

Domestic Sovereignty, *A‘yan* Developmentalism, and Global Microhistory in Modern Egypt

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One night in the late 1860s, Sayyid Ahmad Agha Nafi‘, a village headman in Lower Egypt, had a strange dream. In his words:

This is what I saw: there was a sea steamer with two smoking funnels. It had 271 single spars in addition to the funnels. There were seventy-one big and two hundred smaller spars. The steamer was sailing towards Cairo, the well-protected capital city, on the greatest sea.... I pondered seriously over what this steamer meant as one among the various kinds of glory and happiness because something like this had never happened to me before. As to the question to whom this steamer belonged, and whose yacht it was, I heard immediately a voice which said that this steamer was the yacht of the Lord of Happiness and Prosperity, the current Mighty One of Egypt. So, I kept on reciting the *basmala* and watching until it arrived in Cairo safe and sound. After this I woke up from my sleep in happiness and joy because of the dream.¹

Dream descriptions, mystical visions, and other signs of the spiritual realm are part of the repertoire of premodern and modern Muslim politics. Historians and anthropologists agree that steam technology, the telegraph, and industrialization changed the religious economy.² But how did ancient and new energy relate to political power? What does the dream of Nafi‘ *mean*?

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¹ Attachment to undated letter from Sayyid Ahmad Agha Nafi‘, headman of Dandit, to Isma‘il Siddiq Pasha, 421/39, microfilm 199, al-Ma‘iyya al-Saniyya Turki (Turkish correspondence of the Governor’s Entourage, henceforth MST), Dar al-Watha‘iq al-Qawmiyya (National Archives of Egypt, Cairo; henceforth DWQ). Dandit is a small town in the Daqahliyya Province of Egypt. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Arabic and Ottoman Turkish transliteration follows the simplified standard of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Names of Ottoman elite individuals are written according to Turkish orthography.

² Samuli Schielke, “Hegemonic Encounters: Criticism of Saints Day Festivals and the Formation of Modern Islam in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Egypt,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 47, 3–4

The dream steamship carried the Ottoman governor, Ismail (r. 1863–1879), lauded here as “The Mighty One of Egypt.” Historical accounts have typically portrayed Ismail as a maligned Westernizer, an accumulator of debts, and an autocrat who opened the path to Egypt’s British occupation. He and his son Tevfik (r. 1879–1892) are presented as tyrants against whom the people revolted, led by general Ahmad ‘Urabi (1841–1911).³ In contrast, this article explores how Ismail’s rule was staged and engaged with by rural Muslim elites.

I argue that developmentalism and the origins of modern Arabic monarchism are closely related.⁴ The central problem was the access to new technology in the countryside. Groups of village notables re-used old Islamic concepts to advance their interests while naturalizing Ismail, the Ottoman governor, as an Egyptian monarch. To some extent, this situation followed from both the new British energy regime and Ottoman discursive political traditions, but Ismail’s lust for more power facilitated the rapprochement.⁵ Their pact was symbolized in the Consultative Chamber of Representatives (Majlis Shura al-Nuwwab), understood often as the first parliament in the Middle East, or as part of a disciplining system of power.⁶ I suggest

(2007): 319–55; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, 2013); James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, “Introduction,” in James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, eds., *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley, 2014), 2–22; Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (New York, 2015), 18; Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayegh, and Avner Wishnitzer, eds., *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880–1940* (London, 2015).

³ ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi‘i, *‘Asr Isma‘il* (The age of Ismail), 2 vols. (Cairo, 1987 [1932]); Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt* (London, 1981); Latifa Muhammad Salim, *Al-Qiwa al-Ijtima‘iyya fi al-Thawra al-‘Urabiyya* (The social force in the ‘Urabi revolution) (Cairo, 1981); Juan R. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt’s ‘Urabi Movement* (Princeton, 1993); Irene Weipert-Fenner, *Starke Reformen oder schwache Revolutionäre? Ländliche Notabeln und das ägyptische Parlament in der ‘Urabi-Bewegung, 1866–1882* (Berlin, 2011); Eric Davis, *Challenging Colonialism: Bank Misr and Egyptian Industrialization, 1920–1941* (Princeton, 1983), 26–27; James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 2d ed. (New York, 2008), 108.

⁴ For the analysis of later monarchical systems, see Avriel Butovsky, “Reform and Legitimacy: The Egyptian Monarchy,” in Alain Roussillon, ed., *Entre réforme sociale et mouvement national* (Cairo, 1995); Matt Ellis, “King Me: The Political Culture of Monarchy in Interwar Egypt and Iraq,” M. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2005; Anne-Claire De Gayffier-Bonneville, *L’échec de la monarchie égyptienne, 1942–1952*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 2010); James Whidden, *Monarchy and Modernity in Egypt: Politics, Islam and Neo-Colonialism between the Wars* (London, 2013).

⁵ On Barak, “Outsourcing: Energy and Empire in the Age of Coal, 1820–1911,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (2015): 425–45; Erdem Sönmez, “From *Kanun-i Kadim* (Ancient Law) to *Umumun Kuvveti* (Force of People): Historical Context of the Ottoman Constitutionalism,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, 1 (2016): 116–34.

⁶ Nathan J. Brown, *Constitutions in a Nonconstitutional World—Arab Basic Laws and the Prospects for Accountable Government* (Albany, 2002), 26–27; Abdelaziz EzzelArab, “The Fiscal and Constitutional Program of Egypt’s Traditional Elites in 1879: A Documentary and Contextual Analysis of ‘al-La’iha al-Wataniyya’ (‘The National Program’),” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52 (2009): 301–24; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, 1991),

that this Chamber was not conceived as a legal institution in constitutional terms to check the power of the ruler, but rather as an institution of local developmentalism.⁷

What does a steamship in the dream of a village leader in Egypt tell us about the world in the 1860s? Nafi's dream blended visions of technology and the metaphysical realm. It embodies a triangle. Within the dream-space, the dreamer Nafi, a village headman (the local elite), the Ottoman governor (sovereignty), and steam technology (capitalism and globalization) came together. This triangle suggests how technology, beyond being tools of European imperialists, functioned in a local Muslim system.⁸

Accordingly, this essay, my dream interpretation, intervenes in three bodies of scholarly literature. First, it contributes to the study of notables, the *a'yan*, in the late Ottoman Empire. I unearth what I call *a'yan* developmentalism, an early phase of economic nationalism, in late Ottoman Egypt. Significantly, this is a story set in the countryside, not in Cairo or Istanbul, which are the standard focus of scholarship. Ottomanists emphasize the importance of the *a'yan* in other provinces in the earlier centuries,⁹ that Balkan and Anatolian notables marched to Istanbul to establish an informal "partnership" with the sultan,¹⁰ and that Syrian "urban patricians" developed a "politics of notables" in Beirut and Damascus.¹¹ In contrast, in the Egyptian province we see rural *a'yan* and bureaucrats collaborate with the governor.¹² Existing works on Egypt, however, often converge in portraying an unbridgeable chasm between the Egyptians and their external rulers, be they Ottomans or

75–76; Elizabeth Thompson, *Justice Interrupted: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in the Middle East* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013), does not mention this institution.

⁷ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot evaluated that "every concession he gained from it [the Ottoman center] was in fact a new constitutional development"; "The Porte and Ismail Pasha's Quest for Autonomy," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 12 (1975): 89–96, 89; Robert Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (1984; Cairo, 1999), 53; Thompson, *Justice Interrupted*, 62; Nifin Muhammad Musa, "Al-Dirasa—al-Hayat al-Niyabiyya fi Misr (Study—the history of parliamentarism in Egypt)," pages h-ta', in *Al-Hayat al-Niyabiyya fi Misr—Mukhtarat min Watha'iq al-Arshif al-Misri* (The history of parliamentarism in Egypt: selections from the documents of the Egyptian archive) (Cairo, 2016).

⁸ Daniel R. Haedrick, *The Tools of Empire—Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1981); Gelvin and Nile, "Introduction," 3.

⁹ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, 2008), 259–60.

¹⁰ Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, 2010), 25–27; Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800–1912* (New York, 2011), 45–51; Ali Yaycioglu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford, 2016), 113.

¹¹ Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in Albert Hourani, Philip Khoury, and Mary C. Wilson, eds., *The Modern Middle East* (London, 2004 [1966]), 83–109.

¹² Kenneth Cuno, "Joint Family Households and Rural Notables in 19th-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, 4 (1995): 485–502; James L. Gelvin, "The 'Politics of Notables' Forty Years After," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40, 1 (2006): 19–29.

British.¹³ In this article, I show that groups of *a'yan* were invited and sought to partner with Ismail Pasha in the 1860s in a type of social collaboration. They prefigure Egyptian industrialists who would dominate the interwar years.¹⁴

Second, this article contributes to the discussion about the way the control over technology and energy sources function in the history of power in Muslim polities.¹⁵ There is the steamship in the dream. It must be Ismail's famous English yacht *al-Mahrusa*, delivered in 1865. The 1860s was an era of steam technology in the Nile Valley. It became a central location within the industrial transformation of the world.¹⁶ Ismail Pasha subsidized a steamship company, established sugar factories, ordered new train and telegraph lines, and continued digging the Suez Canal.¹⁷ Steaming Egypt, though, was not just a top-down gesture. I show that village headmen were fascinated with technology, and that they hoped that the Chamber of Representatives would assure their access to new machines. Large economic resources rested only with the pasha and the quest of the rural notables was to gain access to these resources.

Finally, the dream highlights the discursive and institutional construction of *domestic* sovereignty. Recent literature on the late Ottoman Empire investigates sovereignty as a principle in international law and as a legal site of European imperial power.¹⁸ The emphasis has been on reforming the

¹³ Ehud R. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge, 1990); Mitchell, *Colonising*; Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt* (Oxford, 2009); Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford, 2011).

¹⁴ For social collaboration, see William Beik, "The Absolutism of Louis XIV as Social Collaboration," *Past & Present* 188, 1 (2005): 195–224; for similar questions, see Davies, *Challenging Colonialism*, 6–7; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question—Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 27. Importantly, this is a study about their discursive developmentalism. To tell the story of *development* through this collaboration would require a longer enquiry. Hanan Hammad, *Industrial Sexuality—Gender, Urbanization, and Social Transformation in Egypt* (Austin, 2016); Robert Vitalis, *When Capitalists Collude: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt* (Berkeley, 1995).

¹⁵ Gelvin and Green, "Introduction"; Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy—Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London, 2011); Barak, "Outsourcing."

¹⁶ Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, Mass., 2004); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2014).

¹⁷ Barak, *On Time*, 83–87; Daniel Stolz, "The Lighthouse and the Observatory: Islam, Authority, and Cultures of Astronomy in Late Ottoman Egypt," PhD. diss., Princeton University, 2013; Adam Mestyan, "Upgrade?—Power and Sound during Ramadan and 'Id al-Fitr in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Arab Provinces," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, 2 (2017): 262–79.

