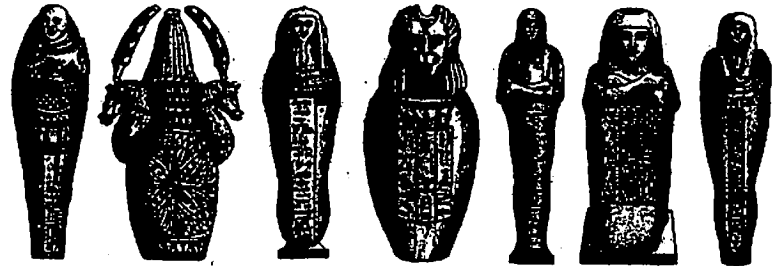


# Conflicted Antiquities



EGYPTOLOGY, EGYPTOMANIA,

EGYPTIAN MODERNITY

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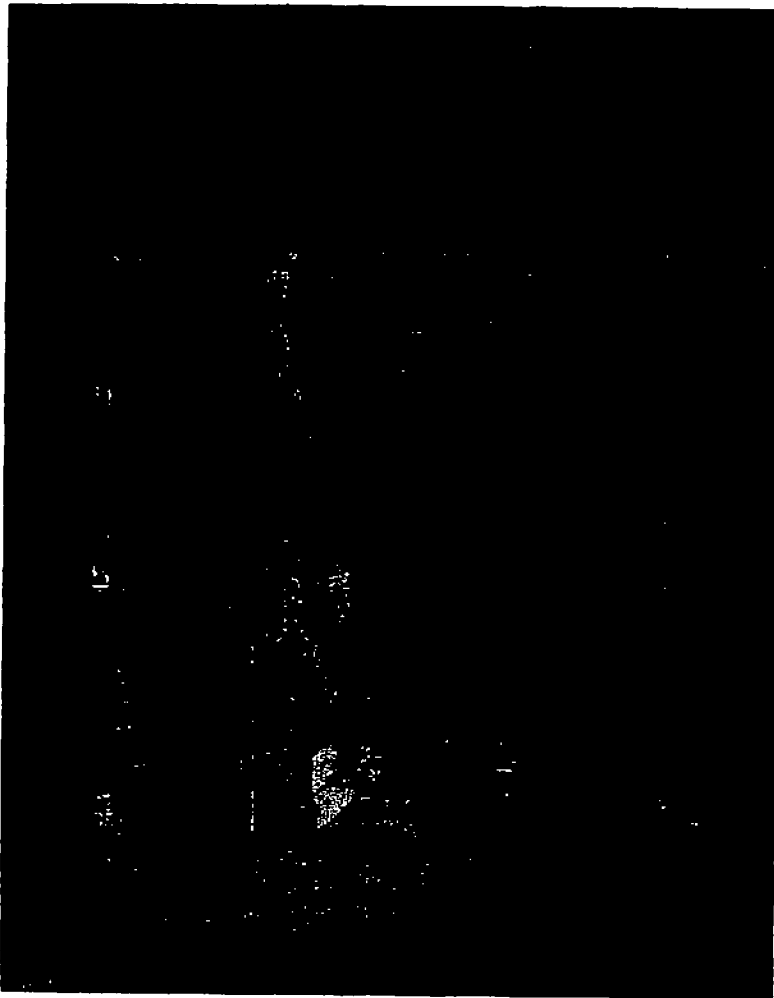


Figure 1. The head of the Younger Memnon installed in the Egyptian Sculpture Room of the Townley Gallery. Engraving by C. Heath after F. Mackenzie, for *Views of London* (1825). © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Egyptian Sculpture Room

The image shown here, from 1825, is of the colossal bust of the Younger Memnon in the Egyptian Sculpture Room, part of the Townley Gallery in the original buildings of the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> Raised on a pedestal, the bust sits among other antiquities of Egyptian provenance. While the Egyptian Sculpture Room contains only stone objects, other sorts of objects such as wooden artifacts, papyri, and mummies are displayed in other rooms, alongside similar kinds of objects. The colossal bust rests between two elevated windows, the only sources of light in the gallery. The engraving shown here frames the Egyptian Sculpture Room between columns that support a pediment of unmistakably Greek form. On the far side of the room, a well-dressed gentleman and lady study the display. We are looking at a picture of large antiquities in the gallery of a famous museum. What else is there to say? The kind of room portrayed in this image has become so familiar that it seems not to need explanation. Yet a cursory survey of the quality of the space represented in this image shows that quite a bit is happening.

Most obviously, the gallery depicted here is a space of visual exhibition. The structure of the museum display privileges one particular sensory faculty (sight) while prohibiting others (such as touch). Organized as spectacle, the gallery creates a palpable sense of separation between the viewer and the objects. One might understand this separation as an instance of what Martin Heidegger once described in terms of “the world picture,” meaning not “a picture of the world, but the world grasped as picture.”<sup>2</sup> The image of the Egyptian Sculpture Room is a threefold illustration of this insight. First, the “world grasped as picture” offers a kind of human subjectivity constituted in relation to nonhuman objects. Heidegger’s critique begins from his reading of the German word for “representation,” *Vorstellung* (lit. “setting forth”). In Heidegger’s reading, the language by

which such an act of representation is conceived betrays its tautological quality: "This objectification of beings is accomplished in a setting-before, a representing [*Vor-stellen*], aimed at bringing each being before it in such a way that the man who calculates can be sure—and that means certain—of the being."<sup>3</sup> The subjectivity offered here is problematic since it posits that the being of objects—such as those collected, displayed, visited, and discussed within museums—is reducible to the human understanding of them. The subjectivities it offers (the curator, the museum-goer, the critic) depend on a fragile relationship to objects of its own making. Put this way, the mode of relationship created by the museum exhibit is one that is contingent, even precarious. This brings me to a second point in Heidegger's critique, that the subjectivity offered by the "world as picture" is not just tautological, but also an essay of control:

That the world becomes picture is one and the same process whereby, in the midst of beings, man becomes subject. . . . The interweaving of these two processes (that the world becomes picture and man the subject), which is decisive for the essence of modernity, illuminates the founding process of modern history, a process that, at first sight, seems almost nonsensical. The process, namely, whereby the more completely and comprehensively the world, as conquered, stands at man's disposal, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively (i.e., *peremptorily*) does the *subjectum* rise up, and all the more inexorably, too, do observations and teachings about the world transform themselves into a doctrine of man, into an anthropology.<sup>4</sup>

In the museum, the "world as picture" means that human subjects stand not only separate from but also opposed to the objects on display. In the Egyptian Sculpture Room, this suggests that even if their bodies are dwarfed by the objects on display, the museum-goers stand against (and over) them, since they are offered for their gaze, their edification. Heidegger's third observation is that the "world as picture" involves another order of confusion: the inability to see that the separation created between subjects and objects is not intrinsic, but rather the product of human imagination and labor. This critique certainly holds true in the Egyptian Sculpture Room: the arrangement of objects in the room is presented not as humanly imposed but rather as deriving naturally from the being of the objects. The "world as picture" illustrated by the museum

gallery thus involves a disavowal of its own epistemological grounds: "Beings as a whole are now taken in such a way that a being is first and only in being insofar as it is set in place by representing-producing [*vorstellend-herstellenden*] humanity."<sup>5</sup>

In *Colonising Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell famously applied the Heideggerian critique of representation to nineteenth-century exhibitions of Egypt.<sup>6</sup> In Mitchell's reading, the exhibition presents objects as if they were faithful copies of original objects whose existence is separate from the act of representation. Mitchell draws out the significance of this in two directions. He emphasizes that the exhibition is foremost a productive institution, creating presence-effects which may or may not have previously existed. In this way, Mitchell shows that the exhibition in Paris in 1889 of "an Egyptian alley" did not so much copy an actual place as constitute a new one. The second line of critique in Mitchell's analysis stems from the observation that the exhibition creates a separation between representations and the world of real things. This point is central to understanding the power of the exhibition in modern history and suggests that the act of representation embodied in the exhibition of an Egyptian alley in Paris involves more than the construction of a new material object like an alley. The production of separation means that one could also generate a concept of the thing represented and create from it typologies and taxonomies. Thus the exhibit in Paris is not merely of *an* Egyptian alley, but rather *the* typical Egyptian alley. As Mitchell points out, the epistemology of separation was crucial to the formulation of abstract concepts (such as tradition and backwardness) which framed Egypt as an object to be worked upon, the target of an overarching plan whose slogans were modernity, reform, and development. In this way, the epistemology of the exhibition is one that follows the logic of instrumentality—"the world as picture" looks for and produces projects of making and transformation.

Large plans may not have been so evident in the exhibit of the Egyptian Sculpture Room in 1825, but the pedagogical mission of the British Museum certainly did present its objects as instruments. The antiquities on display were conceived of as instruments for the edification of museum-goers. Following Heidegger, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno theorized that such instrumentalization was more than an epistemological mistake. It was also the source of potential violence. Describing the kind of knowledge and subjectivity that are based on the objectification of the

world, they write, "The awakening of the self is paid for by acknowledgement of power as the principle of all relations. . . . Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his ends."<sup>7</sup> For Horkheimer and Adorno, as for Heidegger, founding human subjectivity on an essential opposition toward the world may have produced powerful forms of knowledge that treat the world as an object to be made, undone, and remade. But this means that knowledge becomes conceived of chiefly in terms of its use, and its use measured by the standards of efficacy, power, and control. To read the Egyptian Sculpture Room in light of such critiques is to recognize that it is a space able to create subjects who conceive of themselves as separate from and superior to the objects of their study. In this reading, the Egyptian Sculpture Room socializes its subjects into seeing Egypt, already in 1825, as being under the power of their civilized gaze.

The Heideggerian critique of the "world grasped as picture" suggests that the relation obtained in the museum display is one of domination and control. Although this critique is compelling, it does not correspond to accounts of travelers and museum-goers who described their experience of viewing Egyptian antiquities not in these terms, but in ones of familiarity and closeness. Rarely did individuals who viewed these objects, both in Egypt and in the British Museum, talk about their immediate experience in terms of domination. On the contrary, they tended to emphasize the fact that they felt awe, marvel, even humility. They describe the experience of being moved by the huge scale of many Egyptian antiquities. In sum, they routinely describe the objects as the site of an experience in which objects are bearers of their own meaning and active participants in the event. In this reading, the Egyptian artifacts appear to run the show, subjecting British museum-goers to the image of Egyptian grandeur they embody. What this suggests is that by itself the "world as picture" model does not explain everything that is happening in this museum display, or that, if the "world as picture" model is to hold, we need to understand the paradoxical way in which it disavows its form of power. While it is significant that the objects on display in the Egyptian Sculpture Room were concrete reminders of the power held by those who gazed at them, it is no less significant that they—and not those who looked at them—were thought to be the primary

bearers of that power. The ambiguous form of power associated with, but also unacknowledged by, the explicit structure of Egyptological exhibitions from this period would have lasting effects. I will leave for the moment the questions about objects raised (but not fully answered) by this line of thought to address other aspects of the Egyptian Sculpture Room.

The Egyptian Sculpture Room depicted here is a national space, part of the National Repository (as the British Museum was called), funded publicly by act of Parliament,<sup>8</sup> and expressly designed to promote patriotic sensibilities.<sup>9</sup> Like other rooms in the gallery, this room displays an arrangement that attests to the cultural refinement of the English nation and to the reach of the British Empire. The various galleries of the museum present an array of concrete objects from around the world. As an assemblage, these objects form an abstract image of the globe with London at its center. This room is thus also a pedagogical space, creating for metropolitan audiences a material inventory of the stuff of empire and its abstract concept.

Besides representing aspects of nation and empire, the room presents lessons in aesthetic taste and historical appreciation that serve as "civilizing rituals" for museum visitors.<sup>10</sup> One part of this ritual is bound up in the notion of direct aesthetic experience. Unlike the descriptions of Egyptian objects in travel accounts and unlike the famous visual images of Egyptian monuments in books like the *Description de l'Égypte*, the Egyptian Sculpture Room offers the appearance of an unmediated sensation of the objects themselves. In this sense, "the museum is more than a location . . . it is a script" directing aesthetic experience.<sup>11</sup> Beyond being a site for the cultivation of (certain kinds of) corporeal experience and taste, the museum offers other sorts of lessons as well. On the one hand, there is the synchronic lesson of taxonomy and order. This is realized by the placement of like objects with one another or by the division of arts, mediums, and national traditions from one another in the space of the museum.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, there are the diachronic lessons of art history, development, and progress. In this way, the material objects mark events within the plot of the universal survey museum:<sup>13</sup> the forward march of human civilization from its classical origins in Greece and Rome, through Renaissance Italy, to modern-day London.<sup>14</sup>

The space of the Egyptian Sculpture Room is organized around both kinds of scripts. We can certainly interpret the objects in this room

taxonomically insofar as we find only sculpture of a certain provenance (Egypt), scale (monumental), and material (stone). Other kinds of Egyptian objects—smaller stone objects and objects made of wood, metal, papyrus, and human flesh (mummy)—are displayed in other places in the British Museum. Moreover, the Egyptian Sculpture Room is located at the end of the long hall of the Townley Gallery, which houses only stone sculptures of ancient Mediterranean provenance. At the same time, we are encouraged to read these objects as part of a historical narrative. The location of the Egyptian Sculpture Room nestles its objects within a broader survey of fine art. Indeed, the lesson about Egyptian art and culture that emerges from this arrangement is itself situated against (and in the engraving is literally framed by) classical Greek styles whose aesthetic and historical values were taken to be axiomatic.

Overarching these wider lessons in history and taste is arguably the most important, though most abstract, value concretized in the museum room: conservation. Like air, this value permeates the Egyptian Sculpture Room but is impossible to see in itself. Its effects, however, are everywhere—from the cleanliness of the floor and lack of dust on the sculptures to the neatness of the displays and care with which the objects are treated. Conservation implies not just the act of preserving the objects from material decay, but also the cultivation of good administration as a virtue in itself. The clean, well-structured look of the Egyptian Sculpture Room attests to its conscientious management and gives rise to an ethical discourse surrounding the treatment of museum pieces by the curatorial staff.<sup>15</sup> The moral value of rational management cannot therefore be underestimated: it is fundamental to the museum belief that the objects rightfully belong where they are because that is where they are best cared for. Far from clarifying our understanding of the gallery's meaning, however, the theme of conservation introduces a tension between competing notions of temporality. Just as the museum organizes its objects to suggest a developmental narrative of history writ large, the gallery space itself is static and designed to insulate objects from the ravages of history. The capacity to stop time, to preserve, is what enables the presentation of objects as diachronic history.

