir and the Shehebat once and for all. Although
officials were fully aware that several joint Ottoman-Egyptian commissions established
in the past to settle tribal conflicts had all foundered, they chalked these failures up to the
administrative shortcomings of the old pre-revolutionary regime. And so the Ottomans
ultimately convinced the Egyptian Government that convening a new joint commission
would still be the best means to “safeguard public security, and to resolve the hostilities
that have been ongoing for a long time between the Bedouins of Benghazi and the
Bedouins of Egypt.” The two governments agreed to assemble leading Bedouin sheikhs
from both sides at a summit to be held at Sollum on May 15; in turn, the Ottoman
Council of State (Şura-yı Devlet) decreed that the Ottoman delegation would consist of
eighteen ‘Awagir Sheikhs from Benghazi.

The Ottomans actually had a lot more riding on the new commission than the
mere resolution of some lingering Bedouin disputes. According to the Derna Qaimaqam,
who was appointed to lead the Ottoman delegation, the Egyptian Government had
capitalized on the Ottomans’ lack of success in handling similar Bedouin troubles three

---

205 The so-called Young Turk Revolution of July 1908 ushered in the second constitutional period in the
Empire, reversing Abdülhamid’s suspension of Parliament and gradually leading to the rise of a new
governing elite.
206 BOA: DH.MKT 2896/74 (doc. 1 – Qaimaqam of Derna to Mutasarrif of Benghazi, June 16, 1909/27
Cemaziülevvel 1327).
years prior by “annexing a section of territory from the eastern part of Derna, which is twice as large and more valuable than Belgium.” As a result—even though the Ottomans still claimed that the legal boundary between the two provinces was the port of Marsa Matruh—the Egyptians had managed to advance as far as the settlement of Bagbag, and now effectively controlled a swath of territory that put them within seventy kilometers of the oasis of Jalo (a pivotal crossroads for the Benghazi-Wadai caravan route). Moreover, according to the Qaimaqam, the British had even revised their war office maps so that the border was now shown to commence at Sollum, which had obvious “strategic and political importance.” It was therefore imperative that this newly convened Bedouin commission succeeded where others before it had failed; at stake was nothing less than the preservation of Ottoman imperial sovereignty in the borderland.

Much to the Qaimaqam’s horror, however, the commission was an unmitigated disaster for the Ottomans. The Sublime Porte had promised the Egyptian Government that the key sheikhs from the ‘Awagir would be in attendance, yet the local Ottoman authorities once again could not impel them to turn up. The Qaimaqam complained indignantly that he had waited around in Sollum for an entire week without receiving so much as a word about whether or not the ‘Awagir were going to come—this despite the fact that they lived only a fifteen-day journey from Sollum. If the Ottoman delegation thus doomed yet another joint commission to failure, by proving unable to uphold its end of the bargain and produce the Bedouins in question, the event also turned into something of a public relations debacle for the Ottomans. The Qaimaqam noted sardonically that while he and the rest of the Ottoman officials had been made to look like the poor relations, waiting in vain for a week, the Egyptian Government—“being governed

207 Ibid.
according to the British rules of punctuality” (İngiliz usulunca dakikasi dakikasına idare edilmekte)—ensured that its delegation arrived precisely “on time at the right place.”

Moreover, whereas the Ottoman delegation had traveled to Sollum on foot, the Egyptian delegation—“not wasting a moment”—had been outfitted with an impressive special Coast Guard ship that was known to make the trip to Sollum up to three times a week. Adding insult to injury, the Qaimaqam went on, not only had the Ottoman officials been made to look extremely weak, they also spent too much of what little funds they had on food and provisions.\(^{208}\)

Towards the end of his memo to the Benghazi Mutasarrif reporting on the failed commission, the Qaimaqam’s tone became even more heated. He argued that the Ottomans had already paid a serious political price in the past, losing territory around their borders because of their poor administration in the face of various Bedouin troubles. He reminded the Mutasarrif that the conflict between the ‘Awagir and the Shehebat was “not the only issue that was the impetus for convening the commission”; countless other tribes—including the Egyptian-protected Awlad ‘Ali—were embroiled in an ongoing string of hostilities,\(^{209}\) all of which would “yield serious consequences” for the political situation in the borderland. After all, he argued, “even if the current Egyptian administration is not [closely] following” all these troublesome events, “for us it is a

\(^{208}\) Ibid.