¹⁸ Lauren A. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, 2010); Mary Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley, 2014); Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, 2016); Aimee M. Genell, "Autonomous Provinces and the Problem of 'Semi-Sovereignty' in European International Law," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, 6 (2016): 533–49; Will Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York, 2017).

empire into a new Islamic state,¹⁹ studies in the Abdülhamidian reinvention of the caliphate,²⁰ and the earlier strategies of representing the sultan.²¹ New legal-imperial histories focus on the central government and disregard the provincial developments.²² Yet, for rural leaders like Nafi‘, the question was how to express the governor’s authority.

The “Mighty One” in the dream of Nafi‘ is a metaphor about domestic sovereignty in the Egyptian province. This and other texts show a hybrid political vocabulary which does not conform entirely to the European “nation-state from empire” pattern. There is a discursive domain outside of codified law that effects institutionalization. The remaking of authority occurred through discursively Egyptianizing Ismail in terms of a Muslim, local sovereign monarch. This Muslim patriotism was not “Islamic modernism” (the later theological-legal discourse of religious scholars, like Rashid Rida). Instead, it was a clever political use of symbols and stories from the Koran and revelation-based practices, similar to the soft use of Biblical motives in Christian nation-talk. Muslim patriotism was an earlier wave of nation-talk than the often highlighted Ottomanism from the 1880s,²³ and it occurred parallel to the rise of nationality as a legal category.²⁴ It contained the idea of consultation as a form of social collaboration and moralized governance.²⁵ The difference between Muslim patriotism and Christian nationalisms in this period is that the first did not contain a demand for a nation *state* although it did function to create alliances between layers of local-imperial elites. Nothing characterizes the process better than the difference between the Ottoman Turkish high administrative correspondence and the Arabic literature I examine in this article. Importantly, instead of histories of “Arabic thought” in printed texts, I explore the discursive

¹⁹ Frederick Anscombe, *State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (New York, 2014), 90–93.

²⁰ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London, 1998).

²¹ Hakan Karateke, “Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate: A Framework for Historical Analysis,” in H. T. Karateke and M. Reinkowski, eds., *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power* (Leiden, 2005), 13–52.

²² Ayhan Ceylan, *Osmanlı Taşra İdarî Tarzı Olarak Eyâlet-i Mümtâze ve Mısır Uygulaması* (İstanbul, 2014); Süleyman Kızıltoprak, *Mehmet Ali Paşa’dan II. Abbas Hilmi Paşa’ya: Mısır’da Osmanlı’nın Son Yüzyılı* (İstanbul, 2010); Durmuş Akalın, *Siveyş Kanalı: açılışı ve Osmanlı Devleti’ne Etkisi 1854–1882* (İstanbul, 2015); Aimee Genell, “Empire by Law: Ottoman Sovereignty and the British Occupation of Egypt, 1882–1923,” PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013.

²³ See the special issue edited by Stefano Taglia, *Die Welt des Islams* 56, 3–4 (2016).

²⁴ Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality*, 7–8.

²⁵ Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East* (London, 2013); Thompson, *Justice Interrupted*; Ellen McLarney, “Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Adab,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, 1 (2016): 25–46; Maha Ghalwash, “On Justice: Peasants, Petitions and the State in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, 4 (2016): 523–40.

Arabic scaffolding of domestic sovereignty from poems, ephemera, manuscripts, and petitions.²⁶

While this article is a social history about the beginnings of Middle Eastern developmentalism, it aims also to contextualize the Egyptian process in the global 1860s within and outside of the Ottoman Empire. The Egyptian process, as I show, impacted the Young Ottomans, the first wave of reformist intellectuals in the Ottoman center.²⁷ Furthermore, scholars often characterize Egypt's relationship with the Ottoman center as "semi-sovereignty," "quasi-autonomy," or a "vassal state." At the same time, the making of domestic sovereignty was also characteristic of the Ottoman United Principalities (later Romania) and Habsburg Hungary as I will show at the end of this essay. Plural imperial legal sovereignty situations have been labeled in many ways, as divided, layered, or segmented sovereignty.²⁸ I argue that the late 1860s Egyptian-Ottoman situation is best understood as a type of pseudo-federalism, through a regional comparison with Eastern Europe.

Methodologically, I employ a kind of global microhistory that focuses on the effects of worldwide transformations in a single locality and through an axial moment.²⁹ This is not the standard form of global microhistory, which studies how objects, individuals, and ideas traveled in order to decentralize Europe.³⁰ Nor is it about the "cosmos" of one individual in one locality, village life, or a fascinating event.³¹ Rather, my methodology highlights the way in which global changes were manifested throughout the Egyptian

²⁶ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (London, 1962); Thomas Philipp, "From Rule of Law to Constitutionalism: The Ottoman Context of Arab Political Thought," in Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge, 2016), 142–73; Peter Hill, "Ottoman Despotism and Islamic Constitutionalism in Mehmed Ali's Egypt," *Past & Present* 236, 2 (2017): 135–66; see sociology references in the methodology section on patriotism.

²⁷ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, 1962); Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, 1963); Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (New York, 1965); Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London, 2004); Nazan Çiçek, *The Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of the Eastern Question in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London, 2010); M. Alper Yalçınkaya, *Learned Patriots: Debating Science, State, and Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (Chicago, 2015).

²⁸ I learned the expression "segmented sovereignty" from an anonymous CSSH reviewer; it is used casually by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt in several essays, and historian-sociologists, such as Julia Adams in her *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, 2005). For "layered sovereignty" see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010), 17.

²⁹ This resembles the method in Green, *Terrains*.

³⁰ See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York, 2006); and her "Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossing in a Global World," *History and Theory* 50, (2011): 188–202.

³¹ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (New York, 1982); Thomas Robisheaux, *The Last Witch of Langenburg: Murder in a German Village* (New York, 2009).

province at a particular moment in time.³² By “axial moment,” I mean a short period—generally two years—that marks a peak or turning point in a chain of events and provides a meaningful distinction between past and future. Selecting such a moment is unavoidably subjective, and only the depth of the historical evidence and scholarly imagination can justify the choice. This reduction of the grand idea of the “axial age” to *temps courte* serves, however, to understand long-term developments through the close analysis of foundational processes.³³

AN AXIAL MOMENT: OTTOMAN NORTH AFRICA IN THE 1860S

Nafi’s dream is the product of such an axial moment. On a global scale, the 1860s was a pivotal decade in terms of restructuring the elite-monarch relationship, centralizing state administrations, and adjusting the structure of power to the needs of capitalism.³⁴ Village headmen and aristocrats everywhere saw opportunities in new trade and technology.³⁵ In Japan, the Meiji period brought the replacement of the Shogunate with centralized imperial power and new loyal elites; in Austria-Hungary, Hungarian nationalist elites struck a deal with the Austrian emperor in 1867; and in France, Napoleon III’s system was based on a pact with the nationalist bourgeoisie. In Africa, a new monarchical order was devised in 1860s Ethiopia.³⁶ The Mexican War and the American Civil War in the same decade were “inter-regional shocks” with worldwide economic consequences (so important for Egypt’s cash-crop economy), while industrialization served the legitimacy of European kings and aristocrats.³⁷

But the 1860s did not bring a fundamental rearrangement of power relations to the center of the Ottoman Empire. In 1808, there had been a possibility for a pact between provincial (chiefly Balkan) notables and the sultan. However, that “partnership” was not institutionalized, and in fact was suppressed, during the reign of Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839).³⁸ Sultan Abdülmecid (r. 1839–1861) only briefly experimented with an assembly of notables in 1845.³⁹ Under the later *Tanzimat* reforms, the dominant tendencies were centralization, powerful bureaucracy, and co-optation of regional notables. Only

³² Lucia Carminati, “Alexandria, 1898: Nodes, Networks, and Scales in Nineteenth-Century Egypt and the Mediterranean,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, 1 (2017): 127–53; Stephanie Anne Boyle, “Cholera, Colonialism, and Pilgrimage: Exploring Global/Local Exchange in the Central Egyptian Delta, 1848–1907,” *Journal of World History* 26, 3 (2016): 581–604.

³³ Dale Omich, “The Order of Historical Time: The Longue Durée and Micro-History,” *Almanack* 2 (2011): 38–52.

³⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875* (London, 1995), 91.

³⁵ Simon Partner, *The Merchant’s Tale—Yokohama and the Transformation of Japan* (New York, 2017).

³⁶ Izabela Orłowska, “The Legitimizing Project: The Coronation Rite and the Written Word,” *Aethiopia* 16 (2013): 74–101.

³⁷ Bayly, *Birth*, 161, 169.

³⁸ Yaycioglu, *Partners*, 114–15; Anscombe, *State, Faith, and Nation*, 64.

³⁹ Lewis, *Emergence*, 112.

in 1876 was an Ottoman constitution hastily installed.⁴⁰ The 1860s were busy times in Istanbul, as we shall see, but there was not yet a transformation in governance.

Instead of the center, the North African provincial regimes experimented with a rearrangement of power in the 1860s. France colonized Algiers in the 1830s, but in late Ottoman Tunis and Cairo strong localized dynasties ruled.⁴¹ In the imperial system, these were “distinguished provinces” (*eyalet-i mümtaze*) with privileges (*imtiyaz*).⁴² Until the European military occupations in the 1880s, the center saw a variety of provincial relationships as legitimate forms of imperial attachment. Only in 1881 did Ottoman new legal experts characterize the status of the Egyptian province as “quasi-sovereignty” (*şih-i saltanat*) in terms of Western international law.⁴³

DOMESTIC SOVEREIGNTY AND THE A'YAN IN TUNIS AND EGYPT

The localized ruling families in both Tunis and Cairo recreated domestically sovereign Ottoman sub-systems in the mid-nineteenth century. This type of governance included multiple sources of authority: the appointment (confirmation) of the governor by the Ottoman sultan-caliph, support from relatives and military households, and the crucial alliance with local rural elites. Transforming governance was part of the longer process through which Ottoman power elites localized themselves and resisted European encroachment.⁴⁴

The fundamental element in the construction of domestic sovereignty in Cairo and Tunis was the relationship between the governor and the local notables. Local notables (*a'yan*) were usually respected men in their communities (countryside villages and towns), based on their religious lineage, land, wealth, relationship to the central administration, and networks.⁴⁵ The *a'yan* micro-local authority was strengthened by cooperation with the governors.

In Tunis, the Husaynid rulers initiated parallel efforts to strengthen ties with local notables and with Istanbul in the 1850s and 1860s.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁰ Davison, *Reform*, 362–71.

⁴¹ Later, Tripoli in Libya was somewhat reintegrated into the Ottoman imperial system, too. Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance* (1994; Albany, 2009), 30–31; M'hamed Oualdi, *Esclaves et maîtres: Les mamelouks au service des beys de Tunis du XVII^e siècle aux années 1880* (Paris, 2011).

⁴² Ceylan, *Eyalet-i mümtaze*, 28–29, 45; Genell, “Autonomous Provinces,” 542.