Less obviously to us now, this room is an emergent space. In 1825, the Townley Gallery (completed in 1808) was a relatively recent addition to the older museum building (Montagu House), which had, by 1805, become

too small to adequately display the rapidly growing collection of antique statuary. Many of the objects in the collection—like the colossal bust of the Younger Memnon—were themselves very recent additions. Thus, the placement of these objects in relation to one another was also fairly new. Indeed, when the Memnon head arrived in 1819, the curator of the Townley Gallery had to rearrange the entire space drastically to make room for it. At the same time, this room is a temporary space. By the late 1820s, Montagu House had been torn down to make way for the much grander galleries designed by Robert Smirke that remain to this day. Within another few years, the Townley Gallery too would be demolished to make way for the new building. By 1834, the Memnon head would be relocated to the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery in the new wing of the museum.

The space of this room is also a socially exclusive space, as intimated by the fine dress of the museum-goers in the image: in 1825 one still had to apply and be recognized as a proper visitor in order to be admitted. For this reason it is also a space of conflicts: not only did many of those excluded from the room contest the legitimacy of the museum as a public institution, but within the room itself, curators doubted whether the objects belonged in a museum at all. For all the above reasons, this particular room was an ambiguous space. The ambiguity was related to, but also far more pervasive than, the fact that while the Memnon bust was duly catalogued and displayed as a discrete piece, little was known about it other than its material composition and general location of modern acquisition. Nothing beyond classical myth was known about its origins or original use, not to mention the ruler depicted in the sculpture. Indeed, such basic information as this was lacking for most of the pieces in the Egyptian Sculpture Room. Given that deficit, it is difficult to say what the lesson of the exhibition hall could be, let alone how it was supposed to fit into the larger nineteenth-century debates about taste and the history of fine art. This ambiguity does not mean the Egyptian Sculpture Room had no meaning, but rather that at this point its sense had more to do with the emergence of the British Museum than with the Egyptian past. It might be objected that the ambiguity was itself temporary, since by the 1830s, following widespread acceptance of Jean-François Champollion's theories about the hieroglyphic language, curators and museum-goers had access to increasingly certain historical information about the Pharaonic past and the significance of its objects. Yet it is precisely at this

moment—before such knowledge was produced—that one should begin to study it.

The 1825 setting of the Egyptian Sculpture Room is central to the story of this book. The story is not just about a room, however, or just about the objects it contained. It is about the broad array of discourses and institutions made possible by the existence of such rooms and objects and by the kinds of people who worked in the rooms, who passed through them, and who thought about their social and cultural meanings.

Nevertheless, objects—and the Memnon head especially—are a good place to enter these discourses. Though the Memnon bust was an old object, in many senses its status as an artifact was a new avatar. The modern sense of an art object as an artifact in a museum was being invented at the same time the Memnon bust was arriving in London. While I will soon have more to say about the subject, let me signal what I mean by “artifact,” since my usage deviates slightly from convention. Usually, the term is associated with the emergence of new methods of treating material culture during the early nineteenth century. In particular, the term is linked to the work of the Danish archaeologist Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, whose innovations in the study of the palaeolithic past stressed the context and arrangements in which objects were found. Instead of using material culture to confirm already known chronologies, Thomsen looked to deduce information about prehistoric periods from the objects themselves. Key to Thomsen’s method were a number of practices: the treatment of excavation sites as self-contained units, that is as evidence that spoke to the significance of the objects found within them; the study of objects’ material composition, their usage, patterns of style and decoration, and their relation to other objects found in their proximity. Notably, this method bracketed considerations of taste—what was sought was data, not art. Likewise, considerations of Biblical or classical history were no longer automatically assumed as relevant. As a consequence, an artifact was not considered as a unique piece, but rather as part of a class of objects arranged within an emerging taxonomical grid. In conventional accounts of archaeology, this shift in the treatment of material culture marks the change from eighteenth-century antiquarianism to the modern science of archaeology. As these accounts point out, Egyptology was quite slow to make a shift in the direction of “true science,” and the advent of a “self-

contained and systematic study . . . as distinguished from the antiquarianism of earlier times” does not occur until the career of William Matthews Flinders Petrie in the late nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

In this study, I do not seek to redefine the term “artifact” so much as to explore its conceptual roots and the institutions of its birth. Admittedly, my use of the term with reference to the reception of Pharaonic antiquities during the 1820s may strike some as anachronistic. Indeed, during this period, the meaning of Egyptian antiquities was still very much tied to debates about taste and Biblical history. Similarly, it would be many decades before the scientific methods employed by Thomsen and his students gained a foothold in Egyptology. Still, there are important reasons for starting a study of the concept at this moment, for the term was deployed with reference to ancient Egyptian objects long before the period that is described as “scientific” by the histories of archaeology. Critically, the emergence of the new treatment of Egyptian antiquities was itself rooted in the long process of separating *naturalia* and *artificialia* within the early modern museum collections of Europe. As Stephanie Moser has pointed out, during the eighteenth century Egyptian antiquities were regularly treated as both natural and as man-made (artificial) objects.<sup>17</sup> The term “artifact,” a nominalization derived from the latter category, sought to redefine such ambiguities by establishing two things: on the one hand, the human rather than natural origin of an object; and on the other, its status as the product of an act of making. Most especially, its concept seeks to separate factual questions of what it means to have been made by human labor from questions of value. The birth of the artifact is thus embedded in the history of how the museum (as a “public” place of study) emerged from the curiosity cabinet, and how the modern “scientific” disciplines of the ancient past (such as archaeology and Egyptology) emerged from older traditions of antiquarianism.

The invention of the Egyptian artifact in the context of spaces like the Townley Gallery was to have many consequences (see chapter 1). First, it produced a new understanding of the material of the ancient Egyptian past, without which Egyptology could not have come into being. At the same time, the artifact brought into being a new relation to the material world of modern Egypt and its inhabitants. This aspect was not lost on travelers, politicians, and archaeologists of the period, who recognized that to know ancient Egypt, one needed to gain control of as many artifacts

as possible. To reach this end, they might need to control modern Egypt. The possibility was already a matter of discussion as the Memnon head was being removed from Egypt. As Richard Robertson, traveling in Egypt during this time, put it, "Let us not complain of the want of information respecting ancient Egypt, till we have made ourselves thoroughly masters of all that remains in the country."<sup>18</sup> Thus, the artifact was becoming not just a crucial object for producing solid knowledge about the ancient past, but also an instrument of colonial intervention sixty years before the start of direct British rule in Egypt. Much of this book is dedicated to exploring these links between museum collecting, Egyptology, and colonial rule, while also showing how the conflict over Pharaonic material culture became both a source of nationalist culture and a central issue in Egyptian contestations of European hegemony.

#### EGYPTOLOGY'S HISTORIES

The first years of the history of Pharaonic artifacts reveal much about the emergence of museum acquisition in Egypt, the forms of knowledge—like Egyptology—it helped create, and the forms of colonial power that emerged in tandem with them. Not surprisingly, the 1810s feature prominently in the standard histories of Egyptology, though in an uneasy way. In these accounts, the decade marks a turning point in the history of understanding ancient Egypt and its objects, and thus the beginning of a new set of social relations and cultural practices made possible by the new acquisitions and the new institution of the Egyptian artifact. Yet, whether the histories present this period as an unfortunate (but forgivable) prehistory or condemn its protagonists for their excesses, they sharply distinguish the 1810s from a later moment of enlightenment in which the values of true science and responsible administration prevail. In other words, the dominant story told in all these histories is actually concerned with the advent of modern Egyptology, which is a triumphalist history of "us moderns." It is time to reconnect our history with the events that put the Memnon head on display in the Egyptian Sculpture Room if we want to see just where our sense of modernity comes from and what sensibilities its emergence precluded. Conversely, if we want to say that the 1810s represent an era of ignorance and a detachable prehistory of Egyptology, then we are

obliged to consider how this era and its traditions shaped what we take to be professional, that is, disinterested, science. If we hope to understand the power of Egyptology we need to explore at more length what precedes it and consider the ways in which earlier discourses and practices contributed to the emergence of this modern science. Far from emerging *sui generis*, Egyptology is built upon the practices against which it sought to distinguish itself. Far from being successfully purged, these older practices and concepts are embedded in the customs that govern the reception of antiquities to this day, whether in the field or in the museum.

My discussion of the Egyptian Sculpture Room to this point has been framed in terms of the contingent and conflicted understanding of the European reception of its objects. The sense of conflict becomes even more acute when the place of modern Egypt within this history is taken into account. The emergence of Egyptology in Europe was as consequential for modern Egyptians as it was for Europeans. Starting in the late eighteenth century, excavation sites and museum exhibitions were very often the terrain where the contradictions and struggles of Egyptian modernity were most sharply revealed. On the level of colonial rivalries, the French and British often clashed at these sites; however, the larger picture delineates antagonisms between Europeans and the Egyptians themselves. These conflicts intensified during the twentieth century when excavation sites and museums became the scene of struggles between many Egyptian national groups: urban elites and rural peasants, secularists and Islamists, proponents of pan-Arabism and territorial nationalists, and so on.

Until very recently, the history of colonial archaeology in Egypt has been restricted to a very narrow range of account, one that might be called the colonial enlightenment narrative. This body of writing tends to reproduce (consciously or otherwise) one of the central colonial assumptions of early European antiquity collectors, namely, that ancient Egypt and its treasures were the rightful patrimony of the West.<sup>19</sup> Key in this body of writing is the ideology of conservation, itself an important component of nineteenth-century museum formation and archaeological research and an operative term in texts composed by European explorers, excavators, tourists, and administrators in Egypt.<sup>20</sup> Later writers of the colonial enlightenment version of this history tend to reproduce the assumptions contained in their primary sources, composed by such European explorers and archaeologists. They argue the legitimacy of colonial archaeology



and artifact acquisition in terms of conserving objects which, if left in situ, would surely have been lost or destroyed. These are narratives in which great men—from Champollion and Karl Richard Lepsius to Gaston Maspero and Howard Carter—figure large, saving monuments from throngs of fellaheen and deciphering their secrets back home in London, Paris, and Berlin. While these accounts of Egyptology often admit unfortunate commercial abuses that occurred in this history of acquisitions (such as those surrounding the Memnon head), they usually stress that the necessity and benefit of acquisition outweighed all harm.<sup>21</sup> Though the terms of the colonial enlightenment narrative belong to their nineteenth-century progenitors, they remain to this day dominant in popular writing and even in much of the scholarship on Egyptology's history.

During the 1970s, a revisionist history of colonial archaeology in Egypt began to appear. This new narrative, produced mostly in the West, criticized European acquisition projects while characterizing them as haphazard pillage and organized theft.<sup>22</sup> This body of writing might be called the colonial rape narrative, since the infelicitous trope of sexual violation recurs often in them. These accounts cover more or less the same events as the older histories and only rarely seek out new primary sources. As narratives, they also tell the same story of Europeans discovering artifacts in the wilderness of Egypt. However, they display a greater degree of skepticism toward the colonial rhetorics of scientific disinterest and altruistic curiosity. Another body of literature on Egyptology that is especially attuned to its familiar pattern of material dispossession has been associated with Afrocentrism. Most famously among these, Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* theorized the broader consequences that colonial excavation and acquisition had for the science of Egyptology.<sup>23</sup> As others besides Bernal have pointed out, since the issue of historical interpretation is closely tied to the question of control, the significance of colonialism goes beyond the issue of material dispossession.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, because material custody was a necessary condition for scientific and historical interpretation, colonized peoples were effectively barred from interpreting their own past. Bernal's argument goes beyond this, of course, to explore the ways in which nineteenth-century Egyptology incorporated racist assumptions about the nature of civilization and in the process effectively "whitened" the Pharaonic phenotype. While there is much to doubt in his positive claims about the (black) African identity of ancient Egyptians,<sup>25</sup> Bernal does convincingly show how

Europeans had often made claims on the Pharaohs that were no less racial than his. Moreover, Bernal succeeded in putting the issue of colonial epistemology on the table, even if others have been tardy in continuing his critique of the epistemology of Egyptology.

The most obvious fault in both the revisionist accounts (including Afrocentric accounts) and the colonial enlightenment narrative is that modern Egyptians simply do not figure in the story. For instance, scholars of European Egyptomania,<sup>26</sup> even those attuned to its postcolonial critique, have been largely unaware of the fact that a comparable cultural phenomenon occurred in Egypt during the 1920s and 1930s as Egyptian intellectuals and artists studied ancient Egypt and considered it the source of modern Egyptian identity.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, while revisionist accounts speak against injustices against Egypt, they tend to represent Egyptians merely as victims or bystanders, not participants, in the history of Egyptology. The reason is simple: both kinds of accounts were written by scholars who did not consult the extensive Arabic-language archives on the subject. Predictably, by ignoring Egyptian sources these historians came to think that colonial archaeology in Egypt was a conversation that took place only among European travelers, explorers, tourists, administrators, and archaeologists. In such accounts, the backdrop of modern Egypt is incidental, sometimes tragic, and, most of all, obscure. As a consequence of this style of writing, conventional histories of Egyptology stress the infamous Anglo-Franco rivalry in nineteenth-century museum acquisitions and in Egyptology itself. While no doubt worthy of the attention it has received, the focus has obscured the existence of other actors and other lines of antagonism.

This shortcoming has been addressed in a third body of writing on colonial Egyptology that might be called the national enlightenment narrative. Drawing on primary sources within the Egyptian archives (and also on a minor tradition within Egyptian historiography), the national enlightenment narrative foregrounds the place of ancient Egypt in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egyptian culture and sketches the formation of national museums, the academic study of the ancient past, and the popular dissemination of images and stories that take ancient Egypt as a theme and contemporary issue.<sup>28</sup> In many ways, the national enlightenment narrative diverges from the traditional colonial narrative: the colonial argues that Egyptians were indifferent to antiquities and thus lacking in culture, while the national argues that modern Egyptians have a more legitimate

claim to Egyptian antiquities than do Europeans; the colonial claims that the best home for Pharaonic artifacts is in London or Paris, while the national argues they belong in Cairo; the colonial asserts that the ancient Egyptians were the indirect progenitors of Western civilization, while the national claims them as the direct ancestors of modern Egyptians.<sup>29</sup> But, importantly, the two versions share at least one attitude: like the colonial enlightenment narrative, the national enlightenment narrative argues that Egyptian peasants were the chief threat to ancient monuments.<sup>30</sup> In both narratives, the values of preservation and acquisition serve as unambiguous, desirable indices of modernity and civilization.