\(^{209}\) This mention of other conflicts in tandem with the ‘Awagir/Shehebat episode may help explain an ostensible discrepancy between two different archives. Whereas the Ottoman file detailing the episode is clear on the fact that the Bedouin summit at Sollum was intended to put a final end to the ‘Awagir/Shehebat feud, British sources mention a very similar story—a deputation of four sheikhs who “proceeded to the Tripoli frontier and waited there a week”—though regarding a dispute between the Awlad ‘Ali and the Hassouna tribe, based in Benghazi. I cannot resolve this discrepancy with any certainty, though the level of detail of the Ottoman file does lend it credence, in my view. It is possible that the Awlad ‘Ali/Hassouna dispute that the British file mentions was part and parcel of a broader resurgence of hostilities at the time, of which the ‘Awagir/Shehebat feud played a major part. For the British side, see: NA: FO 371/664 (Graham to Grey, Oct. 8, 1909; Dumreicher memo, Sept. 29, 1909).
matter of life and death” (bizim için bir mesele-i hayatiye olduğunu). The Qaimaqam was evidently so distraught about the situation that he took an extreme, even slightly paranoid, measure to protect his own hide. Fearing what punishment may come from being the one in charge of a diplomatic mission that had been so spectacularly botched, he wrote a special memo directly to the Grand Vezir—an extremely rare move for a Qaimaqam, since it meant bypassing several links in the chain of command—making the case that he “should not be held responsible” for this or any future failures, since his actions were constrained by certain factors beyond his authority.

At the same time, the Qaimaqam beseeched his Government to mobilize in order to help the Ottoman delegation save face in the eyes of their Egyptian counterparts contain the damage already done to Ottoman prestige. Miraculously enough, the Ottomans would be given another opportunity in which to do so, as the Egyptians tentatively agreed to convene yet another Bedouin commission at the beginning of the month of Şaban (around mid-August), even as they warned the Qaimaqam when they were departing Sollum that “it would not be possible any more for their time to be wasted for no reason” (daha beyhüde izâ‘e-i vakit etmesi mümkün olamayacağı). The Qaimaqam wanted the next meeting to be held in Derna, but his own intelligence sources informed him that the Egyptian Government would inevitably insist on holding it again at Sollum, “as if Sollum were actually the border between the two Governments” (güÿâ ki Sollum, iki hükümetin hududu imiş). The Qaimaqam concluded his long memo to the Mutasarrif by imploring him to submit the requisite paperwork in order to get approval

211 BOA: DH.MKT 2896/74 (doc. 3 – Qaimaqam of Derna to Grand Vezir, June 20, 1909/27 Cemaziülevvel 1327). The Grand Vezir apparently did not know what to make of such an unusual communication and wrote to the Interior Ministry for clarification.
for the new joint commission; after all, he argued, “major problems” would ensue if “Egyptian officials once again came and went in vain.”

The Benghazi Mutasarrif, taking the Qaimaqam’s exhortation to heart, appealed to the Interior Ministry in Istanbul for assistance in ensuring that the next commission would be more successful. The ability to assemble the ‘Awagir sheikhs and transport them efficiently to Sollum was, according to the Mutasarrif, most fundamentally a matter of “protecting the authority of the government”; for if the local Ottoman authorities failed to educe a settlement this time around, the Egyptian Bedouins were threatening to “take matters into their own hands” (kendi başları çaresine bakacakları), which in his view would only exacerbate the entire conflict. More than anything, however, the Mutasarrif expressed concern over the transportation situation in advanced of the rescheduled summit. He argued that it would be impossible to reach Sollum by land by the beginning of Şaban, and yet it was also impossible at that point to reschedule it. At the same time, he suggested that—since the Egyptian delegation would once again be arriving to the summit in a special Coast Guard vessel—it would be damaging to the “the Government’s honor” if their officials arrived by camel. It was therefore necessary to procure an Ottoman ship for the occasion, and the Mutasarrif felt that such a ship was long overdue to the province, any way—he had in fact been requesting a surveillance ship from the Naval Ministry ever since he arrived at his post. Ultimately, however, the Mutasarrif

