

## INTRODUCTION

**A**LTHOUGH THE CIVILISATION of the ancient Egyptians may have died thousands of years ago, modern cultures around the world continue to connect with it, from collections of antiquities, pyramids on US dollar bills and Egyptianising buildings, to Egypt-inspired motifs in clothing and the visual and plastic arts. Indeed, the Great Pyramid, Tutankhamun's gold burial mask, hieroglyphs and even mummies are instantly recognisable as Egyptian by people from countries across the world. The familiarity that modern audiences have with the remnants of ancient Egyptian material culture and the Egyptian aesthetic are due to a well-established (and apparently endless) stream of books, articles, documentaries and touring museum exhibitions. Periods of what we call 'Egyptomania', when ancient Egypt has influenced popular, and even high, culture, have also contributed considerably to people's interest and familiarity.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, ancient Egypt continues to enjoy an often ravenous popular following, fostered in part by the scholarly engagement with it that has, since the mid-nineteenth century, been known as Egyptology. As with contemporary interest in ancient Egypt in general, the history of Egyptology spans nations and continents, both collaboratively and competitively. Yet even after the past two centuries of intensive investigation into the ancient culture, the history of this scholarship and its impact on the modern world remains largely underexplored. More specifically, many basic questions remain only partially understood. What is Egyptology? Why do people study it? What has ancient Egypt meant to people interested in it around the world?

The question 'what is Egyptology?' is both a simple and complex one to answer.<sup>2</sup> The simplest answer is that it is the study of the ancient culture, history and archaeology of the geographical area now recognised as the modern state of the Arab Republic of Egypt, although the northern part of the territory of the Republic of the Sudan (Upper Nubia) is often occasionally regarded as within

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its purview, to maintain the cultural unity of ancient Nubia. However, temporal boundaries of ‘ancient Egypt’ are more problematic. ‘Maximalists’ might extend it from the earliest times down to the end of Byzantine rule, while a ‘minimalist’ might begin at the Unification around 3000 BC and end it with the formal abolition of paganism in Egypt at the end of the 4th century; indeed, an ‘ultra-minimalist’ might argue for a terminal date around the take-over of Alexander the Great in 332 BC. The balance of opinion has varied over time, especially with the increasing specialisation of practitioners, so that those able to seriously engage with the full ‘maximalist’ span have become all but non-existent, with Egyptian prehistory increasingly becoming an independent area of study. On the other hand, the role of Coptic in understanding the ancient Egyptian language has meant that philologists may continue to embrace Byzantine Egypt, although historians may prefer to keep within one or other of the ‘minimalist’ options.

Indeed, the very definition of ‘Egyptologist’ can be problematic, as some would hold that the title implies a functional level of understanding of the language, whether the individual is a specialist philologist or works primarily in other branches of the study of ‘ancient Egypt’, however defined. A lack of linguistic knowledge might thus define a person as an ‘Egyptian archaeologist’ or other similar constructions.

In full awareness of these complexities, especially in terms of the evolution of an area of study, which is the whole point of the present work, in this volume we have adopted the following definition of ‘Egyptology’: ‘The study of all facets of ancient Egyptian civilisation, as institutionalised by centres of learning in the early nineteenth century, with a primary temporal focus starting in 3000 BC and continuing through to the fourth century AD, but not necessarily excluding the period before 3000 BC, especially prior to the separation of prehistory from

“mainstream Egyptology”.’ The subject material of ‘Egyptologists’ thus ranges from monuments, to artefacts, to texts, to human, faunal and floral remains, and the scientific analyses of all these, falling within the broader geographical limits discussed just above, but with the emphasis on their implications for the study of the language, religion, art, daily life and history of the ancient Egyptians.

In saying this, it is freely acknowledged that ‘Egyptology’ as taught or practised does not always include all these aspects, often owing to the small sizes of university departments, funding issues and the preferences of individual scholars, both as teachers and as instigators of research. Yet, in an ideal world, as well as in several actual (but regrettably rare) situations, these different avenues of research are combined in the teaching and study of ancient Egypt. Indeed, one could say the same about other ancient world studies, such as Assyriology or Sumerology. All of these areas of study were once united under the rubric of ‘Oriental Studies’, and many remain linked with departments of Oriental Studies (such as is the case at the University of Chicago), Cultural or Ancient Studies (as at the Freie Universität of Berlin or University of Stellenbosch) or are grouped together in departments of Near Eastern Languages and Civilisations, particularly in North America. Indeed, at an international level, they were deliberated together (alongside other ‘Oriental’ ‘disciplines’) at the International Congresses from 1873 until 1973, when these congresses were terminated, in favour of individual disciplinary gatherings. Egyptology’s own ‘independence’ was marked by the First International Congress of Egyptologists in 1976 (see below, pp. 6, 62, 200).