A fourth, more diffuse style of writing this history may be thought of in terms of agnostic narrative, since it highlights the constructed, contingent, and contested character of archaeological practices and of the civilizational narratives that are built upon them. All told, this body of writing on colonial and postindependence archaeology in Egypt underscores the fact that its practices are constructed and that its accomplishments are more ambiguous than previously acknowledged. Agnostic narratives recognize the contingency of archaeological knowledge and also of its application in narratives and images designed to legitimate contemporary identities, be they Egyptian, European, or African. The writers in this body of work display a deep ambivalence toward positivist claims on artifacts and history, whether composed by apologists of empire, of the nation, or of Afrocentrism. In all versions of this style of historiography, the term "conservation" does not have the stable, privileged place it has in the other narratives of colonial archaeology in Egypt. For instance, Jacques Tagher's singular account of antiquities collection illustrates that there was no clean break between the rapacious practices of the early nineteenth century and the allegedly more legitimate forms of museum acquisition later in the century.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the groundbreaking but underappreciated work of Antoine Khater on Egyptian antiquities law and its inconsistent application went far to illustrate a deep ambivalence toward conservation ideology even among those figures who appear as heroes within the national enlightenment narrative.<sup>32</sup> In his researches, Neil Asher Silberman has described how the relationship between the Egyptian present and its antiquity is constructed, ever shifting, and informed by a range of conflicting social and political pressures.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, in their work Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski have shown how the political identification between

ancient and modern Egypt sometimes encouraged by secularist national elites during the 1930s—Pharaonism—was one that was tenuous and intensely debated.<sup>34</sup> Jan Assmann's work problematizes the relation between material evidence and narrative claims on ancient Egypt in other directions.<sup>35</sup> Recently, Lynn Meskell has submitted the methods and categories of Egyptology to questions raised by contemporary science studies.<sup>36</sup> Meskell does not merely show that the claims of Egyptology are affected by the political context around them, but rather that the very structures and methods of the most professional and competent archaeological science contain their own kind of politics.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, the political aspects of Egyptology's history cannot be explained away as instances of bad, impure, or unobjective science.<sup>38</sup> Writing also in this vein, Timothy Mitchell has demonstrated how Egyptology has functioned as one administrative institution among others specially authorized, under the banner of technical expertise, to manage Egypt's wealth, resources, and, most important, population. As Mitchell shows, these forms of expert knowledge have constituted their own special mode of power.<sup>39</sup>

#### ANTIQUITIES AND CONFLICT

To give some sense of how the work of Egyptology takes place amidst sets of conflicts, one could not do better than start with a brief consideration of the most exemplary kind of Egyptological institution: the excavation site. While they are in the field, Egyptologists seek as much as they can to create laboratory conditions.<sup>40</sup> To do this, they cordon off their site as much as possible from the social, political, and cultural contexts around it, effectively creating an interior ("the dig," where scientists work to create conditions of objective research) separated from what is around it, which becomes a place of "externalities." The standards, practices, and technical ability to achieve this end may have changed dramatically over Egyptology's history, but the ideal of clinical separation has remained a theoretical constant from very early on. Yet, insofar as the typical method of separation has historically entailed the wholesale appropriation of land and expulsion of local peasant communities by colonial authorities (and later by Egyptian state officials), by no means can one say that even the best Egyptological science has ever been nonpolitical. As the history of the southern

Egyptian village of Gurna indicates, for example, Egyptological interest and concern have long been (and continue to be) key mechanisms of regular and often violent state intervention in the lives of modern Egyptians.<sup>41</sup>

The recent engagement between scholars of Egyptology and science studies is welcome because it recharts the multiple and significant intersections linking archaeology and the European museum to the history of modern Egypt. In this way, it indicates how one might move beyond the history of ideas model that has tended to dominate the colonial and national enlightenment narratives of Egyptology. In this model, the relation between archaeological discovery and Egyptological knowledge is often portrayed as mechanical: discovery leads to breakthroughs in understanding, which are then applied in making new discoveries; this process repeats and improves upon itself, and thus knowledge accumulates. Accordingly, Egyptology's development appears to move in a smooth upward fashion, without regard for (or serious disturbance by) the fact that most of the relevant events took place in, or in relation to, modern Egypt, a country whose experience of colonial modernity has been anything but smooth and uneventful. In contrast, science studies encourages Egyptologists to rethink how knowledge is actually produced by inquiring into the relation between Egyptology's interior—its knowledge—and those factors it usually declares to be mere externalities. Inspired by this critique, this book asks a number of questions usually not considered to be relevant to Egyptology—questions about location and practice, object and representation. Briefly, I will argue that it matters that most of Egyptology's work has taken place in modern Egypt; it matters that the practice of Egyptological inquiry has rested as much on political and legal arrangements (and experimentation based on local knowledge) as it has on scientific methods; it matters that Egyptologists, like other modern scientists and scholars, needed to invent the class of objects (artifacts) on which they would work and over which they would have unique authority; and it matters that Egyptological claims were not pure concepts, but representations that took place in and around long-standing traditions, not to mention emerging semantic fields. Finally, it matters that these practices, objects, and representations—themselves ambiguous—were the site where significant social and cultural conflicts found expression.

One of the first arguments of this book is that Egyptology's object, the artifact, came into being somewhere between Egypt and London, and

that this ushered in a new form of power linking archaeology, Egyptology, print culture, literature, and the arts with colonial and national politics. It should not be startling to assume that innovations in the formation of agency might have first emerged in the colonies, since, as scholars have routinely observed, the colonies of Europe were often quite explicitly constructed as laboratories for developing social and political technologies that might be used in the metropole.<sup>42</sup> And despite the Eurocentric focus that still predominates in Egyptology's autobiography, it is difficult to imagine that the discipline's center of gravity has ever been securely located in Europe. Indeed, the actual work of Egyptology has never strayed far from the Egyptian countryside. Egyptology has always been partly situated in Egypt, even if there has always been a sharp line drawn between the field and the museum.

There is nothing remarkably new in these observations. Yet much said here will be rebuffed by those for whom Egyptology seems nothing more than the scholarly, disinterested study of the ancient past of Egypt carried out by uniquely qualified experts. When Martin Bernal attempted, twenty years ago, to illustrate the ways in which European Egyptology was colored by its own traditions of racism and colonialism, his claims were rejected as nonsense by Egyptologists and classicists alike. Readers will note in the following chapters that, unlike Bernal, for the most part I remain agnostic about the veracity of the particular claims Egyptology makes about the ancient past. It is the relevance of Egyptology in modern Egypt, not what it says about ancient Egypt, that most concerns me. In this way, I will insist that Egyptology needs to be understood as a particular institution of colonial power and later nationalist power in Egypt.

Thus, this study begins with, and returns to, the simple idea that acquisitionists, Egyptologists, and curators have always been situated. They do not study ancient objects in a distanced and acontextual way but are actively engaged in remaking those objects, and remaking them within the horizons in which they labor. The objects they have made, artifacts, are more than mere instruments by which colonial knowledge and power are created. That is because artifacts are not just products of human agency but also constitutive of it. They are not merely inert or detachable from the kind of knowledge and power which comes into being through the interaction of scientists and their objects of study. To employ a useful,

oft-cited phrase, artifacts are "entangled" with the sciences that take them to be their objects.<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, Egyptologists work within contexts that are informed by disputes and conflicts. Though their scholarship may always be about the ancient past, their claims have always touched upon issues—Islam, peasants, nationalist claims to cultural patrimony—that are thoroughly modern. This is as true in today's Egyptology as it was in that of the 1800s. Like other modern sciences, Egyptological study involves acts of intervention into the material composition of its objects even as it strives to observe them dispassionately. In this sense, it is always a productive, not merely a reflective, practice and has, since the 1810s, transformed the Egyptian countryside in radical ways. Likewise, the knowledge Egyptologists produce, like other orders of knowledge, has always articulated a form of power: sometimes it has been marshaled to justify explicitly colonial ends, other times it has served to contest colonial rule, and it has almost always been used to discipline the peasantry of Upper Egypt.

The significance of these dynamics extends beyond the reach of Egyptology. Indeed, the struggle over the administration of ancient Egyptian objects is central to understanding Egyptian nationalist culture during the colonial period. This is because, for one thing, the debate over the ownership of Pharaonic Egypt did not simply pit Egyptian nationalists against European colonial administrators. Just as colonial administrators routinely relied upon preservationist ideology to justify their expropriation of Pharaonic antiquities, so Egyptian elites found it useful for exerting new forms of control over rural populations. Thus concepts such as appreciation and preservation implied much more than a way of thinking aesthetically and historically about objects—they also had vast implications for developing new forms of political governance. Moreover, the appropriation of Pharaonic art and culture was controversial as the basis for a national imaginary within Egypt itself. In particular, cultural Pharaonism reflected the taste and ideology of a narrow elite and took little account of the Muslim culture that had prevailed in Egypt for more than twelve hundred years.

My argument here explores these various conflicts by situating expressive culture in the institutions of material culture. Textual representations of Egyptian antiquities and fictional narratives on Pharaonic themes were not simply posterior reflections of material practice. On the contrary, ar-

chaeology and museum culture anticipated, as much as they proceeded from, the cultural imaginary of Egyptomania and Pharaonism. Similarly, it is not the case that Egyptian and European travelers and writers encountered Egyptian antiquities unmediated. Indeed, even their most personal encounters were never purely individual. The experience of the Egyptian antique was shaped by the exhibitionary institutions that framed the experience of monuments abroad and museums at home, just as it was conditioned by books and images consumed before leaving. In this sense, even the most subjective aspects of material culture are socially constructed. But it is time to move beyond the now routine observation that cultural objects are constructed by human subjects to argue that antiquities were not merely passive objects in history. As nonhuman objects, they were entangled in the social life of human actors and played an active role in the formation of power relations, whether in the British Empire or in the Egyptian nation-state.<sup>44</sup> This is to echo a fundamental precept of science studies: there is no sharp separation between material objects and the concepts and human capacities they enable.<sup>45</sup> This is a call not to return to traditional materialism, but rather to notice that humans, Egyptian antiquities, and the representations of artifacts formed part of a sprawling network of agents and *actants*.<sup>46</sup> One indicator of this fact is that even though the processes of artifaction and figuration attempted to construct antiquities as inert matter, the stuff itself often did not obey this command. The proliferation of mummy fictions in English and French literatures attests to the anxieties that attended this. Moreover, while Egyptian antiquities were an important "object site" for the articulation of struggles among human subjects, the ground of this site was itself in motion. The consequences of this thoroughly conditioned the various cultural formations that emanated from the science of Egyptology, from museums to tourism, from pop Egyptomania in Europe to literary and political Pharaonism in Egypt. The Egyptian Sculpture Room may not have been the origin of this process, but it was a crucial node in the network of artifacts—the assemblage of political and cultural *agencements*—which began to emerge in the 1810s and which remains to this day so powerful that its power is never noticed.

A brief word on the organization of this book. Chapter 1 fleshes out the process by which antiquities were excavated and transported from Egypt

and then received at their museum destination. The experiment pursued in this chapter is the tracing of a moment in a single object's biography as recorded by travelers, collectors, diplomats, officers, curators, and so on. I sought to gather as many documents of its provenance as possible, and in so doing narrate the story of a thing as it was transformed into an object of travelers' interest, and then into an artifact acquired and put on display in the British Museum. If I have erred in the way of length and detail in this account, it has been to stress one of the primary facts of the new mode of antiquities collecting—namely, that the transformation of thing into artifact would be unthinkable without this archive of descriptive claims. This process—the creation of an artifact—is of primary significance for the wider narratives of the book, since it laid the foundation for a new way of thinking about Egyptian antiquities that would soon have consequences well beyond Egyptology. Chapter 2 charts the emergence of a set of ideas about the governance of modern Egypt that was made possible by the new artifact discourse while also situating this emergence against older local and regional traditions of thinking about ancient Egyptian monuments. Chapter 3 traces one consequence that Egyptological knowledge would have for modern Egyptians, since it became the source of a new sense of individual and collective identity. This chapter explores how motifs, themes, and narratives of modern Egyptian interest in ancient Egypt resonated deeply with others from the *Nahda*, the Arab modernist project of the nineteenth century and early twentieth. Chapter 4 revisits the institutional practices of Egyptology by way of the example of the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922. Here we find that the science of the discovery was hopelessly entangled with contemporary nationalist politics and literary culture, and that this entanglement cannot be dismissed as mere externality to the practice of archaeological science. Chapter 5 describes the limits of Pharaonism, the Egyptian literary and political school of the 1920s and 1930s that was based on interest in Egyptological discovery. This chapter presents readings in Naguib Mahfouz's early Pharaonist literary works alongside readings in the work of the contemporary Islamists Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. The resulting juxtaposition illuminates the degree to which literary Pharaonism was founded on assumptions that were always deeply contested.

The organization of the book is historical, though not strictly so. Rather, each chapter develops its own thematic argument even as it presents a

discrete historical moment or series of moments. Moreover, while the order of the chapters is roughly chronological, starting in the 1810s and ending in the 1940s, the broader themes of the book are concerned with the emergence and development of colonial and nationalist cultures in modern Egypt.

While conducting my research, I was constantly reminded of the fact that ancient Egypt and its material culture have meant so many things to so many people over the years. Consider in this regard the following list of attitudes about, representations of, and claims on Pharaonic Egypt. For Neoplatonists, Rosicrucians, Freemasons (and in their way, new-age pagans), ancient Egypt has long been associated with Hermes Trismegistus and the origins of magic and alchemy, rationality and spiritualism. For Jews, the annual observance of Passover is a reminder that ancient Egypt was a place of bondage—and yet readers of the story of Joseph would not be mistaken to think that Egypt might also figure as a place of refuge. For rising empires, both ancient and modern, Egypt has always been a symbol of ancient sovereignty whose power might be grasped through the acquisition (or reproduction) of its monumental objects—hence the conspicuous placement of obelisks in Rome, London, Paris, New York, and Washington. During the first years of the French Revolution, ancient Egypt served as inspiration for a secular symbolic order designed to replace the church. For the nineteenth-century English surgeon-showman, Thomas "Mummy" Pettigrew, ancient Egypt was a fount of anatomical curiosity; for Joseph Smith, his contemporary in the United States, it was a source of divine revelation. Throughout the nineteenth century, Christian scholars studied ancient Egypt, looking for scientific evidence of the literal truth of Biblical narrative. In modern opera, to take one example of modern expressive culture, Egyptian themes figured centrally, as in Verdi's *Aïda* and Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Later, the image of ancient Egypt would loom large in pulp genres of writing, from mystery to fantasy to science fiction. In Hollywood, Egyptian antiquities have always meant the adventure of discovery and the danger of the supernatural. In African American thought and culture, Egypt has appeared as a place of origin and proof of the sophistication and age of African civilization. We could add to this list the rich and diverse ways of thinking about ancient Egypt that appear within the textual tradition of orthodox Islam and the popular practices of Egyptian peasants—from the melancholic contemplation

of ancient ruins to the seeking of fertility totems within ancient temple sites, and from the use of mummy detritus as fertilizer to the pragmatic use of pyramids as rock quarries. Finally, Egypt's Coptic community has long had an intimate, though fraught, relationship to their pre-Christian past—as both direct descendents and apostates from the ancient civilization, they have at times rejected their association with Pharaonic Egypt, and at others championed it.