---

212 BOA: DH.MKT 2896/74 (doc. 1 – Qaimaqam of Derna to Mutasarrif of Benghazi, June 16, 1909/1 Cemaziyülahir 1327).
213 BOA: DH.MKT 2896/74 (doc. 5 – Mutasarrif of Benghazi to Dahiliye Nezâreti, July 15, 1909/26 Cemaziyülahir 1327).
was informed that a boat was not likely to be ready by the designated date, so that “it was
necessary to find other means to transport” the delegation to Sollum.214

End of an Era: The Italian Occupation Redefines the Borderland, 1911

As the decade wore on, it seemed as if the Ottoman and Egyptian governments
could go on indefinitely dodging and parrying one another’s advances in the borderland,
without ever bothering to delimit an actual boundary line. After all, as we have seen was
the case throughout the period following the Ottomans’ arrival at Sollum, both
governments—though for their own separate reasons—consistently manifested a clear
preference not to delineate a set border. Instead, after weathering the crisis moments
brought on by the escalating Bedouin tensions in 1904-5 and 1907, the two sides
generally seemed content merely to keep tabs on one another’s activities in the
borderland, only stepping in periodically to raise some cavils. This was more or less the
situation in which the two governments found themselves in the summer of 1911.

The issue of the moment was the prospect of the Ottoman Government extending
a telegraph line east of Sollum, to the outpost at ‘Alam Tagdida they had maintained ever
since 1907. Although the British had essentially tolerated the Ottoman garrison there all
this time, the news that the Ottomans now wished to link it up to their network in their
Benghazi province caused them to raise their eyebrows once more. As one official put it,
“If the Turks continue their telegraph line…without any protest from us we should be

214 BOA: DH.MKT 2896/74 (doc. 6 – Cover sheet from Mektubî Kalemi, Aug. 11, 1909/24 Recep 1327). Neither the Ottoman or British documents I consulted about this affair shed light on how the situation was ultimately resolved. One Meclis-i Vükela document does refer to the Dahiliye Ministry’s asking for authorization to convene a Bedouin commission in Sollum and seems to imply that some settlement was reached. The crux of the document, however, focuses on new, more aggressive tactics that the Benghazi government was to adopt in order to prevent the re-occurrence of tribal raiding. Most interestingly, the Meclis resolved to punish any tribesmen who undertake blood revenge (ser) on their own, without first informing the government of the situation. See BOA: MV 137/74 (Cabinet minutes of Mar. 4, 1910/21 Safer 1328).
giving away the principle that the Egyptian frontier starts from Sollum” (even though they had not pushed the Ottomans on this principle for some time). The British thus decided to go through the usual motions, making an appeal through their embassy at Istanbul, and reminding the Porte of Britain’s “1904 attitude” vis-à-vis the border question, represented most clearly in the Townley memo that the Ottomans had of course always ignored from the get-go.

In the end, it was the Italians’ unilateral decision to occupy the Ottoman Libyan provinces that changed the whole nature of the game in the borderland, breaking the cycle by which the border conflict—the contours of which were by now fairly well-defined—had periodically been conjured up and acknowledged but never actually resolved. It was clear from the very outset of the Ottoman-Italian War that the rules had suddenly changed: the Italians alarmed the British by establishing their naval blockade of the Mediterranean coast as far east as Ras el-Kena’is—the point near Marsa Matruh that the Ottomans had always claimed, on the basis of the 1841 map, to represent the actual border. The British felt this action marked off a swath of territory as “Turkish (ie, prospectively Italian)” that was far too extensive to be admissible—a fact that they felt they had made clear to the Italians during their governments’ exchange back in 1907. It was, after all, this “identity of interest” between Italian and Ottoman perceptions of border allocation that had in part spurred the British to decide against a delimitation treaty with the Italians at that time. And so British officials steeled themselves for an