Thomas Gertzen, in his work on the history of science in Egyptology, discusses the idea that Near Eastern Studies have never been a discipline in the Kuhnian sense. Instead, he cites John Baines’s definition of them as ‘a range of

methods and approaches applied to a great variety of materials from a particular geographical region and period; even definitions of the area and period are open to revision'.<sup>3</sup> Also like other parts of Near Eastern Studies, Egyptology has not typically developed its own methods and theories, save for perhaps in the study of language and mummies, looking instead to practices and ideas from without.<sup>4</sup> Such a tendency to look for theoretical constructs outside Egyptology might help to explain why Egyptologists, as a whole, have been reticent to explore with any real degree of rigour the history of their own area of study.

There is also, however, at one extreme, a questioning of the practical value of studying the subject's historiography: how far can such study have any impact on what most would see as the overarching output from Egyptology, the reconstruction of the society and history (defined in their broadest possible forms) of ancient Egypt? Yet, it is important to be aware of how current ideas and the research methodologies that have given rise to them have come about, as this makes researchers more aware of not only biases within their own thoughts and methods, but also those implicit within the 'received wisdom' of different aspects of Egyptology itself. Also, as with any other academic subject, political, financial, social, cultural and religious issues have had a significant influence on how Egyptology is practised, and how people perceive ancient Egypt.

Beyond these 'utilitarian' issues for primary research, without curiosity into the origins and nature of Egyptology, we may be hard pressed to answer the second and third questions posed above, on the reasons why people wish to study ancient Egypt, and what it has meant to those interested in it around the world. Why *have* people in such far-flung places as Great Britain, Japan, Russia, Australia and the USA, over the past two hundred years (and, indeed, before),

been driven to study it? The history of Egyptology is of a truly global scale, and it has been throughout its existence. Yet despite this widely shared interest in ancient Egypt itself, the history of Egyptology has only recently become a serious area of study in its own right.

That is not to say that earlier works have not addressed it.<sup>5</sup> Scholars in the late nineteenth through to the twentieth century wrote on it in a variety of forms. Indeed, as far back as 1894, Jacques de Morgan noted that the bibliography of ancient Egypt was sinking into chaos,<sup>6</sup> suggesting a scholarly subject already losing its coherence; on the other hand, John A. Wilson commented in 1938 that 'Egyptology is still a young field of research . . . Only a generation ago it left its relatively disorganized youth and entered its intellectual maturity.'<sup>7</sup>

Yet a broadly coherent, sustained, in-depth scholarly exploration has only recently emerged.<sup>8</sup> If Williams Carruthers' 2015 collection of papers was a first step in English towards a deeper understanding of some of the historiographic aspects of Egyptology, the present work aims to complement such approaches, albeit in a rather different direction, attempting to document *what* happened and *when* in greater detail than hitherto seen. By exploring the history of Egyptology on a country-by-country (or, on occasion, regional) basis, it hopes to illuminate the different ways in which it has developed in the diverse intellectual and political circumstances prevalent in diverse parts of the world, and thus tell the story through individual countries' often nuanced experiences, rather than these being subsumed into a single overarching narrative that generally implicitly privileges certain 'great powers' and 'great men' (and a few women).

It is important to note that the chapters are 'territorial', not 'ethnic', so that individuals who move between countries are covered for their activities in that country if working for a national institution in that territory. Thus, the numerous

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foreigners who were employed by the Egyptian Antiquities Service are covered by the Egyptian chapter while so engaged. On the other hand, those who were based in Egypt as part of (for example) the French or German institutes remain under their 'home' countries. There is also the final 'territory' discussed in this book: that of ancient Egypt as seen through the lens of film, the inhabitants of which are but rarely defined by their ethnicity or physical place of residence.