The above is a just a partial list of the possible topics one could study while exploring the modern image of ancient Egypt. The list also sheds light on a basic problem: the body of cultural representations of ancient Egypt is not just massive, it is also heterogeneous and contradictory. Admittedly, most of the items on this list are not given any consideration in this book. Instead I have chosen to focus on just a fraction of the modern cultural production inspired by the Pharaonic past, a sliver that until the present has not been sufficiently studied—the relationship between the ancient past and modern Egyptian culture during the colonial period, with a special emphasis on the ties between Egyptology and literary culture. Despite this narrow focus, I found no lack of heterogeneity, tension, and contradiction within and between the modern Egyptian traditions of representing the ancient past. These antagonisms and ambiguities are the underlying theme of this book, and I have attempted to leave them as they are rather than iron them out or fold them into a single, smooth story.

To accomplish this, I have arranged between each chapter brief counterpointal readings that highlight the contested, conflicted, and ambiguous character of each text and cultural formation. For example, between chapters 3 and 4, I describe the way that the figure of Pharaoh re-emerges during the colonial period as writers like Ya'qub Sanu' and Ahmad Shawqi sought to critique the despotic character of contemporary political rule. Importantly, their use of the figure of Pharaoh was not exactly the negative one received from the Bible or the Quran, nor the positive one derived from Egyptian Egyptology. Their figuration of Pharaoh speaks *with* and also *against* these other traditions, which are described in earlier chapters—and serves as a lucid example of what I mean by counterpoint. It made little sense to delete them from this study or to try to make them fit where they do not belong. The counterpoints in this book are arranged to indicate the degree to which the texts and themes of the preceding chapter become complicated or undermined when other representations enter the picture.

Part of my motivation for organizing these counterpoints is due to my conviction, following Edward Said's powerful study *Culture and Imperialism*, that the analysis of colonial culture must be attuned to the dialogical character of colonial and anti-colonial power relations, which are themselves composed of back-and-forth movements between brutal violence and inspired creativity, bloody struggle and human conversation. I have attempted to signal this dynamic in the title of the book: the antiquities under discussion here are not only things over which (and because of which) conflicts have arisen, but their very matter is itself conflicted—that is, fraught, ambiguous, and wholly contested. Indeed, the cultural history charted here illustrates the degree to which the modern Egyptian consideration of ancient artifacts is composed (in an almost impossibly unified manner) of elements drawn from a long history of colonial dispossession, a longer tradition of classical Arabo-Islamic literary expression, the class chauvinism of enlightenment nationalist culture, and the revisionist critique of political Islamism.

## The Artifaction of the Memnon Head

According to the curator's report, the head of the statue of the younger Memnon was elevated onto its pedestal in the Egyptian Sculpture Room in early January 1819.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, by the end of this day, when it was set among other Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum, the Memnon head had become that special kind of modern object known as an artifact. Yet it is highly doubtful whether the act of elevation in and of itself transformed the object into the museum artifact. More reasonably, one might recognize it as merely one event in a long chain of events in the biography of the object. Fortunately, much of this narrative is available by way of travel accounts and the correspondence between the collectors in Egypt, the officers of the British Museum, and their go-betweens in the navy and the diplomatic corps. Thus the Memnon head's movements can be traced with surprising precision. In late July 1816, a work team removed the head from its location in the complex of ancient Theban ruins called at the time the Memnonium. On August 12, 1816, it arrived on the west bank of the Nile, opposite the town of Luxor.<sup>2</sup> On November 21, it was loaded onto a flat-bottomed river barge. It arrived in Cairo on December 15,<sup>3</sup> and in Rosetta on January 10, 1817. Four days later, British military engineers unloaded it at the pasha's warehouse in the port of Alexandria.<sup>4</sup> By this time, the museum trustees had been notified many times over by travelers and diplomatic agents that the colossal statue was on its way to London. The head then waited in Alexandria<sup>5</sup> as the British Museum and the Foreign Office arranged transportation with the British Admiralty. In October 1817, it was loaded onto the British naval transport *Minerva* bound for Malta,<sup>6</sup> and in December 1817 it was transferred at Malta to the storeship *Weymouth*.<sup>7</sup> In March 1818, the Admiralty and the Foreign Office announced its arrival in England.<sup>8</sup> On April 10, the Memnon head and the other antiquities which accompanied it arrived at the customs

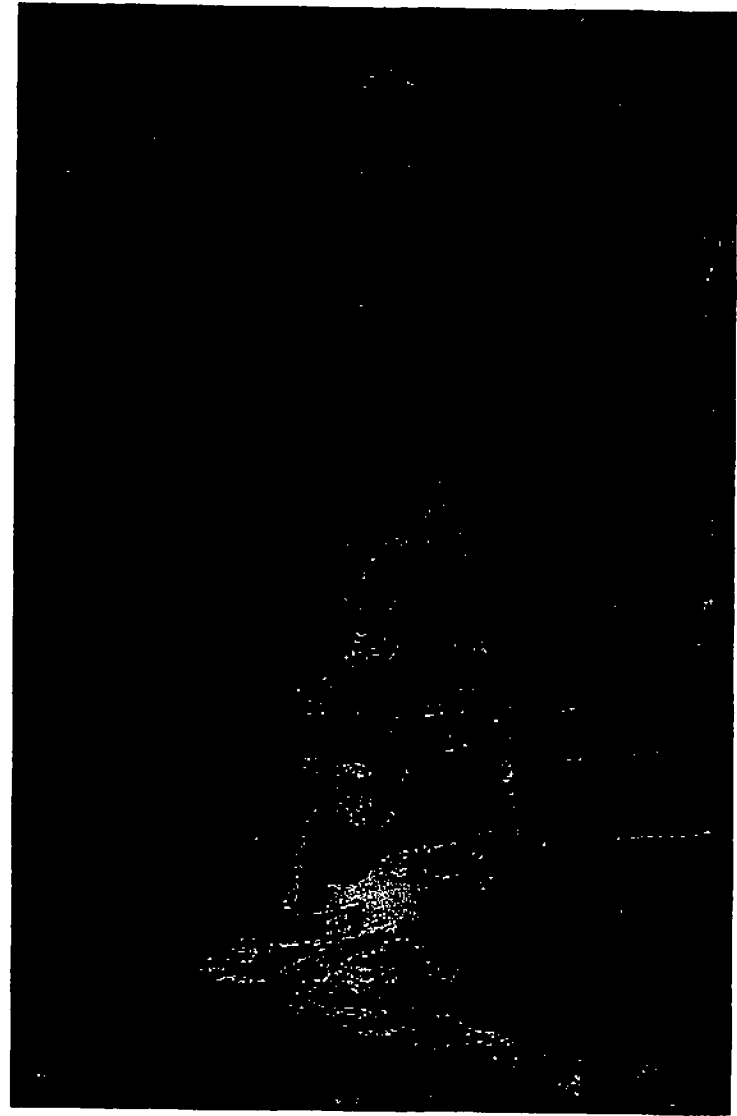


Figure 2. Installation of Head of the Younger Memnon, January 9, 1819. Watercolor, inscribed "Wm. Alexander fac.," 1819. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

office, which deemed them, as gifts for the British Museum, free from import taxes;<sup>9</sup> on April 17, the British Museum asked to use the Office of Ordnance's crane for unloading the Memnon head at London's Tower Wharf.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the period the head was en route, announcements of its "discovery" and imminent arrival appeared in the European press.<sup>11</sup> Inspired by the news, the poets Percy Bysshe Shelley and Horace Smith competed with one another in composing sonnets on the theme of the colossal statue.<sup>12</sup>

What does this paper trail reveal? First, it illustrates that the act of installing the Memnon head in the Egyptian Sculpture Room was but the culmination of a long, deliberate process involving many sets of actors acting in various capacities. In this way, the dates and locations of the object's transshipment not only indicate events in the life of the Memnon head, but also mark nodes in a network of actors and organizations. As we shall see, in itself, the first task—moving the colossal statue fragment from its original site to the banks of the Nile—involved complicated and tense labor as well as diplomatic and imperial negotiations. The collectors, working as agents of the British consul, contracted local peasants, interacted with regional and local officials of the nascent Egyptian state, and competed with antiquities collectors working for the French government. Transporting the Memnon head down the Nile, exporting it through customs, and unloading it in London involved equally complex sets of relationships and more dispersed organizational networks, including the port authority of Alexandria, the British Foreign Office, the Admiralty, customs officials, and finally the trustees and officers of the British Museum.

Besides mapping the networks of the actors involved, however, the paper trail is itself a segment of the process by which the Memnon head became a museum artifact. This is part of the significance of the travel accounts, the letters, and the curators' reports that have always been attached to the statue during its museum life. Together, these documents form the Memnon head's provenance, the story of its movements from the field to the museum. The provenance is not just a record of the events that occurred during the transport of the Memnon head *ex situ* to the place where it became a museum piece. The provenance certainly chronicles these processes. But the creation of a textual record of the object's biography was fundamental to the very process of artifaction itself. Indeed, many of the actors involved in collecting the Memnon head made a

conscious effort to create and organize an archive of their work. Likewise, for their part, the officers who installed the head in the museum and who cared for it afterward collected and preserved these texts because their existence was understood to be vital to the meaning of the object. Because of their efforts, we are able to read about the journey of the Memnon head in the same detail—particular names, dates, and places—we find in the accounts of human travelers from the same period. The paperwork attached to the Memnon head thus performs two functions: on one hand, it tells the story of how the Memnon head became a museum artifact; on the other, as an archive attached to the object, it plays a central role in the process by which the Memnon head became an artifact.

The invention of the Pharaonic artifact, of which the Memnon bust is most exemplary, marks a turning point in the modern European view of Egypt. Part of the novelty was that the agents who helped bring the Memnon bust to London were acquiring objects not for private collections but for the young national museum of Great Britain. The new form of the museum entailed new modes of collecting, such as collecting antiquities as unique pieces rather than as more or less interchangeable objects. Moreover, they sought them out on a scale never before attempted and marshaled unprecedented levels of private and public resources to accomplish their goals. This innovation was not of their own invention, however, but rather a result of new arrangements between Mehmed 'Ali, the pasha of Egypt, and the European powers concerning excavation in Egypt. At the same time that the rules discouraged individual Europeans from undertaking excavations around antiquities sites, they granted consular agents unprecedented freedom to pursue collection activities.<sup>13</sup> The arrangement that emerged by the mid-1810s was that the diplomatic representatives of the European powers with the closest ties to the Egyptian state—the French and Austrian consuls—had a near total monopoly in the antiquities commerce. If we are to trust the accounts of European travelers at the time, their only competition was the Upper Egyptian village of Gurna, which, given its location and organization, had long been a powerful player in the commerce of sculpture, papyrus, and mummy.<sup>14</sup>

The collectors who removed the Memnon head from Egypt were acting in the name of the new British consul. Moreover, they claimed that they sought that object neither for personal gain nor for political profit. But this is not the whole story: while it is true that the Memnon head was



collected as a gift for the British Museum, it is also true that the other antiquities collected during the same expedition were meant to be sold to the highest bidder. Yet it was the Memnon head's value as a museum piece, not as a commodity, that motivated the activities and rhetoric of the collectors who brought the colossal bust to London. It was this rhetoric also that informed its reception into the museum. To be clear: the new set of values did not change the basic patterns by which antiquities were removed from Egypt. Indeed, the traffic continued apace and even increased. However, the *meaning* of that traffic changed with the emergence of artifact discourse. Excavation and transport now took place in the name of disinterested management and study, that is, "acquisition." This new way of speaking about and treating Pharaonic antiquities enabled Europeans to gain control over antiquities sites throughout the nineteenth century, and its logic expanded British and French power and profit even as it disavowed both. Once generalized, the discourse of the artifact gave both shape and substance to later forms of colonial discourse about managing *all* the resources of modern Egypt.

This chapter traces the artifaction of the Memnon head as a set of processes. In speaking of artifaction as a process, I am employing terms and concepts not usually associated with this period of antiquities collection in Egypt. To clarify: the normative sense of the artifact refers to a particular scientific method divorced from most of the aesthetic and historical debates described in this chapter. My point in widening the concept of the artifact is to show that the moment in which the Memnon head was collected marks the beginning of a new era of treating Egyptian antiquities, one deviating significantly from older antiquarian habits, even if it does not fully resemble the kind of scientific archaeology normally associated with the term "artifact." In this regard, one might ask, At what point did the colossal antiquity become that modern object peculiar to the institutions of art history and archaeological sciences? Did its life as an artifact begin the moment it was elevated on a pedestal at the museum? When it was excavated? Or was it already an artifact in its ancient resting place? The answer to these questions is that there is no originary moment, but rather a series of events in an ongoing process. Moreover, the truths of these events depend on the perspective from which they are viewed. Thus the story of artifaction may well convey a sense of how an object becomes an artifact, but it does not begin to explain the unique significance such

objects have once their status as artifacts is obtained. This last point is the focus of this chapter's conclusion, where I argue that it is most precise to define the artifact not in terms of its intrinsic qualities, but rather by way of the tensions and contradictions which permeate and link it to intense political, social, and cultural conflicts.

#### EXCAVATION AND REMOVAL

The great head of Memnon will please, and when you contemplate its grandeur, recollect that Thebes has at present the remains of thirty-seven statues of equal dimensions: many greater.—CHARLES LEONARD IRBY AND JAMES MANGLES, *Travels in Egypt*

In 1816, Henry Salt, the British consul in Egypt, contracted the services of the Paduan Giovanni Belzoni "for the purpose of raising the head of the statue of the younger Memnon, and carrying it down the Nile."<sup>15</sup> Salt had more than one reason compelling him to acquire the Memnon head. He had read about the colossal bust in numerous travel accounts<sup>16</sup> and had also received direct reports from colleagues such as John Lewis Burckhardt. More immediately perhaps, Salt had only recently arrived at his post in Cairo and began to realize that his official salary was seriously deficient.<sup>17</sup> Looking to supplement his income, he did what other European consuls in Egypt did at the time: he engaged in the commerce of antiquities.