---

215 NA: FO 371/1110 (Foreign Office minute, enclosed with Cheetham memo of July 5, 1911).
216 NA: FO 371/1110 (Foreign Office minute, enclosed with Cheetham memo of July 5, 1911; Grey to Marling, July 11, 1911).
217 NA: FO 371/1110 (Foreign Office memo, Oct. 12, 1911).
impending fight with the Italian Government, feeling that they had “no reason…to modify the views which they have hitherto held respecting Egyptian territory.”\(^{218}\)

It was not long, however, before the British started to think ahead to the eventuality of an Italian victory over the Ottomans. Soon after the initial shock of the Italian blockade wore off, some officials in the British Foreign Office began considering the idea of conceding at least Jaghbub to the Italians. One official noted that “the actual value of Jaghbub” to Egypt is doubtful, and that any power attempting to control it would lead to a “collision with Senussism.”\(^{219}\) Kitchener agreed with the assessment that Egypt had little use for Jaghbub, especially given that it had “never been administered by the Egyptian Government” to begin with (despite past reluctance of the British to admit that fact).\(^{220}\) This is apparently the moment when Kitchener—envisaging a new geopolitical reality without the Ottomans in the picture—started to imagine new possibilities for pursuing Egypt’s strategic interests in the borderland. In a memo to Foreign Secretary Grey, he argued that it “would not be desirable to withdraw from this position unless we got something in return,” suggesting that they should only “abandon Egypt’s claim to Jaghbub in return for an adequate quid pro quo.”\(^{221}\) It was of course only a month or so later that Kitchener traveled to Sollum and then began to prepare his key proposed boundary map with which I began this chapter.

The Ottoman evacuation of Sollum at the end of December seemed to clinch the burgeoning feeling amongst all the involved state powers that a new era was dawning in

---

\(^{218}\) NA: FO 371/1110 (Grey to Kitchener, Oct. 18, 1911).
\(^{219}\) NA: FO 371/1110 (Foreign Office memo, Oct. 12, 1911).
\(^{220}\) As late as August 1911 the British were holding onto the principle that their Government had always “claimed Jaghbub as Egyptian territory, and the Italian Government should be aware of this claim” through the now-infamous Townley memo of November 1904—even though the Italians had apparently pestered the British about Jaghbub and Kufra on five separate occasions over the course of 1907. NA: FO 371/1110 (Grey to Cheetham, Aug. 25, 1911; Foreign Office memo, Oct. 12, 1911).
\(^{221}\) NA: FO 371/1110 (Kitchener to Grey, Nov. 4, 1911).
the borderland. By the end of January 1912, the British were coming to grips with the fact that they had “ultimately to deal with Italy and not with Turkey”\textsuperscript{222} in thinking through their border policy. The Italians, for their part—apparently assuming that their triumph over the Ottomans was inevitable—were asking the British not to “allude to the 1907 correspondence” any more, since that “would show that they already had designs on Tripoli” well before the actual occupation.\textsuperscript{223}

The Ottomans, too, were forced to adjust to the new geopolitical reality in the borderland. On one hand, the Government’s official line once the war broke out was that the Egyptian takeover of Sollum was only provisional, and that the Ottoman military would reassume its post there after the war ended. On the other hand, though, there is evidence to suggest that the Ottomans, too, were preparing for the eventuality of their defeat and ensuing loss of the Libyan provinces. In March 1912, the Ottoman Cabinet met to discuss the significance of Kitchener’s “Line A”—the one that began 25 miles west of Sollum and thus represented the Egyptian Government’s maximalist territorial claim. Although the Cabinet strongly disapproved of this aggressive proposal, which would remove Jaghbub from Ottoman territory and threaten to extend Britain’s sphere of influence as far into the interior as Awjila-Jalo, the Cabinet decided that it was crucial to put off any discussions about the boundary line until after the war. The implied subtext seems to be that in the event of an Ottoman defeat, it would be preferable for Egypt, rather than Italy, to have control of the borderland. In this way, it seems, the Ottoman Cabinet was making one last-ditch effort to use ambiguity as a strategic tool: by avoiding a delimitation treaty at this juncture, they hoped they could wait to see the war’s outcome

