

Introduction

When the Arab conquest reached the Nile in 642 CE, the river's eastern bank was already peppered with Jewish and Christian settlements. The Arabs would establish Fustat just north of Qasr al-Sham, which remained home to Orthodox Greeks, Jews, and Coptic Christians. Further south, Jews and Christians established Qasr al-Babiliyun, now known as Old Cairo.¹ Beyond that were the villages of Maadi, Tura, and Helwan. While these villages would later be defined by their relationship to the emerging Egyptian capital, they remained distinct from Cairo for more than a millennium. In these places, villagers established agricultural enclaves, fished, and traded. In Maadi, the Nile's annual flood brought silt-rich deposits that sustained the land's fertility.

For the Coptic community, Maadi had long held special significance. Coptic tradition across generations told of how the Holy Family took refuge in the village during their flight from Palestine to Egypt. According to the story, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph stayed in Maadi for ten days before setting sail for Upper Egypt in a papyrus boat. Maadi's Church of the Holy Virgin (al-'Adhra' bi-l-Maadi) was believed to be on the exact location of their departure. The location was also believed to be the place where Pharaoh's daughter pulled Moses from a basket in the reeds of the Nile waters.² As the stories indicate, from its earliest history, Maadi was long associated with the Coptic and Jewish communities that would become minorities in Egypt. Maadi's modern history was no different.

Maadi remained a village outside of Cairo throughout the reign of Saladin, Mamluk rule, the Ottoman invasion, and the rise of the Ottoman governor Mehmed Ali. Elements of modern urban development only began near the end of Mehmed Ali's reign, when in 1843, Cairo's then-governor 'Abbas Pasha created a Council of Tanzim (Arabic for plan), which oversaw a scheme for widening Cairo's streets and developing new utilities.³ It was not until the khedive's son

Isma‘il came to power in 1863 that a larger plan for Cairo’s development became a significant factor in ambitions to modernize Egypt. Construction of the Suez Canal had already begun, after the 1854 concession was granted to Ferdinand de Lesseps. Isma‘il would look to incorporate the capital fully into modernization efforts that had previously prioritized industrialization and utility development.⁴

With a plan to unveil a new city to a mass of international visitors when the Suez Canal opened in 1869, Isma‘il appointed ‘Ali Mubarak, a French-educated Egyptian engineer, to direct a newly formed Tanzim. Isma‘il drew inspiration from a meeting with Georges-Eugène Haussmann, who was then undertaking his massive renovation of Paris, and the khedive hoped similarly to update Cairo with wide boulevards that radiated off of large public squares. While Mubarak initially planned to incorporate the older medieval city into the redesign, time constraints forced him to focus on largely uninhabited areas to the west and north of Cairo’s existing quarters. This uneven development established districts like Ismailiya, which had wide avenues and European-styled building façades that appealed to Cairo’s growing class of European expatriates. The new districts abutted the older areas of Old Cairo and Bulaq, which retained their medieval shapes and fell into further disrepair. Ultimately, Isma‘il’s scheme proved financially unsustainable and directly contributed to the bankruptcy that would justify the British invasion in 1882. By then, the Ottoman sultan had conceded to British pressure and deposed Isma‘il and replaced him with his son Tawfiq. Instead of creating a fully integrated modern city, Isma‘il’s nineteenth-century plans made Cairo into “two cities”—the increasingly dilapidated medieval city, with its winding, unpaved roads, and the new, European-styled city with its wide avenues and Western-inspired design.⁵

In this context, the village of Maadi would be developed into one of the suburbs of Cairo's European city.⁶ The history of how it was made pushes past the machinations of local and colonial officials to reveal how foreign capital made a home not just in Egypt's businesses and banks, but also in its streets, houses, and gardens. What Maadi became exposes how international investment capital and the people representing it shaped local society and culture, creating a vision for modern Egypt that incorporated a range of global influences.

The expansion of Cairo required infrastructure that could reliably move goods and people into and out of the capital, so suburban development followed the growth of Cairo's rail networks. Egypt's first railroad connected the capital to the more cosmopolitan port city of Alexandria in 1858. Afterward, Cairo quickly grew into a major railway junction that helped integrate communications and transportation across the country.⁷

Railway development, like the construction and management of the Suez Canal, was undertaken by foreign companies that received concessions from the Egyptian government. These companies had a special advantage because of the benefits guaranteed by the Capitulations. The Capitulations offered foreigners in Egypt and their businesses extraterritorial status, exempting them from local taxes and the jurisdiction of local courts. The system dated back to the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman sultan established the Capitulations to regulate trade with Europe.⁸ Throughout Ottoman territories, including Egypt, the policies exempted foreign subjects and foreign-registered businesses from local laws and taxes, which, in turn, encouraged foreign domicile in Egyptian cities and other commercial hubs under Ottoman authority across the eastern Mediterranean. In Egypt, these policies were further institutionalized by the Mixed Courts, which established a separate legal system for foreign nationals that

remained in place from 1876 until 1949, thus preserving the Capitulations benefits well after the fall of the Ottoman empire.⁹ While the Mixed Courts were created to keep a preponderance of foreign consuls from overrunning Egypt's legal system, they also allowed each of the world's "Great Powers" and "middle powers" to have a representative judge in the country. This meant that most European countries, including England, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, and Russia, as well as the United States, had a hand in Egyptian governance for the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰

The legal protections guaranteed by the Capitulations and Mixed Courts provided much of the justification for the British invasion and subsequent occupation. The royal fleet landed at Alexandria under the aegis of protecting British investments in the Suez Canal and elsewhere in Egypt. Yet, British authorities made a habit out of deploring the systems, rightly identifying how detrimental they were to the formation of independent Egyptian economic and political strength. Sir Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, who served as the British consul-general of Egypt from 1883 to 1907, considered the Capitulations part of Egypt's "~~heterogeneous~~ mass of international cobwebs"—elements that he believed the Englishman, whose "mission was to save Egyptian society," had arrived to combat, not benefit from. Cromer acknowledged, however, that the delicate balance of power worked out among the governments invested in the Mixed Courts made their abolition diplomatically unfeasible.¹¹ As long as the Mixed Courts remained in place, the Capitulations continued protecting foreigners' privileged status.

Rather than combatting the Capitulations, the British occupation actually intensified their impact. Britain's administration of the country, especially its finances, made Egypt appear like a more stable investment.¹² While many expatriates had long made homes in Alexandria, more and more moved to the Egyptian capital, which offered the promise of new profits. Historians have

referred to this growing class of expatriates by a range of names to indicate their dual identity as both locals and foreigners: foreign-resident bourgeoisie, local foreign minorities, or, in the case of this book, resident foreigners.¹³ With this growing population looking to reside in Cairo long term came demand for new residential spaces, and companies previously focused on transportation began new endeavors in land development that looked to profit from resident foreigners' domicile in Cairo.

During a general meeting in London on December 22, 1903, the Egyptian Delta Light Railways Company Ltd. (Delta Railways) announced its intention to form a new company that would undertake projects in land development. Land values, the company explained, had “significantly increased,” and Delta Railways hoped to capitalize on those growing values through the new venture.¹⁴ The company established the Egyptian Delta Land & Investment Co. Ltd. (Delta Land) in April of the following year.¹⁵ Because both Delta companies were registered in England, they enjoyed protections under the Capitulations. As English entities, they might appear straightforward products of imperialism. The London announcement was made by Delta Railways' chairman Sir Auckland Colvin, who previously represented British interests in Egypt when he managed the country's debt under Khedive Tawfiq, a subject examined in Chapter Two.¹⁶ Yet the inner workings of the companies reveal deep local ties to some of Egypt's most prominent families.

The Capitulations and Mixed Courts not only attracted foreign businesses and their employees to Egypt, but also made acquiring foreign nationality profitable for locals. France and Italy, which were heavily invested in preventing Britain from gaining full control over Egypt's affairs, regularly granted their respective nationalities to Egyptians with the means to pay for it. For European powers, this gave them more influence within the Mixed Courts. What is more,

Egypt had no nationality law of its own until 1929.¹⁷ This meant that many people born and raised in Egypt were technically foreign subjects, even if their families had resided in the country for generations. Such was the case with the local families that helped establish Maadi, who were longstanding Egyptian Jewish families that retained foreign nationality in order to ensure that their various banking and commercial endeavors enjoyed the benefits of the Capitulations.¹⁸ So while Maadi was founded by Italian, Austro-Hungarian, and English passport holders, that foreign status was not divorced from deep and longstanding local attachments, and in fact represented a kind of Egyptian identity that remained prominent in the country's affairs until the mid-twentieth century.¹⁹ More than representing foreign interests, these Jewish families profoundly shaped the Egyptian economy. Their influence often incorporated local and foreign interests and eventually served as a platform for Egyptian independence from the British.

The Delta companies' Egyptian Jewish connections were integral to establishing Maadi. While the names of both companies indicated an earlier focus on transporting goods in Lower Egypt, Delta Land made its most substantial impact south of Cairo. In December 1904, Delta Railways purchased the Cairo–Helwan light rail line and announced plans to extend the narrow track from the Muqattam hills in the east to the Nile in the west, allowing them to move stone to the river for bridge construction. This track traversed Maadi al-Khabiri, and it is no coincidence that Delta Land simultaneously announced its purchase of seven hundred feddans of land (294 hectares or 726 acres).²⁰ Less than three years later, Delta Land definitively made Maadi its biggest investment when it purchased all of the land that the Messrs Suarès Frères et Compagnie owned at Maadi al-Khabiri.²¹ The Suarèses were among Egypt's most prominent Jewish families, and they, along with the Mosseris, Menascés, Cattaouis, and Rolos, led much of the country's banking and transportation ventures. All of these families became involved in Maadi

from the beginning, and in doing so, incorporated Delta Land's new development into local commercial networks that were integral to the Egyptian economy.