As for the Memnon head, it was part of a complex of ruins that had long been a pilgrimage site for Western explorers, tourists, and writers. Diodorus Siculus had identified the site as belonging to Ozymandias, a corruption of "User-maat-Re," one of Ramses II's names. Diodorus's description of the site and citation of the inscription ("King of Kings am I, Ozymandias. If any would know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works") would be echoed in Shelley's poem "Ozymandias."<sup>18</sup> An earlier traveler, Strabo, had referred to the site as the Memnonium, after Memnon, the Egyptian king said to have joined in the siege of Troy.<sup>19</sup> In modern times, travelers visited the site and compared what they saw to how the places were described by the ancients. In the process, they replaced a long-standing deference to the accounts of the ancients with a new style of travel writing based on empirical experience.

The English traveler Richard Pococke visited the site in 1737. His description of the Memnonium follows Diodorus but also notes that ages had passed since the ancient traveler visited the place.<sup>20</sup> His narrative includes a number of images of the Memnonium ruins, including one that appears to have been of the statue of which the Memnon head was a part. That same year, the Danish traveler Frederick Lewis Norden visited the site, described what he saw, and produced drawings considered the most accurate until the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> James Bruce visited the site in the late 1760s, commenting on the Memnon head in glowing terms.<sup>22</sup> During their short occupation of the country at the end of the eighteenth century, the French referred to the site as the Memnonium and studied it at length. Vivant Denon's account of his travels in Upper Egypt during the occupation even further fixed the Memnonium—and Ozymandias—as one of the most prominent monuments in this literary and pictorial tradition of describing Egypt.<sup>23</sup> Published in 1802, *Voyages dans la basse-et la haute Égypte* went through forty editions during the next century and was not just an essential component of libraries but effectively functioned as a guidebook for European tourists until the twentieth century. At the same time, the encyclopedic *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–20), composed by Napoléon Bonaparte's savants, depicts the Memnonium in massive plates that were considered the most accurate even after the invention of photography.<sup>24</sup>

These depictions only encouraged more visits, and more depictions. William Hamilton's oft-cited *Aegyptiaca* (1809) lingers at the Memnonium and declares it "the most beautiful and perfect piece of Egyptian sculpture that can be seen throughout the whole country."<sup>25</sup> Hamilton noted that the French had apparently used explosives in an attempt to move the colossal head. Local villagers repeated this claim to the Swiss-Anglo traveler John Lewis Burckhardt. Burckhardt, known as Sheikh Ibrahim because he traveled through Upper Egypt in 1813 in the guise of a Muslim cleric from Hindustan, was told that years earlier the French had failed to move the Memnon head but had drilled a hole in it while trying.<sup>26</sup> In 1814, Henry Light, traveling through Egypt and the Red Sea, visited the Memnonium and commented that the colossal head could be moved if one could employ the labor of local villagers.<sup>27</sup> In 1815, a wealthy English traveler, William John Bankes, took ropes and pulleys to the site in the hope of moving it but was unsuccessful.<sup>28</sup> That same year, Burckhardt attempted

to persuade Mehmed 'Ali to send the colossal head as a present to the prince regent in England, but the pasha did not consider stone an appropriate gift.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, in England, the study of hieroglyphics continued among antiquarians, who were as anxious as ever for more texts on which to practice their linguistic theories.<sup>30</sup> By 1816, Hamilton was secretary of the Africa Association as well as undersecretary of state at the Foreign Office. In a memorandum from the previous year, the Foreign Office had urged its diplomatic agents to collect for the British Museum, promising recompense no matter the outcome: "Whatever the expense of the undertaking, whether successful or otherwise, it would be most cheerfully supported by an enlightened nation, eager to anticipate its Rivals in the prosecution of the best interests of science and literature."<sup>31</sup> The British Museum had good cause to worry about the activities of rival acquisitionists, especially in Egypt, where the French consul, Bernardino Drovetti, had been using his position to corner the market in antiquities ever since he had been installed in 1802.<sup>32</sup> Apprised of the importance of Egyptian antiquities that could be brought to England, the most active trustee of the British Museum, Joseph Banks, advised the newly appointed Consul Salt to use his diplomatic position for the museum's benefit. Likewise, Salt's former patron, Lord Mountnorris, requested Salt to collect Egyptian antiquities on his behalf.<sup>33</sup>

By the time Salt was installed as British consul in 1816 there was thus a wide array of influences leading him not only to seek out antiquities, but also to take a particular interest in the Memnon head: a classical and modern tradition of celebrating the monuments of Upper Egypt, and the Memnonium in particular; a strong personal interest in Egyptian antiquities among key individuals at the British Foreign Office, the Africa Association, and the British Museum; and an ever-growing scholarly interest in ancient Egypt and its writing systems. Additional factors were the personal economic distress of a recently appointed consul, the existence of a vibrant market in antiquities, and the practical experience of travelers who knew what it would take to move the Memnon head.

Giovanni Belzoni, who was contracted, as noted, to collect the Memnon head, had met the British consul by way of Burckhardt, and it was Burckhardt who together with Salt commissioned Belzoni's journey to Upper Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Belzoni was an unlikely person to be hired to undertake such difficult work, considering he had not lived very long in Cairo and had

never visited Upper Egypt. At the time, Belzoni's reputation was largely associated with the fact that he had performed for years in London as a circus strongman called the Patagonian Sampson.<sup>35</sup> Belzoni had, however, learned water mechanics while producing scale reproductions of famous naval battles for the stage at Sadler's Wells. On the basis of his practical knowledge of hydraulics, Belzoni was recruited by an agent of Mehmed 'Ali, who was looking for European engineers to aid in the development of Egypt's water resources. Hired to produce a new kind of waterwheel, Belzoni eventually found himself out of work when what he built failed to impress the pasha. Thus, suddenly unemployed in the summer of 1816, Belzoni approached his friend Burckhardt, knowing he was interested in delivering the Memnon head to London.

Besides detailing how Belzoni should prepare for the expedition, Salt's contract elaborates how to communicate the British consul's authority through the domains of various Ottoman officials in Upper Egypt.<sup>36</sup> This was to be done by way of letters that extended the pasha's protection and aid to their bearer. Salt had acquired the letters from the pasha and consigned copies of them to Belzoni for the duration of his trip. Belzoni was expected to use this kind of document—a *firman*—to announce his presence to high officials as he journeyed through the provinces of Upper Egypt.<sup>37</sup> His first political negotiation would thus be accomplished by presenting his letters from Mehmed 'Ali, the pasha of Cairo, to his son Ibrahim, pasha of Upper Egypt at the time. The contract next stipulates in great detail where the desired object was located and sets further conditions on the mission, stating that should the task prove too difficult Belzoni should cease his operations. It requests that Belzoni maintain records of his expenses, which would be reimbursed. Finally, it emphasizes that, once the statue was on board, the boat should proceed directly to Alexandria, stopping only at Bulaq for further directions. As Belzoni wryly notes in his account, the contract does not stipulate the matter of his payment. The dispute over whether Belzoni was Salt's partner in the enterprise or merely his employee was to have real significance for all parties concerned.

Supplied with a line of credit and a small amount of cash, Belzoni left Cairo accompanied by his household and a hired interpreter, Giovanni d'Athanas, who had long served as dragoman at the British consulate.<sup>38</sup> In the town of Manfalut, the group met Ibrahim Pasha, who happened to be en route to Cairo. Ibrahim requested that Belzoni present his papers to the

official he had left in charge. Ibrahim was traveling with the French consul Drovetti, who was himself accompanying a shipment of antiquities he had collected in Upper Egypt. Much to Belzoni's annoyance, the French consul informed him that "the Arabs would not work at Thebes."<sup>39</sup> Belzoni's party arrived in Assyut (Siout), and Belzoni, as Salt had requested, met with Dr. Scotto, Ibrahim Pasha's personal physician.<sup>40</sup> When Scotto heard of Belzoni's plan to remove the Memnon head he replied that there were "many difficulties: first, about obtaining permission to have the necessary workmen; then there were no boats to be had; and next, the bust was a mass of stone not worth the carriage; at last, he plainly recommended to me not to meddle in this business, for I should meet with many disagreeable things, and have many obstacles to encounter."<sup>41</sup> Belzoni later presented the firman Salt had obtained from Mehmed 'Ali Pasha, and the official provided him with orders to the provincial officials and local officials where Belzoni intended to work. In Assyut, Belzoni hired a Greek carpenter, and they proceeded farther south. A week later, the party arrived at Luxor, whose sight greatly impressed Belzoni. He writes,

I beg the reader to observe, that but very imperfect ideas can be formed of the extensive ruins of Thebes, even from the accounts of the most skilful and accurate travellers. It is absolutely impossible to imagine the scene displayed, without seeing it. The most sublime ideas, that can be formed from the most magnificent specimens of our present architecture, would give a very incorrect picture of these ruins; for such is the difference, not only in magnitude, but in form, proportion, and construction, that even the pencil can convey but a faint idea of the whole.<sup>42</sup>

Belzoni's astonishment echoed that of the accounts of modern Western travelers to Egypt.<sup>43</sup> But this language of aesthetic experience was relatively recent in Belzoni's day. Western travelers may have long marveled at the ancient monuments of Thebes, but the attribute of beauty was not often applied to antiquities in Egypt until the 1780s. In fact, when travelers in the late eighteenth century began to describe Egyptian monuments in terms of beauty and sublimity, they were engaged in a polemic about expanding the standard of beauty beyond the classical measure of proportion derived from Greek sculpture, architecture, and music.<sup>44</sup> Part of this shift away from proportional standards of beauty involved the attempt to expand the history of fine art beyond its traditional Greek

origins to include Egypt.<sup>45</sup> But part was also linked to the rise of empirical experience as a value in itself.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Belzoni's comments belong to an Enlightenment aesthetic tradition (including Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich von Schiller, and the English romantics), in which beauty was said to be a product of experience and perception. In this account of aesthetics, beauty was not some property intrinsic in objects, but rather belonged to the feelings aroused within the subjects who regarded them. The significance of this is not just that Belzoni's travel experience, like that of his contemporaries, resonated with the themes and dispositions of romantic poets.<sup>47</sup> It is also that the new sensibility established a relation between subjects and objects—a claim on them—that was directly sensory and emotional but moral as well.

Belzoni's depiction of his arrival at Thebes is also noteworthy for what it says about the place as a collection of ruins: "It appeared to me like entering a city of giants who after a long conflict were all destroyed, leaving the ruins of their various temples as the only proofs of their former existence . . . who will not fail to wonder how a nation, which was once so great as to erect these stupendous edifices, could so far fall into oblivion that even their language and writing are totally unknown to us."<sup>48</sup> As Alois Riegl pointed out, the ruin is a particularly modern kind of antique object.<sup>49</sup> Not merely a dilapidated building or a structure whose form has been completely obliterated, the ruin exists somewhere in between—as a liminal space providing the particular aesthetic pleasure associated with the picturesque.<sup>50</sup> More than a pile of rubble but less than a monument whose original use has been preserved, the ruin evokes a peculiar sense of historical time, namely, that there is an absolute break between the ancient past and the modern present. What matters in the aesthetic experience of ruins is the meeting between the modern and the ancient. All else is distraction. The rise of this romantic sensibility would have had few consequences if not for the fact that, since the period of their original construction until the modern period, Pharaonic monuments usually had served many functions (including habitation) and held many meanings for the people who lived in and around them. According to the new aesthetic norms, indications that the ruins had an abiding local meaning that was not purely ancient were to be ignored and obliterated. In this way, the discourse of the ruin created a particular kind of ethnographic relationship between the traveler and the natives who live in and around ancient

monuments.<sup>51</sup> As we shall see, the romantic discourse of ruins was crucial for developing the notion that the monuments of ancient Egypt should be sharply separated from forms of modern Egyptian life, since these detracted from their proper meaning as ancient objects.

Belzoni, aware that he would have to take advantage of the rising river if he hoped to move the statue, got to work:

As I entered these ruins, my first thought was to examine the colossal bust I had to take away. I found it near the remains of its body and chair, with its face upwards, and apparently smiling on me, at the thought of being taken to England. I must say that my expectations were exceeded by its beauty, but not by its size. I observed that it must have been absolutely the same statue as is mentioned by Norden, lying in his time with its face downwards, which must have been the cause of its preservation. I will not venture to assert who separated the bust from the rest of the body by an explosion, or by whom the bust has been turned face upwards.

As a description of Belzoni's first encounter with the Memnon head, this passage is richly suggestive. Like travelers before, Belzoni compares his own direct perception of the object to impressions gathered from the accounts of others. This is not a moment of pure discovery. The tropes of this passage reverse the agency of what is about to happen. It is the bust that seems to have expected Belzoni's arrival, and it is the bust, not Belzoni, that seems most pleased Belzoni has come to remove it. The prosopopoeic figure—the nonobject that beckons the collector—recurs throughout this account and others of the time.

