

# 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-Babilyun, now known as Old Cairo.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the village of Maadi would be developed into one of the suburbs of Cairo's European city.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 22 December 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.<sup>14</sup> The company established the Egyptian Delta Land & Investment Co., Ltd. (Delta Land) in April of the following year.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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).<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.”<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.”<sup>24</sup> 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, semirural establishments.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly for Delta Land and other land development companies, Howard's plan relied on the activities of a private business that could independently manage the town. He devoted nearly two-thirds of his 1902 *Garden Cities of To-morrow* to the financial workings of the project.<sup>27</sup> He envisioned a private company functioning as the town's local municipality, providing guidance and keeping it in line with the long-term garden city plan. He explained that the administration of the town would be “modeled upon that of a large and well-appointed business, which is divided into various departments.”<sup>28</sup> The company would serve as the local governor and in that role would be responsible for building roads, parks, and schools, and

creating sanitation, water, and electric utilities. In order to ensure that the company remained in control of land use, residents would rent land rather than buy it outright. Howard stipulated that the company would use those rents to pay for the land and provide for the town's municipal needs.<sup>29</sup>

Howard intended the whole garden city system to be cooperative in nature—with the company depending on residents' rents and the residents relying on the company to appropriately reinvest their funds.<sup>30</sup> Residents would not own their homes and Howard dictated that the land's increased value be held in common, rather than being part of the company's profit.<sup>31</sup> These cooperative elements proved serious barriers to the complete implementation of Howard's plan, making it challenging to find investors and residents. What is more, Howard did not anticipate that the garden city would appeal to bourgeois residents who wanted to distance themselves from industry rather than incorporate small-scale manufacturing into their country life. When garden cities quickly gained appeal on a global scale, most of them failed to undertake the entirety of Howard's original ideal.<sup>32</sup>

In the first decade of the twentieth century, companies established suburban "garden cities" throughout continental Europe, the United States, and Japan.<sup>33</sup> Egypt and especially Cairo proved to be an especially hospitable climate for these kinds of developments. Municipal authority in early twentieth-century Cairo only extended to street planning and development, allowing Delta Land and its competitors to design and build new communities and administer them according to their own standards and interests.<sup>34</sup> While Delta Land's plans for Maadi established the capital's first garden city, they were quickly followed by two competitors. In 1905, the global transportation magnate Belgian Baron Edouard Empain, who designed the Paris and Cairo tramways, founded the Heliopolis Oasis Company and established Heliopolis along the desert tramline, just under ten kilometers (six miles) northeast of Cairo.<sup>35</sup> That same year, the Nile Land & Agricultural Company founded the aptly named Garden City southwest of Cairo's European quarter, along the eastern bank of the Nile.<sup>36</sup> All three companies focused on building garden cities of villas where upper middle-class foreigners and Egyptians might make a home.

In Heliopolis, Empain made his tramway the basis for a new garden city that he believed would help alleviate Cairo's overcrowding. Architecturally, the town blended Continental European building façades with Arab-Muslim motifs, reflecting his early aims to create a multiethnic, socially

integrated space.<sup>37</sup> Empain created a “two-oases project” that was supposed to offer Cairenes of all social ranks a new space to live. The larger, first oasis centered on the luxurious Heliopolis Palace Hotel, a cathedral, and a racetrack—all designed to attract Cairo’s wealthy resident foreigners and elite Egyptians. Surrounding this center were residential plots available for purchase or rent. Factories were to be situated along the town perimeter. The second oasis was to stand as a separate development from the first. It offered housing to the Egyptian workers who helped construct the town, worked on the tramway, and were employed in the factories surrounding the first oasis. These two communities were to share quick and easy access to Cairo by tram. After the 1907 financial crisis, however, Empain opted to cut expenditures and limit the scope of his scheme. He abandoned the worker oasis and focused instead on the more elite development.<sup>38</sup> The change in plans likely reflected the growing conflict between Empain and tramway workers, who went on strike in 1908.<sup>39</sup> As the development of Heliopolis continued, it would be Maadi’s biggest competitor.

In contrast to Maadi and Heliopolis, the Nile Land & Agricultural Company established Garden City adjacent to Cairo’s existing downtown. Rather than standing as a true satellite, it immediately extended the urban environment and required no railway connection to the city center. French engineer José Lamba designed the town in an art nouveau style, with twisting and turning streets that made it difficult to navigate for those who did not live there.<sup>40</sup> Overall, the area remained a garden city in name more than function.

Ultimately, Maadi proved to be Cairo’s most enduring marker of Howard’s influence. As the population of Cairo continued to rise, the other two areas were more quickly absorbed into the city’s sprawl. Heliopolis saw an especially rapid rise in population, growing from ninety-two hundred in 1921 to two hundred and twenty-four thousand in 1928.<sup>41</sup> While Garden City and Heliopolis were more quickly drawn into the larger metropolis, Maadi remained most firmly established as a separate, semirural retreat throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The following chapters explore Maadi’s ongoing development as Delta Land’s garden city south of Cairo. Where the village of Maadi al-Khabiri was previously set apart from the capital, Maadi garden city, as the company regularly referred to it, would be drawn into Cairo’s expanding orb.

The new Maadi would simultaneously belong to Cairo, yet also be defined by its verdant distinctions. Events in Maadi were regularly described as *fi Maadi, bi-l-Qahira*, or “in Maadi, in Cairo.” This moniker captures the town’s altered status, as it lost its position as a village that predated the city center, to a modern space that now belonged to and depended on Cairo. Placing Maadi in Cairo, however, was a process. Examining how this small place became incorporated into the national whole, which was itself in the making, exposes a sustained vision for a particular kind of modern Egypt that lasted for the first half of the twentieth century. Maadi would be defined by the domicile of resident foreigners and the Capitulations that protected them. Those influences made the town possible. Yet, Egyptians, too, would see Maadi as an ideal of the nation’s natural beauty and its potential for international collaboration. The history of Maadi, then, captures a story of modern Egypt that was never exactly at the center of national politics, but, in drawing ever closer to it, remained deeply influential. To overlook it would be to miss the very meaning of Egypt to a large number of people who considered themselves locals, whether or not they bore Egyptian nationality.

Maadi would be known for its villas and gardens. It became home to a number of memorable personalities, many of whom are recalled here. Yet what follows is not an attempt to catalogue each facet of Maadi’s past. Such an undertaking would not only be impossible but also fail to interpret the significance of Maadi’s history. For those familiar with Maadi, this book will hopefully present context and nuance regarding the area’s history and offer a way to situate one’s memories within Egypt’s larger story. For those more broadly interested in modern Egypt, Maadi’s history offers a detailed picture of how foreign economic influences shaped an ideal of the Egyptian nation that was swept away amid global and regional conflicts, as well as by Cairo’s demographic transformation.