⁴³ Genell, “Autonomous Provinces,” 541.

⁴⁴ Ehud Toledano, “The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700–1900): A Framework for Research,” in Ilan Pappé and Moshe Ma'oz, eds., *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within* (London, 1997), 145–62; 155. Recently, *mamluks* have been analyzed as social bridges between rulers and society: M'hamed Oualdi, “Mamluks in Ottoman Tunisia: A Category Connecting State and Social Forces,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, 3 (2016): 473–90.

⁴⁵ In the Balkans and in Anatolia *a'yan* was a rank; Yacyioğlu, *Partners*, 127.

⁴⁶ Carl Brown, *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 1837–1855* (Princeton, 1974); Ceyhan, *Eyalet-i mümtaze*, 28–29; Oualdi, *Esclaves et Maîtres*, 376–83.

codification of the *a'yan* relationship in Tunis, first in 1857 and then in 1861, embodied in the Basic Law (*al-Qanun al-Asasi*), had various functions: it established a legal connection between the governor and subjects independent of the sultan, proved in the face of the European civilizational arguments that these territories had solid domestic governance, helped local elites to participate in the administration, protected those elites' rights to land, and secured taxation while the rulers hoped for European loans. Although the Basic Law in Tunis is often regarded through the lens of constitutionalism, it supported the rule of law, "not that of the people," and was in effect only between 1861 and 1864.⁴⁷

In Cairo, Mehmed Ali, an Ottoman soldier, gained the governorship in 1805 and established a ruling family. He ruled until 1848 through an Ottoman military elite (*zevat*) and co-opted the urban merchants, religious scholars, and some rural notables (*a'yan*). He occupied the Syrian provinces with a forced, conscript army. In 1841 Mehmed Ali gained the hereditary governorship of Egypt in return for the evacuation, under British pressure. His successors inherited the system he built. They successfully maintained the partial autonomy of Egypt from the Ottoman center even as their ruling family became part of the Ottoman imperial elite. While the conventional narrative emphasizes the march towards independence, new research has revealed that the Ottoman imperial context remained crucial.⁴⁸

THE CASE OF EGYPT: ISMAIL'S DYNASTIC ORDER

In Egypt, the rapprochement between the governor and rural notables began as early as the 1820s, but was fully codified only when a new political situation arose in the 1860s. In 1863, Ismail, a grandson of Mehmed Ali, was appointed as governor. Despite the upsurge in cotton prices thanks to the U.S. Civil War, Ismail faced several problems: pretenders from within the family, the unsatisfied Turkic-Egyptian military elite (*zevat*), French-British competition, waves of cholera, debt inherited from his predecessor, Ottoman centralizing politics, and Egyptian peasant uprisings.

In response to the internal challenges, Ismail deployed, first, the authority of the Ottoman sultan, as a military liege-lord and as the Sunni caliph. An unprecedented visit of Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876) to Egypt occurred in April 1863.⁴⁹ Then, most significantly, Ismail, with the help of his mother, negotiated a reconfiguration of the dynastic order. In May 1866, Sultan

⁴⁷ Brown, *Constitutions*, 16–20.

⁴⁸ Ehud Toledano, *State and Society*; Kenneth M. Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants: Land, Society, and Economy in Lower Egypt, 1740–1858* (Cambridge, 1992); Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali*; Patrick Scharfe, "The Islamic Politics of Ottoman Reform: Muslim Scholars and the Public Sphere in Mehmed Ali Pasha's Egypt, 1801–1848," PhD thesis, Ohio State University, 2015; Adam Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism—The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Princeton, 2017).

⁴⁹ Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*, 60–61.

Abdülaziz approved a change from the principle of seniority to one of primogeniture in return for secret payments and an increase in the Egyptian tribute. European powers, such as France, also supported this change.⁵⁰ The *zevat* Ottoman military households had to rethink their positions. The imperial change accelerated the restructuration of chains of loyalty locally because it excluded Ismail's half-brother Mustafa Fazıl (d. 1875; I shall return to him) and other family members from succession. In order to understand the significance of the new dynastic order, and what the army leaders and bureaucrats envisioned, we have to explore their system.⁵¹

THE MILITARY REGIME IN LATE OTTOMAN EGYPT

In many aspects, Egypt was an “empire-state,” though since it was a province the term “empire-administration” may fit better.⁵² Ismail's absence in May–June 1866, when he went to Istanbul to receive the sultan's *firman*, offers a window into his system, as recorded by the archives. This was a military regime since army leaders governed in cooperation with high bureaucrats. Just as the gaze of Ahmad Nafi' in his dream followed the steamship to Cairo, the gaze of the army leaders followed their ruler to Istanbul in May 1866. The generals sent reports to Ismail about the health and activities of the Egyptian soldiers.⁵³ Bureaucrats reported the general mood of the population. Isma'il Siddiq (1830–1876), the Arabic-speaking foster brother of Ismail Pasha, and the chief inspector (*mufattish*) of Lower Egypt (hence his feared nickname *al-Mufattish*), regularly sent reports to his master in Istanbul.⁵⁴ The first of these concerned rumors that Ismail's reign, like that of his grandfather Mehmed Ali, would include parts of Greater Syria and the Hijaz in Arabia. Siddiq learned this through his spies, who were scattered among the people “to get all the news” in Lower Egypt.⁵⁵ Minister of Interior Mehmed Şerif (1826–1887), who acted as the regent and head of the Privy Council in the absence of Ismail, on the same day reported a demonstration of Garibaldists in Alexandria.⁵⁶ He also described the visit of the British consul, who

⁵⁰ Letters from French consul in Alexandria to Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 26 April 1866 and 8 May 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

⁵¹ See more in Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*, 63–64.

⁵² Cooper, *Colonialism*, 28, 153, 156.

⁵³ Letter from Şahin Kabh, governor of the Citadel to Ismail Pasha, 26 Dhu'l-Hijja 1282 (12 May 1866), 468/37; and undated letter from Ismail Salim, Minister of War, 486/37, both in microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁵⁴ Jamal 'Abd al-Rahman, *Isma'il Siddiq al-Mufattish—Rajul al-Azamat—Dahiyya al-Wishaya* (Isma'il Siddiq, the inspector: man of crises, victim of conspiracies) (Cairo, 2004).

⁵⁵ Letter from Isma'il Siddiq, 7 Muharram 1283 (22 May 1866), 29/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁵⁶ Letter from Mehmed Şerif, 7 Muharram 1283 (22 May 1866), 31/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ. See Hunter, *Egypt*, 152–57.

acknowledged the right and duty of Egypt to send soldiers to help the sultan in his wars; that is, the Ottoman status of Egypt.⁵⁷

The reports about tranquility were important. Two years earlier, in 1864, peasants and bandits in Upper Egypt under the leadership of a certain Ahmad al-Tayyib, who proclaimed himself as *Mahdi* (a savior-like figure in Islam), had revolted against Ismail's rule. In addition to being perhaps a revolt against work in Ismail's sugar refinery, this was a major challenge to the legitimacy of the local Ottoman order, whose highest representative "on the spot" was Ismail Pasha. Two army battalions were sent to quell the uprising. Most of the rebels, including al-Tayyib, were killed, and their houses destroyed, and even their relatives were executed or imprisoned.⁵⁸

The size of the Egyptian army tripled between 1865 and 1870. In May 1866, there occurred another often forgotten event: a contingent of the Egyptian army entered and peacefully annexed the port of Massawa (today Eritrea, in Arabic *Masawwa'*), the gateway to inland Ethiopia.⁵⁹ Although the port, an Ottoman possession, was leased to Ismail for money, the military leaders in Cairo, and Ismail in Istanbul, received reports that detailed the triumph and included copies of treaties with the local notables.⁶⁰ Soon thereafter, Egyptian troops occupied more land in Ethiopia. The succession *firman* in late May 1866 placed Massawa under Ismail's authority. Later, in September 1866, the French consul reported that Egyptian troops in Crete might also attempt to attach the island to Ismail's jurisdiction.⁶¹

As soon as Ismail received the decree in Istanbul, he sent word to his men in Cairo. Almost all the leading members of the government, the army, and the provincial administration congratulated the ruler on "the succession *firman*."⁶² Leading Arab merchants in Egypt also expressed their utmost appreciation in a joint letter.⁶³ Mehmed Şerif, the head of the Privy Council, wrote on behalf of

⁵⁷ Letter from Mehmed Şerif, 7 Muharram 1283 (22 May 1866), 32/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁵⁸ Isma'il Sarhank, *Ḥaqa'iq al-Akḥbar 'an Duwal al-Bihar* (The true news about the sea dynasties) (Cairo, 2009, reissue), al-Juz' al-Thani, vol. 2, 521; Timothy Mitchell, *The Rule of Experts* (Berkeley, 2002), 64; Zeinab A. Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt* (Berkeley, 2013), 109–14.

⁵⁹ E. van Donzel, "Masawwa'," in P. Bearman et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Brill Online, 2014). See also Ghada H. Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa under Egyptian Rule* (Washington, D.C., 1979); and Shawqi 'Ata Allah al-Jamal, *al-Watha'iq al-Tarikhyya li-Siyasat Misr fi al-Bahr al-Ahmar* (Historical documents pertaining to Egyptian politics in the Red Sea) (Cairo, 1967).

⁶⁰ First letter about the victory is dated 6 Muharram 1283 (21 May 1866), from the Governor of Masawwa' to Ismail Pasha, 21/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁶¹ Letter from French consul in Alexandria to Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 8 Sept. 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

⁶² Most letters are in microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁶³ Letter dated 20 Muharram 1283 (4 June 1866), 98/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ. For merchants, Omar Cheta, "Rule of Merchants—The Practice of Commerce and Law in Late Ottoman Egypt, 1841–1876," PhD thesis, New York University, 2014.

all his colleagues: “We at the Council thank you ... since such an order of succession makes [Egypt] as a realm (*mülkçe*) whose basis is progress and civilization. From these [principles] firm security will be manifest in the present and the future. Thus we congratulate you with a happy celebration for taking formal possession of the important Egyptian affairs.”⁶⁴ The *zevat* understood the *firman* of succession, which also gave permission to boost the number of troops and gave Egypt the rights to Massawa (and the port of Suakin as well), to be the basis of a new Egyptian order.⁶⁵

The Egyptian military machine (an expensive enterprise in itself) is crucial to understanding the context in which the *firman* of primogeniture was issued in Istanbul, and the political arrangement to which village headmen, such as Ahmad Nafi, were expected to agree. Violence and expansionism provided the backdrop to both the imperial decree and its communication to the countryside elites.