\textsuperscript{222}NA: FO 371/1361 (Foreign Office minute enclosed with Grey to Lowther, Jan. 23, 1912).
\textsuperscript{223}NA: FO 371/1361 (Foreign Office minute, undated).
before adopting a clear territorial policy. If, in the event of an Ottoman defeat, the borderland could still somehow remain under the sovereignty of Egypt—which was, of course, still nominally an Ottoman province—there might still be some wiggle room left for the Ottomans to reassert some control. It was a risky policy, as the Ottomans were well aware that the British were taking advantage of the Italian war to gain more territory for the Egyptian state; but in light of the reality on the ground, it was the best chance they had.\textsuperscript{224}

**Conclusion**

The outbreak of the Ottoman-Italian War at the end of 1911 marked the end of a highly fluid, contentious, and interactive period of borderland formation that never evolved beyond the tentative and sketchy “allocation” phase. Although it would be another decade and a half before an actual border was demarcated, the removal of the Ottomans from the picture changed the rules of the game, compelling the British to adopt a new policy in preparation for an eventual diplomatic settlement with Italy—a rival colonial occupier who posed a different sort of threat to British interests than the Ottomans had. In the decade before 1911, as I have shown, the British as well as the Ottoman governments in fact deliberately sought to avoid delimiting an actual border, for fear of provoking an uncomfortable diplomatic melee that would unearth larger unresolved tensions inherent in the Ottoman-Egyptian political relationship; the British only contemplated reversing this policy when the Bedouin conflicts that were rampant at the time threatened to get dangerously out of hand. Throughout the period under study in this chapter, only the Italians—seeking to aggrandize the scope of their would-be colonial domains—consistently pressed for a clear-cut territorial definition in the borderland.

\textsuperscript{224} BOA: MV 162/87 (Cabinet Minutes of Mar. 16, 1912/27 Rebiülevvel 1330).
This insistence by the Italians on an ossified conception of territorial sovereignty clashed with the more fluid, multivalent, and relational modes through which sovereignty had been exercised in the region by a variety of agents.

By examining the political and social dynamics of borderland formation before delimitation, we can observe a sense of borderedness becoming more concrete despite the lack of a boundary line, through the complex, multilayered patterns of both inter-state and state/society interactivity that marked the period. Once again, the spatial practices of local actors were key in propelling events forward. Although it is unclear if the various Bedouin tribes of the borderland ever truly saw themselves as “Egyptian” or “Ottoman” during this period, they did act with a heightened awareness of their local domain as a contested borderland—a point of convergence between two distinct political entities, bearing disparate sovereign capabilities and thus offering different advantages in terms of protection and the pursuit of justice. At the same time, it was the constant mobility of these tribes across the putative border that compelled the state powers to think more seriously about the contours of political membership in the region.

In this climate of intensified inter-imperial contestation over the borderland, there were clear winners and losers. It was really in this critical decade that we see the sovereign capabilities of the Egyptian state coming into their own in the borderland. The Egyptian Coast Guard—which began as a sort of hybrid, quasi-state institution acting with a fair amount of autonomy—transformed itself over the course of the decade to become the paramount arm of the Egyptian Government projecting authority into the West, more firmly integrated into the machinery of the state. As the Coast Guard evolved, so too did various settlements along the western Mediterranean coastline such as
Marsa Matruh. At the same time, years before the Italians unseated them in the Libyan provinces, the Ottomans were growing steadily more paranoid about the continued rise of Egyptian power in the borderland. This was why the Derna Qaimaqam feared that the failed Bedouin summit—which demonstrated Ottoman weakness vis-à-vis the Egyptians—posed such a grave threat to Ottoman interests in the region. The Ottomans thus began to act more assertively in the borderland after 1902, from their home base in Sollum, essentially in order to mask—and attempt to reverse as best as they could—the fundamental limitations of their power, which had always been tenuous at best in the Benghazi interior but now seemed increasingly dangerous given Egypt’s recent assertiveness in the region.
Conclusion