One could perhaps argue that there is a further, 'extraterritorial territory' involved in the world of Egyptology and the wider reception of Egypt: that of the antiquities dealer. Many of the items now in museums and private collections, and sometimes key pieces in Egyptological research, were acquired on the market, various instances being mentioned throughout the book.<sup>9</sup> Of these, few have had meaningful provenances, some sellers even making a point of refusing to pass on any knowledge to purchasers to avoid any danger of the latter attempting to buy 'at source'. While some such pieces can be traced back to at least a site on internal grounds (e.g. texts, typology or old accounts), this loss of context is one of the most pernicious results of the trade, leaving aside the implicit encouragement given to illicit excavations by its very existence, and thus the destruction of contexts as well. Although the export of antiquities from Egypt was finally banned in the 1980s, this has in practice given further encouragement to the trade, cutting off much of the supply side of the economic equation, and thus raising market prices such as to make the business even more profitable – and making the risks run by illicit excavators worth running.

Returning to the truly-territorial chapters, the way that the subject has evolved in a given jurisdiction is sometimes reflected in the structure of that chapter. Thus, some are essentially the biographies of a handful of individuals who *were*

Egyptology in their countries, others are much more built around institutions, and a few begin with individuals and shift their approach as Egyptology gradually institutionalised. Many also address how ancient Egypt has been presented to, and received by, those outside Egyptology in particular, and academia in general, and become part of the broader social history of the time. This has on a number of occasions fed back into the world of scholarship, sometimes with important long-term implications.

Where the focus is on individual researchers, one recalls Juan Carlos Morena Garcia's argument of overriding influences on Egyptology's development: states and museums dictating research priorities through funding models, and a small number of professionals holding tremendous sway over the formation of students and academic output.<sup>10</sup> This focus, on individuals beholden unto institutions and state funding (depending on the country), highlights an important fact, often glossed over in other works on the history of Egyptology: that Egyptology has a very real political dimension.

This aspect can be overstated, since in the vast majority of cases (but not all: a number of examples may be found in this book) an important driver of Egyptological research has been the desire to widen knowledge, often based on the individual researcher's interest. However, its execution has regularly, and inevitably, had political ramifications. These work at a number of levels, including at a microlevel where one's own research agenda has to be tempered by that (or those) of a supervisor, home institution, project funder, and what is in vogue academically at the time. At the macrolevel, there is most obviously the very fact that a foreigner's ability to work in Egypt relies on the acquiescence or direct approval of the local political authorities – although much scholarship can be carried out on objects in museum collections. Over our period of study, these authorities ranged from

the quasi-indigenous regimes of Mehmet Ali and his immediate successors, through British political control (but with the added level of French control of the Antiquities Service), to Egyptian independence, all with widely differing, and often nuanced, agendas regarding the antiquities themselves and research into them. But also those sponsoring such work will often have ‘macro’, as well as the aforementioned ‘micro’, agendas, some overtly political, especially where an activity can be seen as an exercise of ‘soft power’ by the agency in question (e.g. pp. 334–35).

More subtly, the interpretation and presentation of results can certainly be ‘political’, whether implicitly, reflecting a personal underlying ideology, or explicitly, promoting a modern agenda by reference to the distant past (e.g. p. 236). Additionally, the whole enterprise of ‘drawing back the veil’ from Egypt to reveal its past reflects an underlying colonialist mindset, that while generally obsolete in the world of scholarship, remains a popular trope in the public mind.

Understanding the motivations that drove historical figures and events helps us to understand better how knowledge of ancient Egypt was created. In this way, the study of Egyptology is much more than the study of scholars capitalising on and refining earlier successes. To ‘discuss the history of Egyptology is to discuss the history of a discipline that is neither pure nor stable, but one whose practices and existence are historically and spatially contingent . . . to discuss the history of Egyptology is to discuss something far more complex than what sort of work Egyptology should be or who conducted that work the “best” way.’<sup>11</sup> To us, the study of Egyptology offers a lens through which we can view and understand some of the social and political concerns of the times.

Even with this enhanced level of self-awareness, the accounts in the following chapters will inevitably on occasion fall prey to narrative pitfalls of the kinds noted above and perhaps those recorded elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Most markedly, it has not

yet, at times, been possible to progress beyond a heroic lionising of certain players in the history of Egyptology; indeed, given the fundamental roles some have played, it is unclear whether this will ever be wholly possible. Similarly, it has not yet been possible to excise an overall, driving sense of disciplinary ‘progress’ – although the effects of funding cuts might have reversed this had the narratives been carried on in detail beyond 1976! As David Gange notes: ‘To traditional skeletal histories (such as Wortham 1971), all the anthropologist’s techniques of thick description need to be added in order to comprehend Egyptology in and of its time.’<sup>13</sup> While this book may not add tremendous flesh to Egyptology’s body, it nonetheless helps to further complete its skeleton.