A BANQUET IN TANTA: A 'YAN RITUALS AND PHYSICAL NATION-NESS

The change in the order of succession was the occasion to refashion the provincial order. The ideal individuals for collaboration were the *a'yan* in towns and villages. As *'umad* (sing. *'umda*, village headman) they were the minor managers of the pasha's economic regime, and cotton cultivation had boosted their importance.⁶⁶ Their semi-landownership, which was acknowledged already in the late 1850s, also buttressed their political prominence.⁶⁷ Ismail distributed land to more *a'yan*.⁶⁸ Their supposed loyalty offset the possibility of a *zevat* treason and served as a security measure against the Ottoman center.⁶⁹ The *a'yan* also policed their fellow villagers to assure they would not abandon the land.⁷⁰ By the mid-1860s, groups of rural village headmen occupied important positions as semi-legal landowners and tax collectors. What follows is the story of their emergence as power brokers.

The government created occasions for political rapprochement. In the summer of 1866, banquets, dinners, and balls were organized to celebrate the news and invite the *a'yan* to participate in the new order. Contemporary observers, however, questioned the sincerity of joy.⁷¹ Following the brutal repression

⁶⁴ Letter dated 13 Muharram 1283 (28 May 1866), from Mehmed Şerif, 51/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁶⁵ The decree is analyzed in detail in Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*, 63–64.

⁶⁶ Davis, *Challenging Colonialism*, 28–29.

⁶⁷ Cuno, “Joint Family Households,” 495–96.

⁶⁸ Davis, *Challenging Colonialism*, 36–38; Raouf Abbas Hamed and Assem El-Dessouky, *The Large Landowning Class and the Peasantry in Egypt, 1837–1952*, Peter Gran, ed., Amer Mohsen and Mona Zikri, trans. (Syracuse, 2011), 61, 65–66.

⁶⁹ Hunter, *Egypt*, 41.

⁷⁰ Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 65.

⁷¹ Letter from French consul in Alexandria to Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 18 June 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

of the Ahmad-Tayyib revolt in Upper Egypt the previous year, such rituals may have served as occasions for rural notables to display their loyalty. The events provided the physical setting for the participants to express ideas about a new type of *patriotic* community. They started to use the concept of the homeland (*watan*). While they voiced loyal praise of Ismail Pasha, the *a'yan* also used these moments to introduce economic and political demands, as we shall see.

The banquets united Muslim and Arab Egyptian entertainment traditions as staged, embodied experiences of collective unity. In the 1890s, a Coptic historian wrote in hindsight that “the statesmen immediately organized balls, the Mother of the Pasha gave alms, the sheiks and religious scholars were fed and gifts were distributed among them.”⁷² The major cities (Tanta, Asyut, Cairo, and Alexandria) staged the richest banquets, but celebrations were also organized in smaller towns such as Damietta, Rosette, Mansura, and Zaqaзиq. Later, an Italian put on a firework display in Cairo honoring the succession order.⁷³ The powerful Isma'il Siddiq planned his banquet in Tanta, the main city of Lower Egypt, around which the ruling family had extensive domains and which was connected by train to Cairo:

The biggest street in Tanta is already decorated with lamps and the Sayyid Badawi mosque will be also full with chandeliers, candles, and lamps. There the recitation of the glorious Koran and auspicious signs and noble ideas will take place.... To the banquet around five hundred persons will be invited: the greatest religious scholars, the supervisors and [government] representatives, the inspectors of the countryside, the members in the local councils (*mecalis-i ruasa*), the representatives of the Friendly States—both the locals and the Europeans—and some European merchants and also the village headmen.... It is said that two singer girls are very famous in Egypt: one is called Almas and the other is Sakina al-Wardaniyya. The humble banquet will occur with [the contribution of] these two and some singing will take place. Next to the big kiosk two smaller kiosks will be erected for the comfort of these two. In addition, Egyptian acrobats and Arab jugglers will perform ... and food will be given to the poor and the sheikhs at the Sayyid Badawi mosque.... And both the poor and the rich will become so happy by this present announcement [of the change in the dynastic order] that after the banquet the most important village headmen (*büyük 'umdalar*) will organize a thousand other banquets in their own houses.⁷⁴

Indeed, it was a magnificent party in Tanta. Siddiq reported as much in Ottoman Turkish a few days later to his master:

There were eighty people in the [big] kiosk ... and the religious scholars, the village headmen, and the merchants were seated in a preordained way.... There were 205 merchants and village headmen. Various songs and melodies took place and the Egyptian jugglers presented entertaining shows. Lots of prayers and praises were said.... After drinking the coffee, the leader of the religious scholars in Tanta, His Highness Sayyid

⁷² Mikha'il Sharubim, *al-Kafi fi Tarikh Misr al-Qadim wa-l-Hadith* (Compendium of the ancient and modern history of Egypt), 4 vols. (Cairo, 2004 [1890s]), iv, 184.

⁷³ Letter from Leopold Sellari, 20 Aug. 1866, 45/39, microfilm 198, MST, DWQ.

⁷⁴ Letter from Isma'il Siddiq, 14 Muharram 1283 (29 May 1866), 62/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ. For Tanta, see Boyle, “Cholera.”

Imam Qaji [?], and Sheikh Jundi and others read eloquent compositions.... At the end of the evening, the religious scholars, the supervisors and the village headmen were seated at tables which were arranged fully *alaturca* ... but the Europeans, some merchants, and some local village-heads sat together *alafranca*.

Siddiq added that at the dinner the French representative in Tanta (possibly an Egyptian or a Syrian Arab) gave a speech in Arabic and the Italian representative spoke in Italian with Arabic translation. At the end of the Italian's speech, the "Europeans" shouted "viva!" (*wawiwa!*), which Siddiq translated into Turkish as "Long live our Master" (*efendimiz çok yaşa!*). The Egyptians present shouted in Arabic: "Long live our Ruler, long live our Master, may God lengthen your life." On the following day, almost two hundred religious scholars, merchants, and village headmen, with the blessing of Isma'il Siddiq, took the train to Cairo and visited the mother of Ismail to congratulate her on the happy occasion. After this monarchical track of railway patriotism, a number of rural notables arranged follow-up feasts in their small towns and villages.⁷⁵

Next to these events of "groupness" in this rural cosmopolitan center, the news of the succession *firman* was distributed by the Department of War, too, which sent the Arabic translation of the Ottoman *firman* to the provincial garrisons.⁷⁶ In the bigger cities sheiks read poetry and held sermons in the mosques. In Cairo, the religious celebration at al-Azhar involved a Sufi ceremony and public reading from the Koran.⁷⁷ In the countryside the governors and inspectors spread the word; for example, the governor of the Upper Egyptian city Asyut personally informed the headmen of villages of what had happened in Istanbul.⁷⁸ The Department for Foreign Affairs ordered the *firman* to be translated into French as well because the consuls had asked for it.⁷⁹

When Ismail returned to Egypt in late June 1866, the streets of Alexandria were illuminated for four days, and he threw a banquet for the foreign consuls. Cairo repeated the celebration. The pasha then traveled to Tanta, where Isma'il Siddiq and hundreds of sheikhs and *a'yan* dined with him again in "an immense banquet." He distributed ninety decorations to the most distinguished ones.⁸⁰ Finally, he organized a giant dinner for the army, including all the officers in Cairo again. The most immediate result was Siddiq's promotion to the rank

⁷⁵ Undated letter from Isma'il Siddiq (ca. 21 Muharram 1283/5 June 1866), 111/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁷⁶ For groupness, see Cooper, *Colonialism*, 75–76. For the Arabic translation of the *firman*: letter from Ismail Sal, 23 Muharram 1283 im (7 June 1866), 125/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁷⁷ Letter from Ali Cevdet, 2 Muharram 1283 (17 May 1866) 148/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁷⁸ Letter from Qasim Pasha, 26 Muharram 1283 (10 June 1866), 138/38, microfilm 197, MST, DWQ.

⁷⁹ Letter from Mehmed Zeki, 28 Safar 1283 (12 July 1866), 217/38, microfilm 198, MST, DWQ.

⁸⁰ French Consul in Alexandria letters to the Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 28 June and 9 July 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

of inspector general of Egypt in July 1866.⁸¹ The advertisement of the *nouvel ordre des choses*, as the French consul remarked, was thus complete.⁸²

ISLAM AND NATION-NESS: METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

The news and celebrations reveal the government's organized effort to translate the imperial change for the countryside elite. These rural community leaders were to agree to a new taxation which served to repay the sultan for the new privileges and the government's military expenses. They were also keen to participate in the rush for economic gain. Some communicated their readiness through the new patriotic discourse as part of the celebrations. This discourse shows how ideas about domestic sovereignty were constructed and the talk about the moral performance of government in Arabic was born.

There are problems: First, how could Islamic images and rituals operate together with the European-style political use of the homeland? Second, how could these mostly Muslim men celebrate the sovereignty of the pasha while Egypt was formally a province of the Ottoman Empire and the sultan was the Sunni caliph? In what follows, I venture into a deep textual analysis of the discursive strategies the *a'yan* used to resolve these questions.

My analysis builds critically on Anthony D. Smith's theory of religious beliefs in the Western nationalist imagination. Smith argues that biblical motives (the covenant, promised land, etc.) served the making of "covenantal nationalism" in Christian (and Judaic) societies.⁸³ Elsewhere, he proposes that these myths constituted the "sacred character of the nation."⁸⁴ However, while Christian *topoi* are an acknowledged part of nationalist genealogies, such an agency is denied to Islamic images.⁸⁵ Roger Friedland has theorized religious nationalism and questioned how "religion partakes of the symbolic order of the nation-state."⁸⁶ The naïve use of religion was convincingly critiqued by Rogers Brubaker, who argues that "a metaphor can be just a metaphor."⁸⁷ Yet specific historical examples like the present one tell us the social function of metaphors that approve political authority.

⁸¹ See letters in MST and Diwan al-Khidiwi 'Arabi (Civil Administration Department in Arabic) in DWQ; Hunter, *Egypt*, 146.

⁸² French consul in Alexandria letter to the Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 19 July 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

⁸³ Anthony D. Smith, "Biblical Beliefs in the Shaping of Modern Nations," *Nations and Nationalism*, 21 (2015): 403–22.

⁸⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford, 2003), ch. 3.

⁸⁵ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge 1997), 4–5; Smith, *Chosen Peoples*.

⁸⁶ Roger Friedland, "Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 125–52, 126.

⁸⁷ Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* 1, 18 (2012): 2–20, 11.

I argue that Islamic concepts, including justice, served as a toolbox to make sense of a new order and to allow the producers of this discourse to participate in government. This was a *hermeneutic* action: the making of meaning and the discursive wrapping of political and economic processes.⁸⁸ There is no claim on theology. Similarly to later nationalists, the *a'yan* and their sheikhs used Islam as a “disenchanted mode of communal identification.”⁸⁹ The Koran here embodies a discursive pool of tradition and a storehouse of metaphors.⁹⁰

MAKING A JUST PRINCE: “THE MIGHTY ONE OF EGYPT”

Muslim patriotism in Egypt had three characteristics: First, the discourse naturalizes the Ottoman governor as a Muslim prince belonging to Egypt. Second, the authors claim a representative status and attribute sovereignty to the governor. Third, while they refrain from mentioning the Ottoman attachment, they silently acknowledge the sultan’s authority. Let us venture more deeply, first through the example of a manuscript and the dream of al-Nafi.’