On November 25, 1940—shortly after the start of the Egyptian Western Desert Campaign of World War II—a group of Bedouin Arabs from the Western Desert wrote a long petition to the Egyptian Ministry of Defense, a copy of which they also sent to Ahmed Hassanein Pasha, the celebrated Libyan Desert explorer now serving as the President of King Fu’ad’s Royal Diwan. These Bedouins had been thrown into a prison for foreigners—their families were suffering gravely in their absence—and they demanded to know why they were being victimized in this way. In the petition they wrote, “We are your subjects (nahnu riʿayakum), and if the Government does not want us to be its subjects, we implore you to let us know the name of a state that we can join in order to request compensation for our families for the duration of the time we are in prison.”¹ Further down, after a barrage of sarcastic digs against the Government, they continued: “We truly believe that we do not belong to the Egyptian Government; for, if we did belong to it, adhering to its laws, it would not subject us to treatment as foreigners.”²

Although it would be unwise to read too much into this playful document taken in isolation, it nonetheless evokes a number of the themes that have coursed through this dissertation. First, there is the invocation of Egyptian law in the Western Desert—which these Bedouins claim to abide by—at the same time that the Government seems to get away with flouting it. Similar to the story of the arrest of the Stack murder suspects, with which I opened Chapter 1, a different set of legal norms seemed to apply in the desert—at least insofar as the Government once again had the latitude to treat its prisoners who had

¹ DWQ: MNW, 0075-014965 (Petition to the Egyptian Department of Defense, Nov. 25, 1940).
² Ibid.
been captured out west with impunity. Second, the document represents another instance of how sovereignty in practice was a process of negotiation between state and society. The Bedouins writing the petition surely could have no doubts that they owed nominal political allegiance to the Egyptian Government, now ostensibly master of a territorially defined domain. And yet they also made it clear that—as Egyptian “subjects”\(^3\)—they would not brook such inequitable treatment and would be just as happy to find another state to pay nominal tribute to. This ostensible willingness on their part to renounce their membership in the Egyptian political community vaguely recalls the case I examined in Chapter 1, when a large contingent of Bedouin tribesmen threatened in a petition to pick up and leave Egypt for the Hawran region of Syria when the state began to interfere more in their business. Finally, the fact that the Egyptian Government seemed to regard its Western Bedouin population with such suspicion and contempt raises questions about its own faith in the mechanisms through which state and nation had been projected into the country’s borderlands. Even as late as 1940, it seems—a decade and a half after the Western border with Italian Libya had been delimited—the state had not yet fully crystallized the nation.

In this dissertation, I have sought to provide a spatial history of Egypt’s western borderland in order to illuminate the Egyptian nation-state as a work-in-progress in the decades prior to World War I. If Egypt was still working out the kinks as late as 1940, I suggested that the period from the mid-nineteenth century through to the outbreak of the Ottoman-Italian War in 1911 was decisive in shaping the vital social and political practices that would come to define the experience of space, sovereignty, and political practices that would come to define the experience of space, sovereignty, and political

---

\(^3\) It is curious that they use this word instead of “citizens.”
membership throughout the region. State and nation did not come fully formed to Egypt’s western domains, but rather emerged only gradually as the result of a complex ongoing process of contestation and negotiation between a wide array of state and non-state actors along the borderland, each harnessing their own distinct sovereign capabilities.