At this point, Belzoni's party set up camp in the Memnonium and unloaded the rudimentary tools they had brought to transport the colossal bust to the river's edge: fourteen thick wooden beams, four lengths of palm rope, and four logs for rolling. On July 24, Belzoni presented himself to the provincial official, the *kashif* (district governor), in Erments in order to obtain permission to employ eighty Egyptians from the village of Gurna. Belzoni notes that the *kashif* received him with the deceptive "politeness which is peculiar to the Turks, even when they do not mean in the slightest degree to comply with your wishes."<sup>52</sup> According to Belzoni, after he presented the firman he had obtained from the official in Asyut, the *kashif* gave a number of contradictory reasons why the request was impossible: the peasants were too busy to want to work for him; it was too

much to ask people to undertake such an arduous task during Ramadan, the month of fasting; the peasants' labor could not be spared since it was badly needed at the moment by the pasha. Angrily, Belzoni replied that he would go the next morning to Gurna to engage his workers. The kashif replied that tomorrow they would see to it. The next day, no workers arrived. Belzoni visited the kashif again, presenting him with a gift of coffee and tobacco and hinting that there would be more such presents if his request were granted. Belzoni visited the *qa'im-maqam* (local administrator) of Gurna, only to learn that the man was a close business associate of his rival Drovetti, the French consul and antiquities collector. Again the answer was "tomorrow, perhaps." Again, the next day no workforce materialized, even though Belzoni was convinced the peasants wanted the opportunity to work for him. Finally, on the third day, a number of men appeared, and Belzoni hired them at thirty paras per day, which, according to Belzoni, was substantially more than they earned working in the fields. The work itself was straightforward:

The mode I adopted to place [the head] on the car was very simple, for work of no other description could be executed by these people as their utmost sagacity reaches only to pulling a rope, or sitting on the extremity of a lever as a counterpoise. By means of four levers I raised the bust, so as to leave a vacancy under it, to introduce the car; and after it was slowly lodged on this, I had the car raised in the front, with the bust on it, so as to get one of the rollers underneath. I then had the same operation performed at the back, and the colossus was ready to be pulled up. I caused it to be well secured on the car, and the ropes so placed that the power might be divided. I stationed men with levers at each side of the car, to assist occasionally if the colossus should be inclined to turn to either side. In this manner I kept it safe from falling. Lastly, I placed men in the front, distributing them equally at the four ropes, while others were ready to change the rollers alternately. Thus I succeeded in getting it removed the distance of several yards from its original place. According to my instructions, I sent an Arab to Cairo with the intelligence that the bust had begun its journey towards England.<sup>53</sup>

Belzoni's description of the movement of the Memnon head deserves comment. The first-person voice of the passage makes it clear that the agent behind this effort is Belzoni himself; he is literally the subject of

the actions performed. Additionally, he directs the action and organizes the bodies of the natives, who perform subordinate and passive forms of work. There is something curious about the presence of the Gurna natives in this passage: they are present, but it is as if they are not actors in the scene. In this scene, Belzoni seems to be distinguishing two kinds of labor: his own effort, which is purposive and human, and the labor of the Gurna peasants, which, lacking intent, is not fully active, not fully human. In this regard consider the following image, taken from Belzoni's narrative, which represents the labor of the Gurna villagers as collective, undifferentiated, and, in comparison with the Memnon head, puny.

The following day, Belzoni, by his own account, had to "break the bases of two columns" in the Memnonium in order to make room for the car carrying the Memnon head, and by that evening the bust had been transported fifty yards. Over the next week, work proceeded apace, and the Memnon bust was brought closer to a point of land where it might be safely loaded on a boat during the inundation. On August 6, someone ordered the Gurna peasants to stop working for Belzoni. The situation was precarious, seeing that, unless the statue was moved to higher ground quickly, the rising river waters would cover it. Belzoni accosted the *qa'im-maqam* of Gurna that day, holding him at gunpoint while his bodyguard disarmed the official. After thrashing the man, Belzoni learned that the stoppage order originated with the kashif of Erments. Later, Belzoni would learn that it was Drovetti who had given the official the idea. The theme of rivalry with the French consul recurs throughout Belzoni's account.

That evening, Belzoni visited the kashif, dining with the official's entourage as they broke their fast. Belzoni made a present of his pistols to the kashif, at which point the kashif redrafted a new firman authorizing Belzoni to hire the peasants at Gurna. On August 12, 1816, the Memnon head arrived at a suitable place for loading. Belzoni paid his workers "bakshis" [*sic*] of one piastre each, noting, for the only time, that they had performed labor for him: "They well deserved their reward, after an exertion to which no labour can be compared. The hard task they had, to track such a weight, the heavy poles they were obliged to carry to use as levers, and the continual replacing the rollers [*sic*] with the extreme heat and dust were more than any European could have withstood; but here is what is more remarkable, during all the days of this exertion, it being

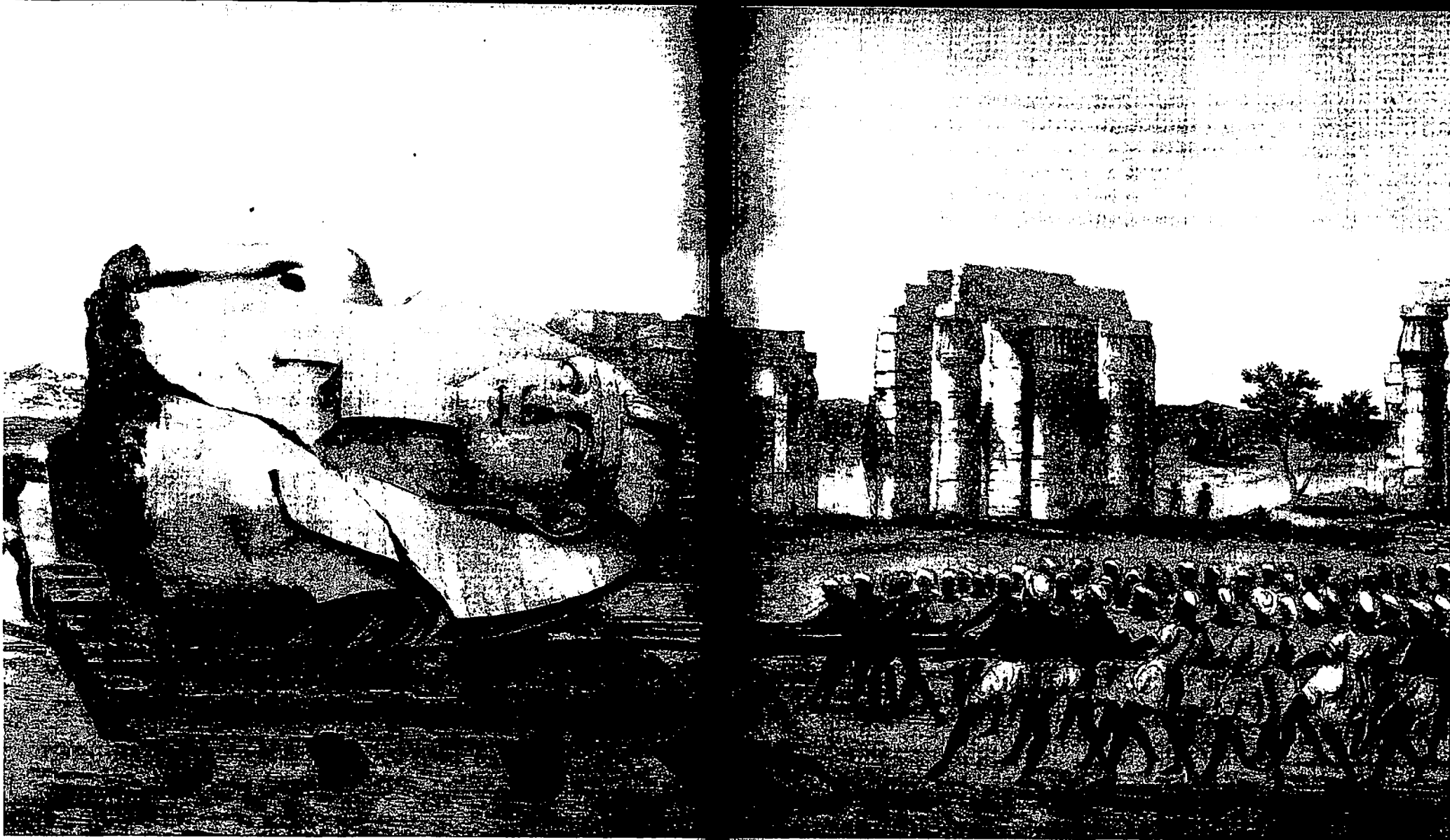


Figure 3. Giovanni Belzoni, "Mode in Which the Young Memnon Head Now in the British Museum was Removed," from *Plates Illustrative of the Researches and Operations of G. Belzoni in Egypt and Nubia* (London: John Murray, 1820). Image by permission of The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University.

Ramadan, they never ate or drank till after sunset."<sup>54</sup> At this point, Belzoni wrote to Salt requesting a boat be sent from Cairo, as there were no boats available in Luxor. In the meantime, Belzoni would make use of his time by traveling south in search of other antiquities to bring to the consul. Before leaving Luxor, Belzoni built an earthen bulwark around the bust to protect it from the elements and from his French rivals.

Belzoni's subsequent journey south is well known.<sup>55</sup> He traveled through Upper Egypt and through Nubia and was one of the first Europeans to describe the Pharaonic antiquities beyond the second cataract. Famously, he is the first to have excavated the base of the Abu Simbel colossi and the first to have penetrated their interior temple. A number of themes from this segment of his account bear upon the story of the removal of the Memnon head.

On more than one occasion, Belzoni comments on what he saw as a disparity between the beauty of ancient Egyptian monuments and the ugliness of modern Egypt. Much of the town of Edfu, for instance, was built into an ancient temple at the time.<sup>56</sup> He notes that the town was

inhabited by people of a different religion from those who built the temple. The pronaos is very wide and is the only one to be seen in Egypt in such perfection, though completely encumbered with Arab huts. The portico is also magnificent; but unfortunately above three-fourths of it is covered with rubbish. . . . The fellahs have built part of their village on the top of it, as well as stables for cattle, &c. . . . On looking at an edifice of such magnitude, workmanship, and antiquity, inhabited by a half savage people whose huts are stuck against it not unlike wasps' nests, and to contrast their filthy clothes with these sacred images that were once so highly venerated makes one strongly feel the difference between the ancient and modern state of Egypt.<sup>57</sup>

The juxtaposition of the modern and the ancient—a recurring feature in the discourse on ruins—caused Belzoni much consternation. In describing the difference between the modern and the ancient in terms of "rubbish" versus "magnificence" and "savagery" versus "perfection" he was not alone. From the moment in the late eighteenth century when Europeans began to seek aesthetic experiences around Egyptian monuments, the fact that the monuments were inhabited was a problem. European travelers and, later, tourists were dismayed to find their view of ancient monuments

encumbered by modern habitations and their immediate experience of the (sublime) past interrupted by encounters with the (squalid) present. Belzoni's discourse on ruins expresses an emerging desire to separate the objects of the past from their present context and to protect antiquities from the threat posed by peasants.

At Abu Simbel, Belzoni needed a small army of laborers to pursue his excavation, an undertaking far more considerable and complicated than the removal of the Memnon head had been. As at Gurna, Belzoni encountered resistance from local officials, who, being much farther removed from Cairo, were under little obligation to regard the firman Belzoni presented them. As at Gurna, Belzoni used a mixture of bribes and force to convince local notables to help him marshal a force of day laborers. There was at least one difference, however: whereas wage labor was a known practice in Gurna, at Abu Simbel this apparently was not the case. Indeed, according to Belzoni, the local officials told him that goods were exchanged through barter in the region and that his Cairene coins were of no value. This not only complicated Belzoni's negotiations over labor tremendously, but thoroughly confused his discussion of the value of the antiquities as well.

When Belzoni first met with the kashif, he refused to believe that Belzoni was interested in the antiquities themselves. Like the villagers of Gurna, he assumed that Belzoni was seeking the gold that frequently was found among ruins. According to the kashif, only a short time earlier another European (Drovetti) had carried away such gold from the region. Why, the kashif asked, would Belzoni come so far in search of *stones*: "What had [Belzoni] to do with stones if it were not that [he] was able to procure gold from them?" Belzoni answers, "The stones I wished to take away were broken pieces belonging to an old Pharaoh people; and that by these pieces we were in hopes of learning whether our ancestors came from that country, which was the reason of my coming in search of stones."<sup>58</sup> A few months later, Belzoni was accused of this same charge of treasure seeking among the ruins.<sup>59</sup> The distinction struck between stones and gold is intriguing because it articulates a collision between two systems of value—one economic, one apparently not—taking place in the material of the objects at stake. In this sense, the distinction between stones and gold most clearly and genuinely expresses the peculiar set of noncommercial values motivating Belzoni's expedition.

Still, to pursue his disinterested acquisitions, Belzoni first had to produce a sense of economic interest in the project among others. To convince the suspicious kashif that Egyptian currency might have value, Belzoni staged a performance of monetary economy. First, he arranged with the captain of his boat that if someone were to approach with money, he was to exchange it for its worth in grain. Then, while negotiating with the kashif about wages, he displayed a piastre coin, handing it to a man in the audience and telling him to go to the boat to see what it might buy. It was only after this man returned with the story of how he had exchanged the money for grain that the kashif agreed to Belzoni's scheme, though he stipulated a daily wage of two piastres, many times over what Belzoni had paid his workers at Gurna. Yet, it was one thing to reach an agreement over hypothetical wages and another to obtain political permission for the excavation. Belzoni went farther south in search of another kashif whose support was now necessary. This official, like the other, was convinced that Belzoni was a treasure seeker pursuing gold. Belzoni promised "that if I found the temple full of gold, I should give him half. . . . if I found only stones, they should be all my own property."<sup>60</sup> Since the kashif cared little for stones, he assented. Now, it only remained for Belzoni to raise a labor force. Again, Belzoni depicts those who would work for him as "complete savages . . . entirely unacquainted with any kind of labour" and ignorant of the value of money.<sup>61</sup>

Here, Belzoni encountered a different order of problem: he wanted only thirty men, but the nearby village demanded he hire one hundred; later, they would demand to be paid collectively, regardless of the actual labor of the individuals involved. More bribes, confrontations, and gifts followed, and eventually work began. There were stoppages and obstacles again. In order to keep up the momentum, Belzoni found it advantageous not to correct what he saw as the avaricious superstitions of his savage laborers: "As it was the first day of our enterprise, they went on better than I expected, and all their thought and talk were on the quantity of gold, pearls, and jewels, we should find in the place. I did not discourage them in their supposition as I considered it to be the best stimulus they could have to proceed."<sup>62</sup> In time, it becomes clear that Belzoni's avowed motivations diverged sharply from those of his workforce and the local officials:

[The two kashifs] gave me to understand plainly that all that was there was their own property and that the treasure should be for themselves. Even the savages began to lay their account in the division of the spoil. I assured them that I expected to find nothing but stones and wanted no treasure. They still persisted that, if I took away the stones, the treasure was in them; and that if I could make a drawing or likeness of them, I could extract the treasure from them also, without their perceiving it. Some proposed that if there were any figure discovered, it should be broken before I carried it away to see the inside of it.<sup>63</sup>

What is striking about Belzoni's account of the work at Abu Simbel is how much of it revolves around the confusion between commercial and noncommercial systems of value. Nevertheless, if there was confusion, much of it stemmed from the contradictory messages about acquisition that Belzoni brought into Nubia. On the one hand, he attempts to communicate that his desire to collect antiquities was not driven by riches and that his motivation was one of scholarly disinterest. On the other hand, to accomplish this goal, he not only introduces the notion of the wage and the workings of a monetary economy, but also encourages his laborers and their political bosses to entertain the notion that the value of the antiquities lies in the gold (supposedly) found in or near them. In Belzoni's own words, antiquities represent a source of material wealth even as their true value is said to be nonmaterial; nevertheless, even as he claims they have no value, that they are mere stones, the undertaking of acquisition inextricably links the antiquities to networks of power and motives of profit and exchange.