The idea of the homeland was used to talk to the ruler. An early example is a unique text, entitled *The Meadows of Ismail’s Praise* (written 1863–1866), by the poet and intellectual Sheikh Mustafa Salama al-Najjari (d. 1870).⁹¹ Possibly one of the last “mirrors for princes” in the history of Islam, it survives only in fragments.⁹² When compared to the great medieval Muslim advice literature,⁹³ *The Meadows of Ismail’s Praise* may pale in theoretical richness, yet it still stands as an important document of mid-nineteenth-century Egyptian politics.⁹⁴

This text addresses Ismail, and even, it seems, wants to convince him of the importance of acting, as a just Muslim prince. It starts with the creation

⁸⁸ Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, 2016), 323.

⁸⁹ Hussein Omar, “Arabic Thought in the Liberal Cage,” in Faisal Devji and Zaheer Kazmi, eds., *Islam after Liberalism* (Oxford, 2017), 17–45.

⁹⁰ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, D.C., 1986), 14; Green, *Terrains*, 10.

⁹¹ Ahmad Taymur, *Tarajim A'yan al-Qarn al-Thalith 'Ashar wa-Awa'il al-Rabi' 'Ashar* (Biographies of notables in the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries) (Cairo, 2001, repr.), 137.

⁹² Mustafa Salama al-Najjari, “Rawd Madih Isma'il bi-Ashraf al-Thana' al-Jamil (The meadows of Isma'il's praise with the most noble and beautiful admiration),” MS 2389 Tarikh Taymur, Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya (National Library of Egypt). I am preparing an Arabic-English bilingual study and edition of this manuscript, to be published by Institut français d'archéologie orientale (Ifao).

⁹³ Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2004), ch. 13; Linda T. Darling, “Mirrors of Princes in Europe and the Middle East,” in Albrecht Classen, ed., *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World* (Berlin, 2013), 223–42.

⁹⁴ For an analysis of al-Tahtawi’s travel description as a mirror of princes, see Peter Gran, “Al-Tahtawi’s Trip to Paris in Light of Recent Historical Analysis,” in Mehrez Boroujerdi, ed., *Mirror for the Muslim Prince: Islam and the Theory of Statecraft* (Syracuse, 2013), 193–217.

of Adam and how his descendant Niqrawush found Egypt and decided to dwell there, becoming the first to regulate the Nile. Al-Najjari explains that the political system of that ancient magical society was kingship (*al-hukm al-muluki*) and Niqrawush was an elected leader (*ra'is muntakhab*) of his people. From this foundational moment (of an elected monarchy!) al-Najjari segues in the space of two pages to the rule of Mehmed Ali and Ismail, with remarks on French Egyptology.⁹⁵

The sheikh unites history, progress, Islamic justice, and technology. For instance, he encourages the governor to open schools for the people, advance civilization, reform the employees' salaries, and generally be a just, virtuous Muslim ruler.⁹⁶ Al-Najjari gives a list (twice!) of areas in which Ismail distinguishes himself: the schools, new factories, attention to agriculture, new steamships, new train lines (for instance, from Giza to Upper Egypt), telegraph systems, and quick administrative answers to petitions—in short, everything that “is important for Egyptian commercial enterprises and for the public interest.”⁹⁷

The steamship-dream of Ahmad Nafi', unlike the obscure manuscript just summarized, was a community product. Nafi' called his dream an “inner vision” (*ru'ya*), not an ordinary dream.⁹⁸ He was so sure that the steamship was a divine sign that he asked the local imam to help him explain the vision. The imam hurried with him to the grand sheikh of the province, who provided the interpretation that the seventy-one huge spars signified the number of years that Ismail Pasha would reign, while the two hundred smaller ones represented the two-hundred-year rule of his descendants. The calm sea forecast a peaceful reign without oppression or injustice. Hearing this fortunate divination from the most respected religious authority in the province, Ahmad Nafi' sent both a description of the dream *and* its interpretation to Ismail.⁹⁹

Dreaming and the interpretation of dreams have long served as a means of communication.¹⁰⁰ Even Ziya Pasha, a famous Ottoman reformist, wrote of a “dream” in 1871 in which he had a discussion with the sultan.¹⁰¹ Unlike anti-colonial dreams, Nafi'’s precolonial dream accommodated power and

⁹⁵ Al-Najjari, “Rawd Madih,” 42–46.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14, 31, 33.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32–33; 50.

⁹⁸ Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley, 2011), 91.

⁹⁹ Undated letter from Sayyid Ahmad Agha Nafi' to Isma'il Siddiq Pasha, 421/39, microfilm 199, MST, DWQ.

¹⁰⁰ H. Hoffner, “Ancient Views of Prophecy and Fulfilment: Mesopotamia and Asia Minor,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987): 257–65.

¹⁰¹ Lewis, *Emergence*, 139–40.

technology.¹⁰² The consensus in Muslim theology is that dreams are the works of God (though, of course, sometimes the devil inspires dreams)¹⁰³ and are the best proof of the existence of the metaphysical world.¹⁰⁴ The dream steamship was thus understood as a message from God, seconded by an institutional interpretation foretelling a just reign—something the dreamer and subsequent interpreters hoped would have a positive effect on Ismail Pasha and, in turn, on the dreamer himself.

Ismail is “the Mighty One of Egypt” (‘Aziz Misr) in both the manuscript and the dream. This title, applied earlier to Said Pasha in the 1850s, was also used abundantly in Arabic to address Ismail in almost all of the following examples. The reason is that ‘aziz is a specifically Arabic, Muslim and Egyptian title, originally the designation of the Pharaoh’s minister in the Koran.¹⁰⁵ Since it can also be translated as “dear,” a gendered reading of the male ruler as being the lover of the female homeland is also possible.¹⁰⁶ Thus the history of revelation helped dynastic naturalization.¹⁰⁷

The strategic use of praise impedes our ability to assess texts like Nafi’s dream and al-Najjari’s *Fürstenspiegel*. We do not know whether their ideas expressed Ismail’s own plans (so the mirror of the prince was of his own making) or whether they actually had some influence on the pasha’s action. Writing Ismail into a courtly literary tradition supposedly bound him to a Muslim universe of justice,¹⁰⁸ but as in other praising texts at the time, both history and dreaming could serve only the authors’ career goals.¹⁰⁹

THE “ISMAILITE KINGDOM”: REPRESENTATION AND SOVEREIGNTY

The second characteristic of Muslim patriotism was that its makers claimed that they represented others and framed the governor as sovereign. The poems, speeches (essays), and songs during the 1866 celebrations were public texts read aloud and later collected and printed by none other than Sheikh al-Najjari.

¹⁰² Amal Ghazal, “Illiberal Thought in the Liberal Age—Yusuf al-Nabhani (1849–1932): Dream-Stories and Sufi Polemics against the Modern Era,” in Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards and Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge, 2016), 214–33, 227.

¹⁰³ Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 6, 143.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ghazali quoted in Abu Talha ‘Umar bin Ibrahim, *Ru‘yat Allah Ta‘ala fi al-Manam* (The vision of the Almighty God in sleeping) (Oman, 2002), 16.

¹⁰⁵ J. Deny, *Sommaire des archives turques du Caire* (Cairo, 1930), 76–78. See Roberto Tottoli, “‘Aziz Misr,” in Kate Fleet et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*. Brill Online, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ On a later period, see Bath Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006 [1983]), 85–88.

¹⁰⁸ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 158–61.

¹⁰⁹ Felix Konrad, “‘Fickle Fate Has Exhausted My Burning Heart’: An Egyptian Engineer of the 19th Century between Belief in Progress and Existential Anxiety,” *Die Welt des Islams* 51, 2 (2011): 145–87.

Next to manuscripts and congratulatory letters, these printed products constituted a form of public sphere, or dynastic propaganda, just before the appearance of large-scale Arabic journalism. I focus on al-Najjari's booklet in this section since it includes many voices and thus enables more general conclusions than do single-author works.

A Collection of the Beautiful Praise for the Just Prince Ismail contains texts from bureaucrats, countryside judges, men of religion, village headmen, and other notables.¹¹⁰ The men included would go on to become part of the canon of modern Arabic literature and politics. They wrote poems, short prose compositions in rhymed Arabic, and even a song (by head translator Rifa' al-Tahtawi, 1801–1873) that was set to music by the military band of the pasha. Most poems end in textual chronograms, a popular lyrical technique.¹¹¹ These works were intended to immortalize the succession *firman* as the beginning of a new age, to celebrate Ismail as the leader of progress and justice, and to announce the new state or the “Ismailite Kingdom” (*al-Mamlaka al-Isma'iliyya*), as al-Najjari called it.¹¹²

The authors claimed to represent their larger community. For instance, Sheikh Khalil al-'Azzazi¹¹³ considers himself and his poem as speaking “in the representation of the people in our Sharqiyya province.”¹¹⁴ The translator 'Ali Fahmi believes that dynastic praise is “a patriotic service” (*khidma watan-iyya*).¹¹⁵ Sheikh al-Najjari in a long panegyric compares Ismail Pasha to a good shepherd: “While the subjects sleep in safety and in his justice / he looks after them with care and [good] results.”¹¹⁶ Sheikh 'Abd al-Wahhab, a judge from Damietta, hints at the possibility of an even higher office for Ismail Pasha: “The caliphate is inherited by the one who leads a pious life.”¹¹⁷ And the refrain of al-Tahtawi's song is: “The glory of the Mighty One is everlasting / the order of rule is renewed / this hidden [age] had already begun / to be unveiled by the Mighty One.”¹¹⁸

The Koranic tropes about Egypt in these texts come close to what Smith calls the idea of “a sacred homeland.” But in contrast to his analysis about Islam, which underlines the devaluation of “religion,” in our example at least the Koran does provide meaning and connections between people and

¹¹⁰ Al-Shaykh Mustafa Salama [al-Najjari], *Majmu' al-Thana' al-Jamil li-Dawar al-'Adl Isma'il* (A collection of beautiful praise for the just prince Ismail) (Cairo, 1866 or 1867).

¹¹¹ Shirine Hamadeh, *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle, 2008), ch. 6.

¹¹² [Al-Najjari], *Majmu'*, 3.

¹¹³ He was an Azharite sheikh and Sufi leader. See, in particular, Meir Hatina, *'Ulama', Politics, and the Public Sphere—An Egyptian Perspective* (Salt Lake City, 2010), 60, 67.