I have focused on many different aspects of this interactivity—between different states engaged in the region as well as between state and society—to illustrate the variety of mechanisms through which the Egyptian West was transformed into a contested borderland, marked by a sharpened sense of borderedness between two distinct political spheres even despite the sustained lack of any clear territorial definition. First, I focused on key centralizing projects that the Egyptian state undertook in the West—the standardization of its judicial system across space; the articulation of a more assertive Bedouin policy, intended to legislate legibility; the campaign to incorporate the Oasis of Siwa more firmly into the administrative machinery of the Government, spearheaded by the Maher Commission—in order to argue how these projects were impossible without the mediation of key local non-state actors (most notably the Sanusiyya). The language of alterity that the Government adopted to define the variegated spaces and populations of the Western domains was thus a necessary fallback—a concession to the limits of exercising centralizing sovereignty at this time, and a nod to the power and pervasiveness of various non-centralizing marks of sovereignty that defined the social and spatial practices of Bedouins and oasis-dwellers alike. The same was true for the Government’s decision to enact a series of special laws for the Oasis of Siwa that left so much
administrative authority in the hands of local notables. In these ways, I argue, the processes of centralization and decentralization went hand-in-hand.

The activities of Khedive Abbas Hilmi II and the agents of his *Daira Khassa* in Siwa and Maryut illuminate yet another dimension of the interactivity between different sorts of actors that constituted a complex, multi-layered political field in Egypt’s Western borderland throughout the period. The Khedive’s engagement with the local political scene in Siwa in particular serves as a unique test case for exploring the multivalent and relational nature of sovereignty in the region more generally. The Khedive—who I argue operated as a unique sort of quasi-state actor in the Western domains—managed to arrogate a considerable amount of authority (at the expense of the “official” institutions of the Egyptian Government) by more effectively plugging into the social and political practices of key local notables, who themselves exercised their own marks of local sovereignty in the Oasis. Consequently, the Khedive “qualified” as sovereign in the eyes of the local population in ways the *ma’mur* never could.

The transformation of the Egyptian West into a contested borderland—linking two abstract political communities that only slowly gained more definition—likewise occurred through a complex process of contestation, mediation, and negotiation both between rival states, and between these states and local society throughout the region. Most fundamentally, perhaps, both the Ottoman and Egyptian states were forced to deal increasingly with the meaning and consequences of Bedouin mobility—a local spatial practice (and a key non-centralizing mark of sovereignty) that played a considerable role in shaping the way both sides approached the idea of political membership in the borderland. Even in the most acute phase of borderland formation, between 1902-11, it
was the local affairs of the Bedouin population throughout the borderland that created a sense of a border crisis in a region that the British and Ottoman Governments otherwise were perfectly content to leave territorially ambiguous. Indeed, it was only really the eventual occupation of the Italians—who had always insisted on bringing a new conception of territoriality to the region—that altered the course of borderland formation, removing the Ottomans from the equation and thus eliminating a key dimension of the internal contestation that had made the political field what it was.

Nation-states are, of course, always works-in-progress, and the practice of sovereignty (in borderland regions especially) always necessary entails some degree of negotiation between centralizing and non-centralizing forces, practices, and spatial imaginings; the delimitation and demarcation of borders does not change that. If the Egyptian geo-body that is today inscribed in our world atlases and on Google Earth leaves no question of where Egypt ends and another nation-state called Libya begins, in another crucial sense, the mapped image of the nation conceals just as much it elucidates—and erases just as much history as it creates. If the Egyptian nation-state must necessarily insist on forgetting the long-standing connections with the Libyan side of the border that defined the experience of space, sovereignty, and political membership across the region, this does not mean that those who live there have forgotten. History continues to draw the Bedouins and oasis-dwellers of the Egyptian West across the border. In many key respects, what it means to be Egyptian in the Western borderland is still an open question.
Bibliography

I. Archives

1. EGYPT

Dar al-Watha’iq al-Qawmiyya (DWQ)/Egyptian National Archives (Cairo): Archival Units

Diwan al-Dakhliya (DD)
Majlis al-Nuzzar wa al-Wuzara (MNW)

2. GREAT BRITAIN

Durham University Library (DUL): Special Collections

Abbas Hilmi II Papers
G.G. Hunter Papers
General Sir Reginald Wingate Papers

House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online

Middle East Centre Archive (MEC) – St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford: Private Papers