According to popular legend, the Suarès patriarch Felix—whose former property at Maadi al-Khabiri became the basis for Delta Land's development—first envisioned the development of the area into a distinctive “garden city.”²² The garden city concept was created by Sir Ebenezer Howard at the turn of the twentieth century and combined urban and rural elements into a town-and-country satellite.²³ For Delta Land, the garden city offered a method for creating a well-controlled and aesthetically pleasing space conveniently situated a short train ride from the capital.

When Howard first developed the garden city plan, he believed that the greatest crisis facing the world was the growth of metropolitan slums and the related impoverishment of rural areas. To address the crisis, he proclaimed, “Town and country *must be married*, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization.”²⁴ Howard believed that modern technology could liberate humanity from grueling, unskilled toil, and that the railroad was integral to allowing for the dispersion of humanity into more harmonious, semi-rural establishments.²⁵ In his plan, Howard created a series of diagrams to explain how the garden city was to be carefully zoned. The town centered on a single commercial center, which was surrounded by residential space that comprised the majority of the development. Outside of the residential area was an industrial sector, and finally a rural greenbelt that served as an agricultural buffer. A rail line attached the garden city to the larger metropolitan center and to neighboring towns. It also provided an ideal outlet, in Howard's consideration, for farmers, manufacturers, and artisans to more widely market their goods.²⁶

Notes

¹ André Raymond, *Cairo: City of History* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 20.

² Otto F.A. Meinardus, *The Historic Coptic Churches of Cairo* (Cairo: Philopatron, 1994), 82–83; Otto F.A. Meinardus, “The Church and Monastery of the Virgin Mary,” Brochure, Binder 8, SRCARMPC.

³ Raymond, *Cairo*, 302; Michael Reimer, “Urban Government and Administration in Egypt, 1805–1914,” *Die Welt des Islams* 39, no. 3 (1999): 289–318.

⁴ Raymond, *Cairo*, 308–309.

⁵ Raymond, *Cairo*, 312–318; Nezar AlSayyad, *Cairo: Histories of a City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 222–223.

⁶ Janet Abu-Lughod describes Maadi as the only true suburb of Cairo. Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 201.

⁷ Raymond, *Cairo*, 307.

⁸ Maurits H. van den Boogert, *Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls and Beraths in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 7.

⁹ Nathan J. Brown, “The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (1993): 33–52.

¹⁰ Sir Richard Vaux, “Egyptian and Other Episodes: Personal, Political, and Legal,” unpublished memoir (1941), GB165-0293, MECA.

¹¹ Evelyn Baring, Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, vols. 1–2 (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1916), 125.

¹² Bent Hansen, “Interest Rates and Foreign Capital in Egypt under British Occupation,” *Journal of Economic History* 43, no. 4 (1983): 877.

¹³ Robert Tignor uses “foreign-resident bourgeoisie” to describe people who were foreign nationals but identified their economic interests with Egypt. Similarly, Marius Deeb uses “local foreign minorities” to describe people who did not necessarily assimilate into local society but “can be regarded as a major agent of change affecting the internal development of Egypt’s social and economic history.” Gudrun Krämer also uses “local foreign minority” in her extensive study of modern Egypt’s Jews. See Robert Tignor, *State, Private Enterprise, and Economic Change in Egypt, 1918–1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3–5; Marius Deeb, “The Socioeconomic Role of Local Foreign Minorities in Modern Egypt, 1805–1961,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 1 (1978): 11; Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt, 1914–1952* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1989), 31.

¹⁴ “Sharikat al-Delta,” *al-Ahram*, January 9, 1904.

¹⁵ “Memorandum of Association of the Egyptian Delta Land & Investment Company, Limited,” BT 31/43735, BNA.

¹⁶ No. 127, “Memorandum from Sir A. Colvin on state of affairs in Egypt,” December 26, 1881, FO 407/19, BNA.

¹⁷ Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 38.

¹⁸ Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, 31–32.

¹⁹ Delta Land registered lists of the company’s board members and managers, which included the nationality of each member, with the British Board of Trade from the company’s founding in

1904 until 1955. “Memorandum,” BT 31/43735; “Baron Jacques de Menasce and Baron Charles de Mensace,” FO 141/655/6.

²⁰ “‘Ilan,” *Al-Muqattam*, December 22, 1904.

²¹ “Memorandum,” BT 31/43735.

²² “Mead,” in *Egypt Today, Published in the Interests of Egyptian Finance, Industry and Commerce, 1937–38*, 2nd ed. (London: Bemrose & Sons), 171, SRCARMPC.

²³ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, edited by F.J. Osborn (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1965 [1902]).

²⁴ Howard, *Garden Cities*, 48. Emphasis in original.

²⁵ Howard’s utopian vision drew from a variety of antecedents, including Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Quaker spiritualism, Fabian socialism, and late Victorian science fiction. He was particularly inspired by Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward, 2000–1887*, published in 1888, which promoted similar ideals of basic human decency and progress through modern technology. Peter Batchelor, “The Origins of the Garden City Concept for Urban Reform,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 28, no. 3 (1969): 184–200.

²⁶ Howard, *Garden Cities*, 61.