¹¹⁴ [Al-Najjari], *Majmu'*, 25.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

periods.¹¹⁹ The titles mostly used to describe the ruler are the familiar ones: “the Mighty One of Egypt,” the Persian words meaning “lord” and “prince,” and, unsurprisingly, “owner,” “ruler,” or “king” (*malik*).¹²⁰

Here lies the deep layer of the Koranic history of Egypt. Since Ibrahim’s son is Isma‘il in the Koran and since Ismail Pasha’s father is called Ibrahim (the eldest son of Mehmed Ali, r. 1848), the poets had a ready-made tool to apply the ancient story to a modern ruler and, even retroactively, to his ancestors. Furthermore, the title “king” (*malik*) and the concepts of “kingdom,” “royal power,” or “sovereignty” (*mulk*) have direct resonances in Suras II:258 (The Cow) and IV:54 (The Women), where God gives “a great kingdom” (*mulk*) to Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) family (instead of giving it to Nimrud). The title “Mighty One” also resonates with *mulk* because in Sura XLIII:51 (The Ornaments) Egypt is called a *mulk* by the Pharaoh.¹²¹

These are proofs that the notions of “king” and “kingship” were present in Arabic thought in the nineteenth century, contrary to arguments regarding their novelty in the twentieth century.¹²² Importantly, the texts did not refer explicitly to an independent national kingdom. The engagement with sovereignty through the Koran was a strategy to avoid reflecting on the political reality: the actual Ottoman belonging of Egypt.

THE QUESTION OF THE OTTOMAN BELONGING

This type of dynastic naturalization differs from the paths of the European nation-state because it maintains a higher sovereign. Involving the supernatural in patriotic politics has the advantage of imposing an *absolute* that, at least in theory, cannot be surpassed by the human ruler. When Ismail is likened to a good herdsman, the resonance in Muslim tradition cries out that he, in turn, is shepherded by God.¹²³ But God’s representative was not Ismail Pasha: it was the Ottoman sultan.

The poet Sheikh ‘Ali al-Laythi connects “homeland” (*watan*) and Ismail in a short sermon and stresses that the *firman* is the gift of God and the Ottoman caliph.¹²⁴ The rural judge Sheikh Ahmad al-Maliki al-Abyari expresses this view in the strongest way: “Our Benefactor the Noblest Khedive, in the consensus of the *umma*, is the blessing of the happiest state / God privileged him and chose him / supported his reign and made his glory

¹¹⁹ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 162–63.

¹²⁰ The title *malik* is not new: Said Pasha had already been praised as “possessor/king of Egypt” in the 1850s. [Salih Majdi], *Diwan* (Collected poems) (Bulaq, 1311 [1893 or 1894]), 1, 12, 55, etc.

¹²¹ M. Plessner, “Mulk,” and A. Ayalon, “Malik,” both in P. Bearman et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed., Brill Online, 2014.

¹²² Bernard Lewis, “Monarchy in the Middle East,” in Joseph Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder, 2000), 15–22.

¹²³ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Politics* (London, 2001), 74.

¹²⁴ [Al-Najjari], *Majmu‘*, 13.

everlasting in East and West / and gave the heritage of the reign [the succession] to him.”¹²⁵ Ismail comes only third in the Muslim hierarchy after God and the Ottoman caliph.

The point here is that the Ottoman attachment is not problematized, it simply exists. Al-Najjari’s booklet ends with a prayer asking blessing for both the sultan as caliph and Ismail. In his earlier text, the sheikh acknowledges the legitimacy of Ottoman rule, but frames Ismail as the prince to whom *mulk* belongs.¹²⁶ After all, the sultan’s *firman* occasioned the celebrations, the praises, and the songs. In the world of Muslim patriotism, the sultan secured epistemological consistency but not direct political loyalty.

MUSLIM PATRIOTISM AND “ARABIC THOUGHT”

What does this analysis of loyalist praise mean for the recent revision of Arabic political thought?¹²⁷ My sources exemplify a move away from reliance on canonized texts, to draw instead from ephemera, manuscripts, and archival material as sources for political speech in Arabic.

Printed books and journals are the very last products of a deep communal effort to talk to and about power. Muslim patriotism was the wider discursive context of the small number of translators, with the famous al-Tahtawi at their lead, who translated European laws and science into Arabic. Al-Tahtawi himself devised, in a famous book printed in 1869, a justification of monarchical power against the republic in Ottoman and Islamic terms.¹²⁸ His ideas were once taken as indicative of “Westernization” and, moreover, as representative of “political thought” at the time.¹²⁹ Yet individuals who did not receive training in Western languages were the majority and they had their own means.

Similar to the tropes of the Bible, the Koranic tropes provided material for a monarchical patriotism specifically located in Egypt. This should not be a surprise, since Arabic panegyrics and allegorical wisdom-literature were sources of political advice in medieval Muslim polities.¹³⁰ As to the late nineteenth century, the rise of nation-ness was “linked to pre-modern Arabic-Islamic discourses of virtue.”¹³¹ There was a “tactical use of the figure of the just ruler.”¹³²

¹²⁵ Ibid., 28. Not identical with the al-Abyari above. Hatina, ‘*Ulama*,’ 56.

¹²⁶ Al-Najjari, “Rawd Madih,” 28.

¹²⁷ Hanssen and Weiss, *Arabic Thought*; McLarney, “Freedom”; Hill, “Ottoman Despotism”; Omar, “Liberal Thought.”

¹²⁸ Rifa’a Bey Rafi’ [al-Tahtawi], *Manahij al-Albab al-Misriyya fi Mubahij al-Adab al-‘Asriyya* (The paths of the Egyptian hearts in the joys of modern arts) (Cairo, 1869), 232–38; Leon Zolondek, “Al-Tahtawi and Political Freedom,” *Muslim World* 54. 2 (1964): 90–97; Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 39; McLarney, “Freedom,” 37–38.

¹²⁹ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 72–82.

¹³⁰ Stefan Sperl, “Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 8 (1977): 20–35; Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 91.

¹³¹ Yaseen Noorani, *Culture and Hegemony in the Colonial Middle East* (New York, 2010), 23.

¹³² John Chalcraft, “Engaging the State: Peasants and Petitions in Egypt on the Eve of Colonial Rule,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, 3 (2005): 303–325, 318.

Indeed, there were standards of justice within the governmental machine in the 1850s and 1860s too.¹³³

But is it not a terrible mistake to identify praise and poetry as a form political communication? It is hard to make a distinction between how the authors talked *to* power and what they thought *about* power. We read only what the authors thought would please the pasha. For intellectual historians, the printed texts from the government press are the basis for philosophical musings about Arabic political theory. And does not the privileging of praise divert our attention from more resistant voices in history? One has to be cautious with praise, to be sure, but we should be equally cautious, I argue, in discrediting it.

Intellectuals are often ashamed of dynastic praise. In the 1940s, Egyptian critics categorized similar panegyrics as “the literature of the official Egypt”—a court literature written by “Egyptianized Turks.”¹³⁴ As I have already shown, contrary to these views, the majority of the authors were Arabic-speaking rural elites and intellectuals. Resistance to or collaboration with power have no intrinsic values for scholarship. In fact, the latter demands even more explanation than the former. In the following sections, I unearth what was behind the praise: developmentalism.

A ‘YAN DEVELOPMENTALISM AND SOCIAL COLLABORATION

Explanations for the praise, unless the authors did admire Ismail, include fear of punishment and the possibility of personal gain. Discourse about sovereignty facilitated communication in two directions: the pasha was able to discuss new taxes without the use of violence and the *a‘yan* could communicate their willingness to cooperate with the administration in order to gain capital and machines. The issues of developing the rural economy and improving the administration embody what I call *a‘yan* developmentalism.¹³⁵

As for Ismail, who inherited the Suez Canal works and debts, he had already been pressured by foreign debtors before 1866. In 1864, Napoleon III famously decided a large sum in favor of the Suez Canal Company when Ismail wanted to change the terms of contract. The pasha also needed Egypt to pay the significantly raised Ottoman tribute. The Egyptian troops in Crete and in Ethiopia were expensive. In early July 1866, when he traveled to Lower Egypt to Tanta to feast again and distribute decorations, he thus discussed with the rural notables a new general tax,¹³⁶ which was implemented soon after.¹³⁷

¹³³ Ghalwash, “On Justice.”

¹³⁴ Quoted in Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry, 1800–1976* (Leiden, 1976), 70.

¹³⁵ Davis calls the practice “native capitalism”; *Challenging Colonialism*, 7.

¹³⁶ Letter from French consul in Alexandria to Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 9 July 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

¹³⁷ Letter from French consul in Alexandria to Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 19 July 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

As for the village notables, they displayed an engagement with technology and development. Sheikh al-Najjari, the writer of the magical history of Egypt, not only praised the factories of his master, but also wrote about his fascination with the safe iron boxes that could guard valuables against thieves by capturing or cutting their hands.¹³⁸ But new technology comes from the pasha: technically, large systems such as train lines require a central authority; economically, Ismail possessed the immense capital needed for steam engines. In the context of Ismail's establishment of sugar refineries and locomotives, the steamship in Nafi's dream symbolizes the relationship between the governor and steam technology.¹³⁹

Taxation, machines, and the governor were woven into a *'yan* developmentalism. For instance, a village headman and merchant from the Buhayra district, Hasanayn Hamza, submitted a letter to Ismail Pasha asking for "the complete rights of the homeland" (*wafi huquq al-watan*).¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Hamza asked for the wholesale reform of Egypt, something he outlined in eight points. He starts with agriculture and suggests that the government should help peasants to pay their loans; next comes the distribution of lands and workers; then the making and maintenance of canals. Hamza points out that neither the engineer nor the director of the directorate (both sent from Cairo) know the land, and thus the work of cleaning the canals is badly organized. He emphasizes the importance of new agricultural machines, and calls for the establishment of a new company in which "every subject could participate as a subscriber" (he even makes detailed calculations of the capital needed). He points to the problem of peasants investing in gold and silver instead of keeping banknotes. Hamza also requests charity houses for the poor, better distribution of the yearly charity alms, extra land, and a train line to the village—the expense of which he offers to pay for in the name of the local community.¹⁴¹

Another project is outlined by Musa al-Jundi, head of the village Manuf. His list includes twenty-one points for "the reform of the tax-system, for improving security, and for the reform of the army's condition." Like that of Hamza, al-Jundi's is also a capitalist project, asking for the opportunity to invest.¹⁴² A third petition is from Ahmad Mustafa, a village headman of Malij in Manufiyya province. He deals with topics including agricultural reform, the canals, and the state of the peasantry in a set of ten points.

¹³⁸ Al-Najjari, *Rawd Madih*, 59.

¹³⁹ Davis, *Challenging Colonialism*, 24; Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 62–65; Daniel Stolz, "The Voyage of the Sammanud: Pilgrimage, Cholera, and Empire on an Ottoman-Egyptian Steamship Journey in 1865–67," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 23, 1–2 (2017): 1–18.

¹⁴⁰ Chalcraft translates *huquq* at the time in peasant petitions as "dues," but in this context it seems that "rights" may work better; "Engaging the State," 323, n. 57.

¹⁴¹ "We pay for the expenses of the train line" (*yakun takalif al-sikka 'alayna*). Letter from Hasanayn Hamza, 16 Rabi' al-Awwal 1283 (29 July 1866), 265/38, microfilm 198, MST, DWQ.