In the fall, Belzoni halted his Abu Simbel excavation, leaving what remained to be done for the following year. At this point, he was pressed for time to return to Luxor before the Nile receded. On arriving at Luxor, Belzoni heard disparaging remarks made by some of Drovetti's agents, who claimed that the colossal head was not worth the effort of moving so far. These same agents had returned to Gurna and, with the qa'im-maqam's support, insisted that no more work be done for British collectors. Belzoni also began to seek a boat to transport the Memnon head. At this point he encountered great resistance among the boat captains of the town, who told him that if, as Belzoni claimed, the Memnon head did not contain



gold, it was not worth the risk and expense to load it onto the barge. Belzoni finally negotiated with a boat owner who was on his way upstream to return to Luxor. To secure the agreement, Belzoni paid an extravagant sum. While waiting for the boat to return, Belzoni explored Luxor, Karnak, and the Valley of the Kings, collecting an array of smaller statues that he would also ship to the consul. In November, the boat Belzoni had hired returned from Aswan, though it was now unexpectedly filled with dates. Belzoni learned that the owner had reconsidered the deal and wanted to return the deposit. The change of heart, as Belzoni learned, was due to Drovetti's agents. At the same time, Belzoni heard reports that the same agents mutilated a number of other statues he had left in Philae until he could arrange their transport. It was at this low point, according to Belzoni, that he found a door open onto the favor of the kashif of Erments. Belzoni learned that Drovetti's latest gifts from Cairo—recompense for the kashif's support during that season of antiquities collection—had been far from generous. Belzoni pounced on the opportunity, and announced that the British consul would be very grateful for any aid the kashif might show its agents. The kashif interceded on Belzoni's behalf and ordered the boat owner to honor his prior agreement with Belzoni. For his efforts, the kashif was promised a brace of pistols from Cairo. On November 15, 1816, Belzoni writes, "[We] collected, though not without trouble, a hundred and thirty men; and I began to make a causeway by which to convey the head down to the river side, for the bank was more than fifteen feet above the level of the water which had retired at least a hundred feet from it."<sup>64</sup> The following day, Belzoni was told he did not have to pay the peasants, since the kashif intended to make "a present of their labour." Belzoni refused, saying "it was not my custom to have the labour of men for nothing nor would the consul of England accept such a present."<sup>65</sup> On November 17, the head was successfully loaded onto the boat. Belzoni's account of the event again depicts him as the chief force driving the event:

I succeeded in my attempt and the head of the younger Memnon was actually embarked. I cannot help observing that it was no easy undertaking to put a piece of granite of such bulk and weight on board a boat that, if it received the weight on one side, would immediately upset. . . . The causeway I had made gradually sloped to the edge of the water close

to the boat, and with the four poles I formed a bridge from the bank into the centre of the boat so that when the weight bore on the bridge, it pressed only on the centre of the boat. The bridge rested partly on the causeway, partly on the side of the boat, and partly on this centre of it. On the opposite side of the boat I put some mats well filled with straw. I necessarily stationed a few Arabs in the boat, and some at each side, with a lever of palm wood, as I had nothing else. At the middle of the bridge I put a sack filled with sand that, if the colossus should run too fast into the boat, it might be stopped. In the ground behind the colossus I had a piece of a palm tree firmly planted, round which a rope was twisted and then fastened to its car to let it descend gradually. I set a lever at work on each side, and at the same time that the men in the boat were pulling, others were slackening ropes, and others shifting the rollers as the colossus advanced.<sup>66</sup>

The next day, the boat sailed for Cairo, then Rosetta. Leaving the Nile, the boat sailed to the port of Alexandria, where, with the help of the crew of a British transport that was equipped with tackle, it was unloaded on the pier.

#### RECEPTION

We saw here the great head of Memorandum; and I'm sure I shall never forget him. Some say he was King of the Abiders, which I think likely, from his size: others say he was King of the Thieves, in Upper Egypt. At any rate, it's a great lump of stone, and must be the best lot the Government thought.  
—THE SATIRIST, August 18, 1833

While there was much confusion during the removal of the Memnon head about the source of its value, the mixed welcome it received at the British Museum only added to the ambiguities of its acquisition. Though the piece was popular with museum patrons, it was far less so with the men officially entrusted with its care. Taylor Combe, head of the Department of Antiquities, acknowledged the installation of the Memnon head in a single terse sentence appended to an otherwise enthusiastic report about medieval numismatic acquisitions from the British Isles.<sup>67</sup> Combe's

subsequent report describes the installation of the piece solely in terms of the problems it caused to the aesthetic composition of the display in the Townley Gallery.<sup>68</sup> Again, after noting coin acquisitions, Combe writes, "[I] made a new arrangement of the articles in the Egyptian Room; in which arrangement it has been his aim to preserve the same line of objects, as in the other compartments of the Gallery, and to produce as much symmetry as was compatible with the situation on one side of the room, of so large an object as the colossal head."<sup>69</sup> The reaction of the museum's trustees to the gift was tempered.<sup>70</sup> At the very moment the Memnon head was being installed, Joseph Banks, the director of the British Museum, wrote to Salt, "Though in truth we are here much satisfied with the Memnon, and consider it as a *chef-d'oeuvre* of Egyptian sculpture, yet we have not placed that statue among the works of *Fine Art*. It stands in the Egyptian Rooms. Whether any statue that has been found in Egypt can be brought into competition with the grand works of the Townley Gallery remains to be proved unless however they really are so, the prices you have set upon your acquisitions are very unlikely to be realized in Europe."<sup>71</sup> These were sharp words from the man who had earlier so encouraged Salt to use his consular office to collect antiquities. Yet Banks's ambivalence about the aesthetic value of the Memnon head was actually not so remarkable, being simply the expression of an old aesthetic tradition that drew a sharp line between the Egyptian sculpture and fine art.<sup>72</sup>

Banks's reference to price raises another issue. Though the Memnon head had been sent as a gift to the British Museum, Salt was pressing the museum to purchase other antiquities he and his agents (including Belzoni) had collected. This last point drew the rebuke of Banks, who went on to censure Salt for abandoning his "original intention" of placing the matter of antiquities collection "in the hands of the public."<sup>73</sup> Here, an aspect of the 1816 expedition that is partly submerged in Belzoni's account is relevant: though Belzoni was certain that his acquisitions were "disinterested,"<sup>74</sup> he also knew Salt was funding the expedition as a for-profit venture. The mixture of the categories of public/private and commercial/noncommercial may have been what troubled the museum trustees.<sup>75</sup> More likely, however, it was the recent public uproar caused by the extravagant purchase of the Parthenon friezes from Lord Elgin that led the trustees to insist that acquisitions from Egypt be gifts, a point to which I will return shortly. Banks was not alone in his sharp response to Salt's attempt to sell

the museum the other pieces that arrived with the Memnon head. Hamilton, the man whose glowing description of the Memnon head had led Salt to acquire the piece, wrote similarly discouraging words.<sup>76</sup> In a third letter, Salt's former patron, Lord Mountnorris, joined Banks and Hamilton in admonishing Salt for trying to sell antiquities to the museum. Together, these sharp responses to Salt's gift indicate two lines of resistance to the reception of Egyptian antiquities at the British Museum in 1819: the first had to do with the *Egyptian* character of the antiquities; the second, with the *commercial* character of such acquisitions.

While Egyptian antiquities had been included in the collection of the British Museum from its inception, in 1819 they were not considered part of its fine art collection, of which Greek and Roman statues held pride of place. There were at least two reasons for this: a long-standing scholarly tradition that placed Athens and Rome at the origin of European art and world civilization, and a lack of basic knowledge about ancient Egyptian language, history, and culture. In light of this, it is not difficult to understand the response of curators who had been mandated to build a collection in order to inculcate a clear art-history narrative to the public. They were at a loss as to what to do with Egyptian pieces, whose aesthetic style was contrary to the Greco-Roman standard of beauty and whose origins and meaning were unknown. Given these factors, how could they have assimilated the Egyptian antiquities into the existing standards of beauty and narratives of art history? Even though British travelers had been vociferously asserting the beauty of the art they saw in Egypt, their claims had little resonance at the British Museum.

The uncertain reception of the Memnon head has very much to do with philosophical shifts taking place within the British Museum during the early nineteenth century. Ian Jenkins has aptly described this as a conscious shift in thinking about the meaning of the museum itself, a shift from the paradigm of the *Wunderkammer* to that of the *Kunstkammer*, that is, from the royal curiosity cabinet to the public art museum that offers a universal survey of aesthetic history.<sup>77</sup> These changes were themselves instantiated in the increasing tendency toward administrative division and specialization within the museum's collections. From its inception in 1756 until 1807, the museum had only three departments—Manuscripts, Printed Books, and Natural History. The capture of celebrated Egyptian antiquities from Bonaparte's army in 1801 and the purchase in 1805 of a large

private collection of Greek and Roman sculptures from Charles Townley massively increased the museum's holdings of antiquities. With this large addition, the old administrative categories, which placed statuary under the care of librarians, no longer made much sense, and in 1807 the Department of Antiquities was formed along with a subdepartment of Prints and Drawings.<sup>78</sup> These divisions did more than solve organizational problems; they also expressed an emerging consensus that the department's holdings should be a finely crafted collection that formed a systematic survey of art, not a conglomeration of wonders, oddities, and curiosities. The construction of the Townley Sculpture Gallery in 1808 gave architectural form to these new ideas. Originally, curators arranged the pieces thematically around the concept of the picturesque, though they soon moved to a more strictly chronological arrangements of objects.<sup>79</sup>

The shift from the appreciation of static classical forms to a historical understanding of art bore greatly upon the meaning of Egyptian antiquities. In the eighteenth century, in the work of the influential aesthetician Johann Winckelmann most particularly, Egypt had offered the antithesis of the aesthetic values embodied in classical Greek and Roman statuary. Paraphrasing Winckelmann, a museum guidebook from 1832 states, "It is generally assumed that all Egyptian figures are stiff, ugly, and devoid of grace which Winckelmann, going a step further . . . attributes to the general want of beauty in the nation."<sup>80</sup> Winckelmann urged scholars to concentrate on the purest Greek forms rather than "waste . . . thoughts on trifles" and occupy oneself "with low ideas."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, he provided a method of study, beginning with the details of individual pieces and moving to the deeper unities underlying different eras of classical statuary. Winckelmann's hermeneutic—a study of parts, synthesized into more abstract wholes, brought to bear again upon the study of parts—would provide the logic for the modern scholarly study of fine art. By the early 1800s this relatively static taxonomy would be supplemented by another notion—that art's history was one of progress.<sup>82</sup> In this model, "the chain of art" began in Egypt, then continued through the more familiar history of Greece and Rome. Nevertheless, Egypt did not figure here as part of the history of progress, but as the lifeless ground from which civilizational progress—a uniquely Greek invention—rose.<sup>83</sup> These concepts imbued the curatorial attitudes toward statues and the rooms which held them alike. In the Townley Gallery, curators paid the same attention to the values of

balance and proportion in their display as to such attributes in the objects themselves. The arrangement of objects on display was an amplification of the kinds of patterns found in art. Hence, one can begin to understand Combe's frustration when he was given the impossible task of fitting the Memnon head into a space ruled by the proportions and scale of classical humanism. As a non-classical piece, it had no easy place in the collection, a problem magnified by the enormous size of the piece itself.

The sense that art had a history was crucial for understanding the place of Egyptian antiquities within the department's collection in 1819. Egyptian objects, while apparently popular with patrons, served as a primitive and rough example when set against the higher, more dynamic forms of beauty found in the Greek and Roman statues. By this logic, the Memnon head would be installed in the Egyptian Sculpture Room even as it failed to reach the higher standards of classical statuary. In this regard, the 1832 guidebook remarks,

The stranger who visits the Gallery of Sculpture, in the British Museum, cannot fail to be struck with the curious collection of objects in the room of Egyptian Antiquities. Passing from the contemplation of the almost faultless representations of the human form in marble, the triumph of Grecian art, he comes to figures more remarkable, at first sight, for their singular forms and colossal size, than for their beauty. Though the contrast between what he has just left and the new scene to which he is introduced, creates at first no pleasing impression, feelings of curiosity and admiration soon arise from a more careful examination of what is around him.<sup>84</sup>

The welcome Egyptian antiquities had was thus complicated: though they were not fine art, their meaning had some relation to aesthetic values. They were not beautiful objects but aroused curiosity instead.

The category of the curiosity opens upon another set of ambiguities in the reception of the Memnon head. Not all Egyptian antiquities were included in the antiquities collection. Some were displayed as curiosities alongside wonders of the natural world. As the museum transformed from the model of the curiosity cabinet to the nineteenth-century pedagogical public museum, the category of the artificial curiosity became increasingly problematic. An earlier series of incidents involving Egyptian curiosities is telling in this regard. Even before the formation of the

Department of Antiquities, museum officers were rethinking the rationale of the collection and the fitness of articles on display. In 1806, a directive was issued to create order among the collections and to label the items on display. As Edward Miller notes, "The following year an even more drastic reorganisation took place. Certain objects, most of a medical or anatomical nature, were declared unfit to be preserved in the museum and were ordered to be disposed of to the Hunterian Museum, which, as a professional medical collection, was considered a more suitable home to them."<sup>85</sup> At the top of the list of items the director of the museum asked to be removed from display were Egyptian mummies, along with other such "artificial curiosities, many of which are of a very trifling nature and by no means fit to be exhibited in such a Repository as the Museum."<sup>86</sup> These mummies may be the same that appear in a housecleaning report from 1809, which was likewise directed at scouring up the basement rooms of Montagu House, the original, now-dilapidated building of the British Museum. The author of this report referred to the threat to the objects posed by water in dire terms and recommended removing objects like mummies from the collection rather than "suffering them to decay and be consumed in the damp apartments they are now deposited."<sup>87</sup> Years later, the problem of rotting lumber, rubbish, and unwanted curios remained. Combe inherited this problem in 1811, reporting that "4 mummies . . . in a state of decay on the ground floor of the New Buildings . . . are a harbour for dirt, and are only fit to be destroyed."<sup>88</sup> Not long after, Combe found a solution by donating the mummies to the Royal Academy of Surgeons.<sup>89</sup> It was easier to clean the basement than to transform antique curiosities into suitable objects for the museum's galleries of art.