This book’s territory-specific approach, and attempts at addressing Egyptology’s reception within countries, stem from a long tradition in the history of science.<sup>14</sup> However, having lauded the advantages of this approach, it is important not to lose sight of the transnational nature of Egyptology, and the underlying strength inherent in that. A brief perusal of many chapters will show the numbers of individuals who moved around the world to study or work while there were numerous ‘virtual’ transnational moves, with books and articles produced by multinational combinations of authors (see p. 6, below).

The core of the book focuses on the period between 1831 and 1976. The former was the year when a university chair was established at the Collège de France in Paris for Jean François Champollion (see p. 68), the great scholar responsible for ultimately breaking the log-jam of the translation process of the hieroglyphic script and some of the first steps in reconstructing ancient Egyptian history on its own terms. Champollion’s work, and scholars’ ability to engage with the texts of the ancient Egyptians, mark an important turning point in the study of Egypt’s past. The terminal year is that in which the first International Congress of Egyptologists



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was held in Cairo, an event marking Egyptology's emergence from the much broader congresses of 'Orientalists' within which its practitioners had previously met on a pan-national basis (see pp. 62, 80, 158, 169, 170, 171, 174, 190, 193, 217, 289, 296, 306, 327, 355). The year 1976 has also been chosen as a cut-off date partly owing to its convenience as an 'event horizon', but also to allow a proper historical perspective, less likely to be coloured by the presence of actors who are (with a handful of venerable exceptions) still actively contributing to the discipline.

While this book is primarily about Egyptology from 1831 onwards, what was happening in that year, and would happen in those immediately following, was a direct consequence of the decades, indeed centuries, before. Accordingly, the first chapter of this book offers a broad-brush, transnational, chronological overview of Egyptology before anybody thought of it as 'Egyptology', and the people, works, events and phenomena that contributed to it. It is thus intended to set the stage for the many dramas that would unfold around the world in the succeeding years. With a nod to the Egyptological chronology with which every student and practitioner must at some point wrestle, we have called this chapter our 'Prehistory'.

In closing this introduction to a book ultimately dedicated to 'national' – or on occasion 'territorial' – Egyptologies, it is important not to lose sight of the transnationality that has already been noted as a fundamental building block of the study of ancient Egypt. In particular, this can be seen in the origins of many of the key tools of Egyptology. The great dictionary of the ancient Egyptian language, the *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (1926–53), was a German project (see p. 215), although it was achieved with the aid of a team of scholars from all over Europe and beyond. From the UK, although conceptually an outgrowth of the *Wörterbuch* project, has come the *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, begun in the 1920s and still continuing, bringing order to

the 'chaos' bemoaned by de Morgan, and providing the discipline with a tool almost unique in the world of archaeology. A similar example is the *Annual Egyptological Bibliography*, initiated by a meeting in Copenhagen in 1947 (see p. 146), and produced in the Netherlands from 1947 to 2001, when it shifted to Oxford. There, it has been combined, as the *Online Egyptological Bibliography*, with data on earlier works from Christine Beinlich-Seeber's monumental 1998 publication, *Bibliographie Altägypten, 1822–1946*, providing an enormous collection of references in Egyptological literature, and making sense of the bibliographic chaos that de Morgan decried.

Teaching grammars of the language have been produced in many languages, including those of Alan Gardiner in 1927 and Gustave Lefèbvre in 1940, while Henri Gauthier produced invaluable digests in the form of the *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques* and *Livre des rois d'Égypte* (1907–17), as did Hermann Ranke in his *Personnenamen* volumes (1935–52). And between 1975 and 1992, the massive *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* was produced, German-published, but with contributions from Egyptologists across the world. All of these works passed across national boundaries to influence the study of ancient Egypt.

These are just a few examples of the ways in which Egyptology has developed into a truly international field. Egyptologists from around the world have also worked together on field projects: perhaps the grandest and most high profile of these was the UNESCO Nubian salvage campaign of the 1960s. More recently, and on a smaller scale, a unified effort was seen in the Sinai in the 1990s, when teams from around the world worked on rescue excavations associated with the al-Salam Canal. Like the pyramids of Giza, large-scale projects such as these demonstrate what can happen when people's efforts and resources are pooled towards the completion of a common goal, and as such may be seen as emblematic of the international body of study that is Egyptology.