¹⁴² Letter from Musa al-Jundi, 11 Rabi' al-Thani 1283 (23 Aug. 1866), 55/39, microfilm 198, MST, DWQ.

From his letter we gain further indication of the connection between developmentalism and monarchism. Mustafa emphasizes that the succession order based on seniority was “contrary to the *shari‘a* of Muhammad” (the Prophet) and thus Ismail reinstated a proper legal situation that will help progress.¹⁴³ Asian examples suggest that elsewhere primogeniture was considered a Western European monarchical principle and a condition of progress.¹⁴⁴ There must have been a general circulation and sharing of some of these ideas among the rural village headmen since almost verbatim versions of Hamza’s letter were submitted by others.¹⁴⁵

The historian must, therefore, be extremely cautious with these letters. Most were submitted, first, to the Inspector General Isma‘il Siddiq, and made a point of praising him also. Siddiq may have encouraged their formulation. It is possible to see him as an intermediary between the rural notables and the regime. Isma‘il, *al-mufattish*, acted as the rural alter ego of Ismail, the governor.

The government employee Ahmad al-Yamani also wrote a unique essay. His suggestions focus on how to save the administration money. He makes detailed calculations about the taxes of the state lands and the expenses of the administrative departments. He also deliberates over questions of time because the land tax is collected according to the Coptic calendar (365 days and a third) while the Muslim calendar contains fewer days (354); al-Yamani suggests using the Muslim calendar for payments so that every three years a whole month will be saved. He also points out that when the barber-doctors vaccinate children their salary is a government expense. Al-Yamani is fond of printing and recommends that by buying printing machines instead of going to contractors the state would save money. He also notes that printing money is the most effective way to raise revenues. It is clear that this unique bureaucrat thinks about the government as his own organization; he picks basic problems that he perceives as “the truth in the minds of local people.”¹⁴⁶

A‘yan developmentalism appears in the colors of a specific sub-genre of advice literature using the vocabulary of Muslim patriotism. Medievalists often argue that “advice undermines the king.”¹⁴⁷ Was praise and advice a way to manipulate governance in the nineteenth century, too? Instead of revolt, when these individuals proposed reform and used praise to exhibit a

¹⁴³ Letter from Ahmad Mustafa, 15 Rabi‘ al-Akhir 1283 (25 Oct. 1866), 82/39, microfilm 198, MST, DWQ.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Undated letter from Muhammad al-Shawarli, village headman of Qayub, and Hamza ‘Ali, village headman of Tasma, 150/39, MST, DWQ.

¹⁴⁶ Undated letter from Ahmad al-Yamani entitled “Malhuzat tata‘allaq bi-aqlam min al-irad wa-l-masarif wa-umur al-dabt wa-l-rabt” (Notes related to the Offices of Income and Expenditure and General Security), 151/39, microfilm 198, MST, DWQ.

¹⁴⁷ Nequín Yavari, *Advice for the Sultan: Prophetic Voices and Secular Politics in Medieval Islam* (London, 2014), 79.

willingness to cooperate with the pasha, were they in fact proposing to rule together?¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, and contrary to what is commonly held about later concepts of the peasantry, these letters prove that some rural notables were concerned with the well-being of the peasants or at least depicted themselves as such.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, I have found no peasant petitions in the registers of the khedivial entourage, even though petitioning by peasants was constant during this period.¹⁵⁰

“Native capitalism” is often interpreted as resistance to informal European imperialism.¹⁵¹ However, the texts above show a different sequence of causation. Development was part of a promise to work with the governor and facilitated a structural change in the late Ottoman Mediterranean.

THE INVENTION OF CONSULTATION? OTTOMAN MONARCHISMS

Next to *a'yan* developmentalism, there was a hidden power struggle at the highest level which affected also the public political ideas. The mass public production of Muslim patriotism in Egypt starts at exactly the same time, the summer of 1866, when an Istanbulite group of intellectuals, later known as Young Ottomans, commence a press campaign for a military solution for the Cretan revolt and champion a reformed empire.¹⁵² One year later, in the summer of 1867, it is Ismail Pasha's disinherited half-brother, Mustafa Fazil, who invites and finances the then-exiled Young Ottomans in Paris and London.¹⁵³

Fazil's involvement is often mentioned as the backdrop for Ottoman liberal constitutionalism.¹⁵⁴ In the above context, however, his ideas can be seen in a different light. Given the contestation between Ismail and Mustafa Fazil, both were interested in creating bases of support. Ismail, confirmed by the sultan as governor, and gaining the right to primogeniture, was much better equipped: he had a whole province to shore up support. The *a'yan*

¹⁴⁸ E. Attila Aytekin, “Peasant Protest in the Late Ottoman Empire: Moral Economy, Revolt, and the Tanzimat Reform,” *International Review of Social History* 57 (2012): 191–227, 219; Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine, 1865–1908* (London 2013), 58.

¹⁴⁹ Michael Ezekiel Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Cuno, *Pasha's Peasants*; Maha Ghalwash, “Peasant Land Tenure in Mid-Nineteenth Century Egypt, 1848–1862,” PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1997.

¹⁵¹ Darling, *History of Social Justice*, 166.

¹⁵² Davison, *Reform*, 188–91; Nazan, *Young Ottomans*, 72–78.

¹⁵³ Davison, *Reform*, 191–205; Nazan, *Young Ottomans*, 48; Florian Riedler, *Opposition and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire: Conspiracies and Political Cultures* (London, 2011), 28–38.

¹⁵⁴ Andrew Arsan, “The Strange Lives of Ottoman Liberalism: Exile, Patriotism and Constitutionalism in the Thought of Mustafa Fazil Paşa,” in Maurizio Isabella and Konstantina Zanou, eds., *Mediterranean Diasporas: Politics and Ideas in the Long Nineteenth Century* (London, 2015), 153–70.

exhibited their recognition of Ismail while Mustafa Fazıl gathered the Young Ottomans in exile.

This is the context in which the idea of consultation appears in the Ottoman press and, at least in Egypt, in practice. Not European liberalism but rather the need for capital and the competition for Egypt stirred the discourse about the rule of law. The legal-political discourses in Tunis, Egypt, and the Ottoman capital were part of one trans-imperial phenomenon in the 1860s.

Shura (in Turkish *meşveret*) was an ancient concept meaning the “consultation in the electoral process” and applied to the selection process of the first leaders in the early Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁵⁵ It was an element in Ottoman political thought throughout the centuries, modified somewhat as “political advice given to the ruler”; in the early nineteenth century this concept was contrasted with freedom.¹⁵⁶

It seems that up to the 1870s, *Tanzimat* intellectuals advocated a form of monarchy that was bound by law (*qanun*, *qawanin*) and wanted to prove to Europeans that Ottoman governance was such a political system. They point to consultation as the indigenous practice and to *qawanin* (understood as the Koran, *shari'a* laws, and administrative laws made by the Muslim rulers) functioning as a constitution (often translated as *qawanin*) upheld by the high imperial statesmen.¹⁵⁷

The elite competition for Egypt channeled into this discourse. Mustafa Fazıl encouraged the Young Ottomans—Namik Kemal, Ali Suavi, Ziya, and others—to think in terms of monarchical parliamentarism. I did not find explicit articles on *meşveret* in the surviving 1866 issues of the journal of Namik Kemal,¹⁵⁸ but he did celebrate the regulations of the Egyptian Consultative Chamber in November 1866 (see below).¹⁵⁹ *Muhbir*, the journal of the more radical Suavi, from January 1867 reported on the Egyptian developments,¹⁶⁰ but criticized Ismail and published Mustafa Fazıl’s letter. It is only in 1868 that the Ottoman intellectuals proposed consultation (*usul-i meşveret*) as part

¹⁵⁵ Ami Ayalon, “Shura,” in P. Bearman et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed., Brill Online, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ Marinos Sariyannis, “Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms,” *Turcica* 47 (2016): 33–72, 58.

¹⁵⁷ Ahmad ibn Abi Diyaf, *Consult Them in the Matter—A Nineteenth-Century Islamic Argument for Constitutional Government* (Fayetteville, 2005); Sönmez, “From *Kanun-ı Kadim*”; Hill, “Ottoman Despotism.”

¹⁵⁸ There is a short series of articles entitled “Usul al-Hukm fi Nizam al-Umam,” from n. 422, *Tasvir-i Efkar*, 8 Jumada al-Ula 1283 (18 Sept. 1866), 4.

¹⁵⁹ *Tasvir-i Efkar*, n. 439, 18 Rajab 1283 (27 Nov. 1866), 1–2.

¹⁶⁰ *Muhbir*, 25 Sha’ban 1283 (2 Jan. 1867), 3.

of the solution to strengthen the empire.¹⁶¹ The imperial State Council (*Şura-yi Devlet*) was established soon after.¹⁶²

The rule of law (consultation) is not necessarily constitutional, and it certainly does not necessarily embody a republican form of governance in terms of Western positive law. Even invested studies in Turkish republicanism acknowledge that the Young Ottomans were predominantly monarchists.¹⁶³ The elite sponsors of intellectuals had no interest in advocating republican ideas. The codification of law was to preserve monarchical governance.

MUSLIM PATRIOTISM AND DOMESTIC SOVEREIGNTY: THE CONSULTATIVE CHAMBER OF DELEGATES

In Egypt, the apotheosis of the many strains of a *'yan* developmentalism, Muslim patriotism, and late Ottoman politics was the establishment of the Consultative Chamber of Delegates in the fall of 1866. The Chamber is seen as the forerunner of a parliament, a “gift” from Ismail,¹⁶⁴ or as created to “strengthen Egyptian credit in London and Paris.”¹⁶⁵ Francophone statesmen of Ismail explained it as a “school” “to civilize the population.”¹⁶⁶

The first group of representatives in the Chamber’s opening session is no surprise; among them were the protagonists of this article: the dreamer Ahmad Nafi’, the petitioners Hasanayn Hamza, Musa al-Jundi, Muhammad (Mansur) al-Shawarli, and a scion of the Abaza family.¹⁶⁷ Sheikh Mustafa Salama al-Najjari, for his part, became an editor of the revitalized official government bulletin. We can only guess how and on whose authority the members were selected, but my analysis so far provides us with some clues.¹⁶⁸

Ismail conceived of such a council in July 1866, right after the celebrations of primogeniture,¹⁶⁹ but he did not issue the order creating the council until the following October,¹⁷⁰ and the first session convened only in 1867. It is possible that Ismail was also inspired by the earlier Tunisian experiment and by the fact that, in 1829, a similar consultative council had been created

¹⁶¹ Nazan, *Young Ottomans*, 152–53, 165.

¹⁶² Mehmet Canatar, “Şura-yi Devlet Teşkilatı ve Tarihi Gelişimi Üzerine Bazı Tespitler,” *İlmi Araştırmalar* 5 (1997): 107–39.