Wilfred Jennings-Bramly
Thomas Russell

The National Archives (NA) – Kew Gardens, London: Series

FO 78 – Foreign Office and Predecessor: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, Ottoman Empire
FO 101 – Foreign Office: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, Tripoli, Series II
FO 141 – Foreign Office: Embassy and Consular Archives, Egypt, Correspondence
FO 195 – Foreign Office: Embassy and Consular Archives, Turkey (formerly Ottoman Empire): General Correspondence
FO 371 – Foreign Office: General Correspondence, Political
FO 407 – Confidential Print, Egypt and the Sudan
WO 106 – War Office: Directorate of Military Operations and Military Intelligence, and Predecessors: Correspondence and Papers
Royal Geographic Society (RGS), Foyle Reading Room – London: Special Collections

Manuscript Archive
Maps and Atlases

3. ITALY

Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE)/Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Rome): Series

Ambasciata d’Italia in Egitto, 1864-1940 (AIE)
Archivio Storico del ex-Ministero dell’Africa Italiana (ASMAI), vol. II (Libia, 1859-1945)

4. TURKEY

Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA)/Prime Ministry Archives (Istanbul): Sections

Bâb-ı Âli Evrak Odası (BEO)
Dahiliye Nezâreti Idare Evrakı (DH.İD)
Dahiliye Nezâreti Mektûbî Kalemî (DH.MKT)
Dahiliye Nezâreti Muhâberât-ı Umumiye İdaresi Evrakı (DH.MÜİ)
Dahiliye Nezâreti Tesr-i Muamelât ve Islahat Komisyonu (DH.TMIK.S)
Hariciye Nezâreti Mektûbî Kalemî Evrakı (HR.MKT)
Hariciye Nezâreti Hukuk Müşavirliği İstişâre Odası Evrakı (HR.HMŞ.İSO)
Haritalar (HRT.h)
İrade Dahiliye (İ.DH)
İrade Eyâlet-i Mümâte Mısır (İ.MTZ(05))
Meclis-i Vâlâ Evrakı (MVL)
Meclis-i Vükelâ Mazbataları (MV)
Sadâret Mektûbi Kalemî Evrakı (A.MKT)
Sadâret Mektûbi Kalemî Meclis-i Vâlâ Evrakı (A.MKT.MVL)
Sadâret Mektûbi Mühimme Kalemi Evrakı (A.MKT.MHM)
Sadâret Mektûbi Umum Vilâyât Evrakı (A.MKT.UM)
Yıldız Esas Evrakı (Y.EE)
Yıldız Mütenevvi Marûzat (Y.MTV)
Yıldız Perâkende Evrakı Adliye ve Mezâhib Nezâreti Marûzatı (Y.PRK.AZN)
Yıldız Perâkende Evrakı Arzuhâl ve Jurnaller (Y.PRK.AZJ)
Yıldız Perâkende Meşîhat Dairesi Marûzatı (Y.PRK.MŞ)
Yıldız Perâkende Evrakı Elçilik, Şehbenderlik ve Ateşemîlîerlik (Y.PRK.EŞA)
Yıldız Perâkende Evrakı Zabıtiye Nezâreti Marûzatı (Y.PRK.ZB)
Yıldız Sadâret Hüsûsî Marûzat Evrakı (Y.A.HUS)
Yıldız Sadâret Resmî Marûzat Evrakı (Y.A.RES)
II. Newspapers and Periodicals

Bulletin de la Société Khédive de Géographie de l’Égypte
Encyclopedia of Islam
al-Jarida
al-Mu’ayyad

III. Reference Works and Published Collections


Dağdelen, İrfan, ed. İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Atatürk Kitaplığı Haritalar Kataloğu. İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediye Başkanlığı, Kütüphane ve Müzeler Müdürlüğü, 2002.


Redhouse, James W. A Turkish and English Lexicon. Istanbul: A.H. Boyajian, 1890.


IV. Published Primary and Secondary Works


Deringil, Selim. “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate.” Comparative Studies in Society and History 45, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 311–342.


Hohler, T.B. *Report on the Oasis of Siva*. Cairo, 1900.


Lugard, F.D. The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa. Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922.