## NOTES

- 1 Curl 2005.
- 2 The term itself seems to have first appeared, at least in English, during the middle of the nineteenth century, the Oxford English Dictionary giving its earliest example of 'Egyptologist' in 1859, and 'Egyptology' in 1862 (cf. p. 92).
- 3 Gertzen 2017a: 9.
- 4 Gertzen 2017a: 9.
- 5 Key earlier works include Greener 1966; Bratton 1967; Fagan 1975/2004; Thompson 2015–18; also see Bednarski 2020 for a more comprehensive list.
- 6 De Morgan et al. 1894: xi.
- 7 Wilson 1938: 202.
- 8 Recent in-depth English-language explorations include Reid 2002; 2015a; Moser 2006; Colla 2008; Carruthers 2010; 2015b; Quirke 2010; Gange 2013; 2015; Riggs 2015.
- 9 For a particular case study, see Hagen and Ryholt 2016.
- 10 Moreno Garcia 2015: 55–56.
- 11 Carruthers 2015b: 5.
- 12 Colla 2008, for example, categorises prior attempts to write histories of Egyptology, and cites the difficulties that such efforts present.
- 13 Gange 2015a: 64.
- 14 See Glick 1974; Porter and Teich 1981; the scholarly problem of using national/regional boundaries as a starting point is addressed in Secord 2004: 668–70.

## Chapter 1

# THE PREHISTORY OF EGYPTOLOGY

## The Editors

### THE ECLIPSE OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

**T**HE FIRST TO TAKE an interest in ancient Egypt were, of course, the ancient Egyptians themselves. Prince Khaemwaset, fourth son of Rameses II and high priest of Ptah at Memphis, is often held to have been the first 'Egyptologist'. He certainly carried out what now might be called 'heritage' activities in the Memphite necropolis, (allegedly) restoring monuments and carving large texts identifying their owners on the exteriors of certain examples, including the pyramids of Unas, Userkaf, Menkaure, Djoser, Sahure, Isesi and Senwosret III, as well as the mastaba of Shepseskaf and the sun temple of Niuserre.<sup>1</sup> The prince also dedicated an ancient statue of the Fourth Dynasty prince Kawab in the temple at Memphis. On the other hand, while Khaemwaset was seemingly conserving the memory and importance of these structures, other monuments (including those ancillary to the pyramids in question) were being exploited as stone quarries for his father's projects. Indeed the 'labelling' may well have been a direct result of the demolitions and resulting loss of any external means of identification of the pyramids' owners. The salvage of material from ancient monuments was of course a phenomenon stretching back into the earliest times, and would continue into the nineteenth century AD.

The Egyptians continued to record aspects of their history in their own language into Byzantine times, especially in the Demotic script, hieroglyphs being restricted to monumental temple contexts, although Greek had long since become the language of the ruling classes. The Edict of Theodosius in AD 391



initiated the closure of the last pagan temples in Egypt, an act that is often seen as marking the end of 'ancient Egypt' with the formal abolition of paganism in the Roman Empire. One consequence was that the hieroglyphic script stopped being employed – the last known text in the script, at Philae, dates to AD 394 – and soon afterwards Demotic as well – the last dated example of which, from AD 452, also comes from Philae. With hieroglyphs no longer being written or carved, the ability to directly engage with the texts of the past ended. Subsequently, primary sources available to those seeking information on pharaonic Egypt became restricted essentially to texts in languages that could still be accessed – the works of classical and Hellenistic authors, together with the Bible, and, even then, many of the former failed to survive intact beyond antiquity. In addition, the triumph of Christianity led to the significant mutilation of ancient monuments, especially as regards 'graven images' of human beings or deities on temple and tomb walls. Other structures were simply demolished for their building stone, many monasteries incorporating portions of ancient tombs and temples.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the conversion of some temples into churches preserved their structures, and the covering of pharaonic decoration with plaster and whitewash on occasion had the ironic result of preserving the carvings below.