¹⁶³ Banu Turnaoğlu, *The Formation of Turkish Republicanism* (Princeton, 2017), 71–72.

¹⁶⁴ Hunter, *Egypt*, 52; Hamed and El-Dessouky, *Large Landowning Class*, 142–43.

¹⁶⁵ Davis, *Challenging Colonialism*, 26–36.

¹⁶⁶ Mitchell, *Colonizing*, 75–76.

¹⁶⁷ al-Rafi’i, *‘Asr Isma’il*, ii, 94–96.

¹⁶⁸ Chalcraft, “Engaging the State,” 313–17. Cole provides details about later elections in guilds, in *Colonialism and Revolution*, 169–74.

¹⁶⁹ French consul in Alexandria letter to Direction Politique (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 30 July 1866, 166PO/D25/67–68, MEAN.

¹⁷⁰ The decision was sent to the governorates on 22 October 1866. Amr Karim, p. 18 from *qayd* 24, microfilm 23, Ma’iyya Saniyya ‘Arabi (Correspondence of the Governor’s Entourage in Arabic, henceforth MSA), DWQ.

by his grandfather.¹⁷¹ Today, official Egyptian history does not consider Mehmed Ali's council part of the history of parliamentarism, and portrays the Consultative Chamber as the starting point.¹⁷²

Contextualized in the above story and within recent scholarship, one can see the Chamber as the most successful example of a *'yan* under Ottoman rule who managed to partner with the local governor.¹⁷³ It has been understood as Ismail's master-plan to check the influence of the *zevat*, control the rural notables, strengthen Egypt's credit, legitimize his land policy, and get help in the administration.¹⁷⁴ But in the history of a *'yan*, the Chamber formalized a pact using the discursive technique of Muslim patriotism. Ismail's inauguration speech on 25 November 1866 was delivered in Arabic and did not mention the sultan, but it did make reference to the Koran.¹⁷⁵ He—or possibly his Arabic secretary—translated “parliament” as *majlis shura* (“consultative council”), from French into Arabic, and of course he also advertised it to Europeans as a parliament.¹⁷⁶

Masking the Chamber as a parliament was a tacit claim to symbolic sovereignty, which was crucial to contracting loans from European banking houses. Thus, the contractual legal personhood of Egypt was in place for the international business community before the recognition of its independent status in the international political system.

The tacit claim was tacitly rejected by the Ottomans. I have highlighted that Ismail was described as ‘Aziz, “the Mighty One” in Arabic. In the winter of 1866, this is precisely the title that he demanded from the sultan. The title ‘Aziz would translate *de facto* domestic sovereignty into a dangerous legal symbol. The 1867 final agreement to another title, “khedive” (a Persian-Ottoman epithet), symbolized the imperial refusal to acknowledge the covenantal type of dynastic nation-ness in Egypt as internationally sovereign.¹⁷⁷

The Chamber's actual work is outside of the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that the representatives often proposed projects such as the creation of administrative councils in rural areas (which subsequently became the main power base of the large landowners).¹⁷⁸ Their main concern was irrigation.¹⁷⁹ Scholars suggest that “the issues pertaining to ‘the prosperity of the peasant household’ were viewed through the narrow lens of their interests.”¹⁸⁰ The Chamber was the means through which groups of a *'yan* successfully

¹⁷¹ Afaf Lutfi Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge 1984), 108.

¹⁷² Musa, “Al-Dirasa.”

¹⁷³ Yaycioglu, *Partners*.

¹⁷⁴ Hunter, *Egypt*, 53.

¹⁷⁵ al-Rafi'i, *Asr Isma'il*, ii, 96–97.

¹⁷⁶ Amr Karim, p. 18 from *qayd* 24, microfilm 23, MSA, DWQ.

¹⁷⁷ “Khedive” (A. Mestyan), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3d ed., Brill, forthcoming.

¹⁷⁸ Hunter, *Egypt*, 54.

¹⁷⁹ See, for instance, p. 90, *qayd* 40, microfilm 33, MSA, DWQ.

¹⁸⁰ Ghalwash, “On Justice,” 528.

appropriated the space of national representation at the expense of other peasant groups that were less connected, less enterprising, or simply less loyal.¹⁸¹

How does this story relate to the famous revolt in 1882? Were there unintended consequences in the long term? Did the Chamber become a space of resistance to Ismail, instead of collaboration, by the end of the 1870s?¹⁸² Seen through the above lenses, the 1876 financial takeover by European controllers threatened the pact between a *'yan* and governor. Did they aim to save it? Was the restoration of social collaboration actually the origin of the *a 'yan* resistance to foreigners in 1882?

REGIONAL PATTERNS OF PSEUDO-FEDERALIZATION

Instead of being a prehistory to revolution, the making of domestic sovereignty in late Ottoman Egypt prompts us to think about other provincial patterns in the axial moment of the 1860s. At a higher level of analysis, because of the sultanic privileges and the Chamber, Egypt's position in the Ottoman Empire legally became similar to pseudo-federalization. To understand such situations at the time, British international lawyers looked to examples from overseas colonial history.¹⁸³ But for our purposes, it is enough to register the regional context since this is the context of Ismail and the *a 'yan*.

In 1866, Romanian elites invited the Hohenzollern prince Karl to rule as Carol I (r. 1866–1914) in the Ottoman United Principalities. In the spring, they issued a Basic Law to establish a constitutional monarchy that would be recognized by the Great Powers of Europe, but not by the Ottomans. In October, at exactly the same time as Ismail gave the order for the Consultative Chamber, the Ottoman grand vizier recognized Karl-Carol only as a hereditary prince in the United Principalities.¹⁸⁴ Another, non-Ottoman, path was the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in the Habsburg Empire. In 1866–1867, following the violently suppressed revolution of 1848–1849, Hungarian landowner elites accepted a compromise with the emperor that restored their taxation privileges.¹⁸⁵ The pact was symbolically sealed in Emperor Franz Joseph's coronation in June 1867 as a Hungarian king.¹⁸⁶ The *Ausgleich* created the Austro-Hungarian dualist system.

These different strategies of notables in 1866–1867 establishing domestic sovereignty with monarchs, but without complete independence, highlight distinct provincial trajectories in the transition from old imperial systems to new capitalist-imperial models of pseudo-federalization. The temporal coincidence

¹⁸¹ Chalcraft, "Engaging the State," 309; Ghalwash, "On Justice."

¹⁸² EzzelArab, "Fiscal and Constitutional Program."

¹⁸³ Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*, 237–38.

¹⁸⁴ Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866–1947* (Oxford, 1994), 14–15.

¹⁸⁵ Manó Kónyi, ed., *Dedk Ferenc beszédei*, 6 vols. (Collected speeches of Ferenc Deak) (Budapest, 1903), ii, 397–403.

¹⁸⁶ András Cieger ed., *A kiegyezés* (The compromise) (Budapest, 2004), 15–183.

may not indicate a causal relationship, but the simultaneity is striking. While the Romanian elites invited a foreign ruler (the Ottomans did not recognize their independence for the next fifteen years), the Hungarian aristocrats negotiated with the imperial center and naturalized that imperial sovereign in order to gain semi-independent governance. Next to these two provincial strategies, the Egyptian way was a third one: a pact with the local imperial representative. The three provincial trajectories—which ended in full independence, dualism, and semi-sovereignty, respectively—thus correspond to three types of naturalized foreigner dynasts (an aristocrat, emperor, and governor). The legal architecture of overlapping sovereignties came about from internal compromises in the 1860s.

DOMESTIC SOVEREIGNTY AND TECHNO-POLITICS

This microhistory of an axial moment has provided an argument for further expanding the agency of rural notables in modern history. I contend that the need for machines and dynastic change forced the *a'yan* and the governor Ismail into closer cooperation with each other in the Egyptian province. This temporal collusion of interests, carefully staged by the government, resulted in discursively naturalizing Ismail and codifying social collaboration as consultation in a “representative” chamber within the Ottoman context. Together, all these processes reconstituted domestic sovereignty: Ismail as the Mighty One arrived in a steam ship in a village notable’s dream.

It is here, in the Egyptian countryside, that we can detect non-European concepts of sovereignty. Yet the elaborate Muslim sovereignty-talk shows only one side of a bifurcated political structure: patriotic kingship, sustained by consultation, as a domestic vision of power. The other side was sultanic and caliphal loyalty: an external, silent, spiritual necessity. There is a break between the discourse on absolutizing administrative authority and the legal-theological situation of delegated Muslim sovereignty.

Here can we see the birth of a pattern characteristic of Egypt until 1952. Ismail allowed the producers of this ideology to occupy the space of representation guaranteed in the Consultative Chamber. Their loyalist texts tell us nothing about other types of emotional-political attachment to land such as vernacular peasant and urban popular politics. The Chamber excluded peasants, urban professionals, and non-loyalist Muslim scholars, but it allowed an imagined form of nation-ness (soon, Arab-ness), increasingly molded into the European nation-state pattern.

In general, the relationship between rural elites and industrialization provides a way to reclaim local agency after the material turn in empire studies. How does *a'yan* developmentalism relate to British imperialism? Whatever the *a'yan*, or even Ismail would have thought about their needs and sovereignty, they ultimately connected to a new techno-political global system. Was *a'yan* developmentalism an effect of British coal-based imperialism or,

on the contrary, is its existence an argument for decolonizing the global history of technology? Finally, the codified legal situation that provincial notables and monarchs create through pacts, that is, pseudo-federalization in the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, provides a non-maritime imperial genealogy of creating legal personhoods of polities without independence. Allowing pseudo-federalization by codified domestic sovereignty through monarchical naturalization highlights the capacity of contiguous empires to accommodate local autonomy in the 1860s.

Abstract: Through a new type of global microhistory, this article explores the remaking of the political system in Egypt before colonialism. I argue that developmentalism and the origins of Arabic monarchism were closely related in 1860s Egypt. Drawing on hitherto unknown archival evidence, I show that groups of Egyptian local notables (*a'yan*) sought to cooperate with the Ottoman governor Ismail (r. 1863–1879) in order to gain capital and steam machines, and to participate in the administration. Ismail, on his side, secured a new order of succession from the Ottoman sultan. *A'yan* developmentalism was discursively presented in petitions, poems, and treatises acknowledging the new order and naturalizing the governor as an Egyptian ruler. Consultation instead of constitutionalism was the concept to express the new relationship. The collaboration was codified in the Consultative Chamber of Representatives, often interpreted as the first parliament in the Middle East. As a consequence of the sultanic order and the Chamber, Egypt's position within the Ottoman Empire became similar to a pseudo-federal relationship. I conclude by contrasting different ways of pseudo-federalization in the global 1860s, employing a regional, unbalanced comparison with the United Principalities and Habsburg Hungary.

Key words: Egypt, Arab monarchism, developmentalism, domestic sovereignty, notables, Islam, Ottoman Empire, constitutionalism, federalization, *a'yan*