With regard to texts that were influential on the history of Egyptian exploration, the role of scripture, especially that of the Christian Bible for Europeans, cannot be overstated. Depending on the translation, Egypt is mentioned about seven hundred times in the Old Testament, approximately thirty times in the New Testament, and some twenty-three times in the Qur'an. Such ancient references lent both a familiarity and, for the faithful who were curious about ancient Egypt, a starting point for enquiry. Certainly, ancient Egypt's role in the Bible created an interest in Europe for visiting holy sites as part of

pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with one of the earliest such religious travelogues being written by a woman, variously known as Egeria, Etheria or Aetheria, in the early 380s.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning ancient Greek and Latin sources on ancient Egypt, it is important to recognise that, at the time of the Roman Empire's fragmentation, large portions of its population lived and flourished in North Africa and the Near/Middle East. These populations had centres of learning that preserved many Greek and Latin texts, including those on ancient Egypt. During and after the empire's fragmentation, these texts, much as in Europe, became assimilated into local traditions. The influence that such sources had on these cultures, and how they contributed to local people's exploration of Egypt, has, however, been greatly understudied, largely because European scholars who have written on the history of Egyptian exploration have been unable to access source material, as pointed out by Okasha El-Daly in his study of Arab scholars' attempts to engage with ancient Egypt.<sup>4</sup> This has contributed to a Eurocentric view of Egyptology's history, with the activities of non-Europeans, and especially those dwelling in Egypt, usually overlooked.

## THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

It is often hard to determine which of the Greek and Latin texts have had the most impact on our understanding of ancient Egypt, as the material in question has filtered through a wide range of secondary and tertiary sources in such a way that it is often impossible to say definitively which texts have influenced which. However, it is clear that the third-century BC *Aegyptiaka* of Manetho<sup>5</sup> has been a crucial source for authors going back to antiquity, many of whom quoted from him extensively, particularly Josephus in the first century AD.

However, the text displays a range of problems. First, no copy of the actual *Aegyptiaka* survives, meaning that we are wholly reliant on these later excerptors for its contents. Second, while showing signs of continuing an earlier Egyptian king-list tradition, visible in such things as the Turin Canon,<sup>6</sup> and thus deriving in part, at least, from hieroglyphic sources, the extant quotations suggest an admixture of Greek legend also being present, perhaps a result of its having been commissioned by an early Ptolemaic king, probably both to record the history of Egypt and to help legitimise its new rulers from the northern Aegean. Third, these later excerpts frequently differ widely from one another, even between different versions of the same secondary work, often leaving one at a loss as to what Manetho's original view on a point might have been.

Other writers who recorded aspects of ancient Egypt included Herodotus, the fifth-century Ionian Greek, whose *Histories* mix travelogue, including 'tall tales' told by local guides, with the earliest extant example of trying to create a coherent narrative of happenings in the past.<sup>7</sup> Diodorus Siculus' universal history, written in the first century BC,<sup>8</sup> shares a number of features with Herodotus, while in the first-century AD Plutarch also contributed work that would inform Egyptological ideas on ancient Egyptian religion, with his *De Iside et Osiride* (On Isis and Osiris).<sup>9</sup> His approximate contemporary, Pliny the Elder's multi-volume *Naturalis historiae* (Natural History) also contributed to legends surrounding ancient Egypt's flora and fauna.

In all cases, the level of authority of these authors remains an issue, as do matters of corruption during the transmission process. Nonetheless, when manuscripts began to re-emerge from ecclesiastical libraries for publication and translation from around the fifteenth century onwards, they were seized upon as primary sources, for use alongside what were believed to be infallible facts provided by the Bible, in

attempts to give some kind of account of ancient Egyptian history and culture. The perceived authority of such sources is seen in the work of the earliest scholars able to read hieroglyphs, in particular Champollion and Wilkinson, to reconcile what they could now read of actual ancient Egyptian monumental sources with the Greek/Latin/biblically derived framework that had been so long familiar.

## THE NEW EGYPT

The process of the assimilation of Egypt into the Muslim world that commenced in AD 642 has at times been seen by western scholars as a negative phenomenon in the study of ancient Egypt's material culture, chiefly its monuments, despite the fact that early Christians were already defacing ancient monuments and reusing material for new structures, both sacred and secular; indeed, post-Arab conquest activities tended to focus more on reuse than defacement. On the other hand, various scholars from the medieval Arab world took a strong interest in ancient Egypt, including its history, monuments and scripts, with several works produced attempting to decipher the last.<sup>10</sup> Prominent among these was the work of the tenth-century scholar Ibn Wahshiyah (d. 930), while others also correctly identified certain signs. A considerable number visited and described ancient sites, with al-Nuwairi (d. 1331) apparently visiting the 'blue chambers' under either the Step Pyramid or its South Tomb. Some (such as Muhammad al-Idrisi, 1100–65) responded to the latent power of ruins as a testament to past cultures.

There appears to be little in the way of surviving written documentation, however, concerning any attempt to understand much about ancient Egypt by those who inhabited the land in post-pagan times. Several reasons may account for this, in particular the inability to read the