Long before the Memnon head was on its way to London, most of the museum reorganization had already taken place, and most of the curios had been effectively purged from the Department of Antiquities. Nevertheless, one of the first notices the trustees received about the imminent arrival of the piece praised Egyptian antiquities for being exactly this, "curiosities" and "ornaments."<sup>90</sup> Thus, on its arrival, the Memnon head that appeared was something of an artificial curiosity, the very category of object which the museum was attempting to purge from its collection. The shifting semantic field of the term *artificial curiosity* is critical to understanding how the Memnon head was received. The word *curiosity* took on a pejorative meaning and came to mean an object of wonder and mystery more fitting

for a natural history exhibition—or carnival show—than a place where scholars studied the art of human civilization. In contrast, the word *artificial*, meaning "man-made," did not bother curators. In fact, the appropriateness of this term increased as the museum focused its attention on the study of human rather than natural history. The persistent value of the concept of man-madness is arguably what provoked the transformation of the adjective *artificial* into the substantive noun *artifact*, a neologism of the moment.<sup>91</sup>

It was not a simple matter to transform the Memnon head from a curiosity into a piece fit for inclusion within the art-history paradigm of the Department of Antiquities, especially when so little was known about its original historical context. Much hinged on developments that took place outside of the museum, particularly those linked to recent linguistic theories concerning hieroglyphic writing. Throughout the reports he filed until his death in 1825, Combe's reception of Egyptian antiquities remained skeptical, even hostile. Keeper of the Antiquities Richard Westmacott was warmer, although he continued to relegate Egyptian statuary to a lesser place.

In contrast, the museum catalogues and guides from the period indicate a subtle change occurring in attitudes toward Egyptian antiquities. A museum guidebook from 1821 describes the contents of the Egyptian Sculpture Room as follows: "Many of the articles contained in this Room were collected by the French in different parts of Egypt, and came into the possession of the English army, in consequence of the capitulation of Alexandria, in the month of September, 1801. They were brought to England in February, 1802, under the care of General Turner, and were sent, by order of His Late Majesty, to the British Museum."<sup>92</sup> The description is not so much of the objects' composition or meaning as of the history of their acquisition. The entry for the Memnon head follows this pattern in that it has more to say about the feat of removing it than it does about the piece as an object of study in itself.<sup>93</sup> This fact is not so surprising considering how little besides its contemporary history was known about the piece at the time.

Soon after the head's arrival, G. H. Noeden, a sublibrarian assigned to assist Combe, studied the Memnon head and published his findings in 1822.<sup>94</sup> Noeden's study marks the first attempt to remake the Memnon head into an object fit for inclusion in the institution as an *object of study*

rather than as curiosity or pretense for narrating the heroic deeds of contemporary collectors. Central to Noeden's effort was the task of measuring the piece. Exact figures for height (8' 9"), circumference (15' 3" at top of breast, 14' 7" below), and weight (between 10 and 12 tons) appear in a table as crucial facts in themselves. Other measurements of various segments of the statue suggest that Noeden was searching for ratios that might attest to an association between Egyptian and Greco-Roman standards of beauty. In Noeden's account a new kind of description is at work, one which, by means of measurement, establishes both its material factuality and its aesthetic status in relation to known standards of beauty. Arguably in these lines the beginnings of artifact discourse on the Memnon head are discernible.

The 1832 guidebook on the Egyptian antiquities in the museum's collection (published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge) was perhaps the first to state openly another assumption about how an artifact, as opposed to a curiosity, might be received. Though he concedes that aesthetic appreciation of Egyptian pieces could only follow historical knowledge, the author asserts that Egyptian antiquities deserved more attention than mere curiosity. While such knowledge was more or less lacking at the time, the author of the guidebook makes clear that Egyptian antiquities belong in the same collection as classical antiquities because they too are art. To make this conceptual shift, the author argues, one needs to absorb the context from which Egyptian antiquities were taken.<sup>55</sup> This guidebook devotes most of its discussion of the Memnon head to narrating at great length the history of its acquisition and citing the story of French vandalism alongside descriptions that appeared in *Description de l'Égypte*, Denon, and Norden. It also includes Noeden's table of measures and presents a close reading of Egyptian statues as pieces of art. The author's comments on the Memnon head's racial features are striking in this regard. He writes that the nose of the

Memnon may be called beautiful, though it has not the European form; it is far from being so round and thick as that of his colossal neighbour opposite. Indeed the nostrils of the Memnon are, in our opinion, the finest pair in all the Museum, if we compare them with those of statues in perfect repose, and it is only with such that any comparison can be fairly made. . . . The lips of the granite figure opposite the Memnon are the

thickest specimen the Museum offers, and the whole character of this face is much rounder and more massy than any other which we have seen. Though it is not the negro face, we cannot help feeling, as we look upon it, that its features recall to our minds that kind of outline which we understand by the term African, a word that means, in ordinary acceptance, something of the negro cast of face.<sup>56</sup>

Racialized aesthetic analysis may not have persuaded many curators. In fact, locating Egyptian art in Africa would have had wholly negative associations in contemporary models of aesthetics (such as G. W. F. Hegel's). Nevertheless, it does signal a new framework by which one could study the Egyptian antiquities in the collection as pieces of art. And in the end, it was this imperative—to study Egyptian antiquities as if one were studying examples of classical art—that mattered most.

By the early 1830s, following growing acceptance of Champollion's theories, there was widespread skepticism toward earlier traditions of interpreting Egyptian antiquities. With regard to the Memnon head, it was at this time confidently pointed out that there was no reason to call the colossal bust by the name of Memnon.<sup>57</sup> This skepticism would be replaced by a more positivist confidence in the 1840s as scholars began to read the primary sources of Egyptian history and the now-legible names written on the museum pieces. The consequences of this knowledge were wide: it was possible to read not only Egyptian history, but also the history of the objects in the collection. The name of Memnon was corrected to Ramses II during these years, and the place of Egyptian art in the antiquities collection transformed. An introduction to a museum guidebook from 1842 reads as follows:

The object of the present work is to publish a Selection of the Choiseul [*sic*] Monuments existing in the National Collection of this country. It commences with those of Egypt, from the high authenticated antiquity of many of them, and from their being the source from which the arts of Sculpture and of Painting, and perhaps even the Sciences, were handed to the Greeks—from the Greeks to us. *They are the Alpha of the history of Art.* The collection of the British Museum is so rich in this newly opened mine of antiquity, of which so little has been edited, that no apology is necessary in commencing with this branch.<sup>58</sup>

Not only had Egypt been allowed into the same aesthetic narrative as classical art, but it had now become the *origin* of that history. Within roughly twenty years, the place of Egyptian antiquities, including the Memnon head, shifted from the margins of the museum's art collection to its center. Moreover, there had accrued by this time enough information about the origins, uses, and meaning of Egyptian antiquities that they were no longer interpreted solely through the old lens of Greece and Rome:

Attached to every object will be found a succinct description of its use, application, locality, and relations; such as will, it is hoped, suffice the general reader and offer to the Archaeologist the broad outline of the subject. In treating each Branch, a preference will, of course, be given to the first authorities; thus, Egyptian Antiquities will be illustrated from the monuments and Hieroglyphics of Egypt, not from the second-hand information of the Greeks which the present state of hieroglyphical knowledge refutes or challenges. Hellenic remains will also be judged by Hellenism, and the labours of Continental Antiquaries brought before the British Public.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, these guidebooks suggest that the accumulation of knowledge about ancient Egypt generally led to an increase in the ability of curators and connoisseurs to arrange Egyptian antiquities into a coherent historical narrative and to appreciate objects as discrete items worthy of individual study. Gone were the days in which the principle of balance and symmetry determined the style of arrangement, replaced by a taxonomic logic and historical arcs. Subsequent guidebooks built on these principles, and by the 1850s museum visitors would be given increasingly comprehensive historical lessons about ancient Egypt, the purpose of which was to increase their ability to appreciate Egyptian antiquities as art:

Before we proceed to the separate description of the Monuments which have been procured from Egypt, and which now enrich the National Collection at the British Museum, we propose briefly to lay before our readers an outline of the nature of the celebrated country in which these, the earliest remains of ancient art, have been discovered, with some account of its most celebrated cities and buildings now wholly ruined. It seems, indeed, hardly possible thoroughly to appreciate the remains of ancient art without some knowledge of the peculiarities of the lands which they

once adorned and illustrated. Thus a knowledge of the religious creed of a nation or a race, the language they spoke, the ordinary life they led, are almost essential requisites in tracing out the course of their artistic history.<sup>100</sup>

These institutional and philosophical changes obtained in the spaces of the museum displays themselves. In 1832, the museum opened a permanent gallery built especially for the Elgin marbles. Since their installment in 1817, the Elgin marbles had been consigned to a hastily built room off the Townley Gallery. Now, they had an expensive new gallery, with top lighting, in the new wings being constructed by Robert Smirke. With the completion of a new Egyptian Sculpture Gallery in 1833, it was proposed that the Memnon head be immediately relocated to fill the larger space. The task of moving the head was daunting. Westmacott wrote at the time,

I am in some difficulty and quite at a standstill with the head of the Memnon. There is no private source on which I can rely for its removal with safety either to the men or to the object itself. I calculate the weight at about 14 tons, but this could be effected with care by the Government tackle and three or four of their men.<sup>101</sup>

The Office of Ordnance was contacted again, and a detachment of gunners was sent to the museum. In order to accomplish their task, the military engineers were compelled to reinforce floors. In June 1834, the Memnon head was installed in the new, much larger space.

Unlike the gallery built for the Elgin marbles, however, the new Egyptian Sculpture Gallery, like the old Egyptian Sculpture Room, was designed for side lighting rather than top lighting. This detail was itself a consequence of the aesthetic judgment that Egyptian sculptures, being of inferior quality, did not deserve the special lighting reserved for higher Greek and Roman forms. James Fergusson, writing in the 1840s, would spell out the logic of this arrangement, arguing that "the light is sufficient and sufficiently diffused, and for Egyptian sculpture it is of very little consequence how or in what direction the light falls. The artists on the banks of the Nile never aimed at aesthetic beauty of form, so that the sculptural products of their art scarcely depend more on their shadows than architectural members do."<sup>102</sup> In sum, even as the Memnon head was finally admitted into the



Figure 4. Gunners installing Memnon head in Egyptian Sculpture Gallery. Drawing by E. W. Cooke, signed June 2, 1834. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

British Museum's realm of art, its place was still behind that of classical Greco-Roman art. Moreover, as knowledge about Pharaonic political dynasties accumulated in the years thereafter, the treatment of the Memnon head and other such objects began to change in curators' descriptions. This shift is slight but perceptible, away from questions of the compositional or mimetic aspects of individual pieces, and toward issues of material composition, ornament, patterning, and use. If, during the 1820s, questions of taste and experience dominated the description of Egyptian antiquities, in later decades this was supplemented by debates about how such objects might be studied to learn about ancient history itself.

The slow but steady warming in the aesthetic reception of the Memnon head was only one factor in the development of its significance as a museum artifact. The other was tied to anxieties about the museum's public financing. Part of this had to do with the fallout from the purchase of the Parthenon friezes in 1816.<sup>103</sup> There is no doubt the friezes revolutionized English painting and literature and encouraged artists and poets to discard the derivative beau ideal style for direct experience with the original. The museum trustees, pressing their case for purchase with public funds, were confident, stressing that Elgin should be recompensed not only for offering the friezes to the country, but for saving them from either sure destruction at the hands of the Ottomans or certain acquisition at the hands of the French.<sup>104</sup> A royal act authorized the purchase, invested Elgin and his heirs as trustees to the museum, and stipulated that the pieces "be preserved and kept together in the . . . British Museum whole and entire, and distinguished by the name or appellation of 'the Elgin Collection.'"<sup>105</sup> Thus, the Parthenon friezes were rebaptized as the Elgin marbles.

Almost forgotten in this story is that the huge cost of the marbles (thirty-five thousand pounds, roughly equivalent to 3.5 million dollars in today's currency) to the British government was seen as excessive by many, especially given that the country was still reeling from recent war expenditures. The response of the trustees was consistent: since the purchase was invested in a public institution (the museum), its benefits accrued to the public. Yet claims about the public character of the museum only intensified the debate. From the outset in 1753, the founders of the museum insisted that the collections were meant "for the use and benefit of the publick, who may have free access to view and peruse the same."<sup>106</sup> Likewise, from this early time, the trustees won public funds to support the

foundation, expansion, and maintenance of the institution. Also from the outset, however, there were serious questions about whether public funds should go to support the collection of "knick knackereries" donated by wealthy travelers.<sup>107</sup> With regard to admission, the museum's effective definition of *public* was one that, until midcentury and beyond, excluded the vast majority of the working- and middle-class British public.<sup>108</sup> The museum was referred to disparagingly as "a place intended only for the amusement of the curious and rich," useless for the nation at large.<sup>109</sup> Throughout this period, arguments arose within the museum administration first about whether (and later about how) to make the definition of the public more inclusive. But the officers did not proceed quickly enough. As one angry critic put it in 1836, "The baneful spirit of aristocratic monopoly interferes even with our national institutions, and operates, in a great degree, to the exclusion of the working classes from the enjoyment of the blessings bequeathed for public good, by a generous benevolence. These prefatory remarks are especially applicable to the British Museum, which, even on the cautious admissions of its own officers, is characterized by inefficient management, and a very narrow accessibility as regards the great body of the people."<sup>110</sup> Hence, rather than mollifying critics, the key term ("the public") in the trustees' response to criticism of the Elgin purchase only increased demands that admission to the museum be opened up to a wider spectrum of society.

With regard to the use of public funds for acquisition, the trustees of 1819 were not willing to expend any of their budget on Egyptian antiquities. By the mid-1820s, however, they were negotiating to purchase small groups of pieces collected by Salt and even Droveti. Still, the figures involved in the purchase of Egyptian antiquities were a fraction of those paid for Greco-Roman statuary. Nonetheless, the rising costs of acquisition, the upkeep of Montagu House, and later the new construction meant that the issue of the museum's funding and its public character would be raised by those who were outraged by the institution's exclusionary practices. Striking in this account from a debate in 1823 in the Supply Committee of the House of Commons is how aesthetic questions about Egyptian antiquities are woven into a basic fiscal point:

[The trustees] imported taste from a country which was said indeed to have been once the land of arts and sciences; they brought and imported

from Egypt a head of Memnon; and having got it safely home, they discovered that it stood rather higher than their ceiling. Then they wanted a place to hold the head, and two other huge Egyptian relics of a singular shape; so they built a double cube, which was the continuation of the aforesaid parallelogram. Unfortunately, it turned out that this head of Memnon was a dev'lish long head, insomuch that they were obliged to raise the ceiling of his closet somewhat higher, so that the roof of the closet which held the Townley [statue of] Venus was at one elevation, and the roof of the closet which enclosed the Memnon's head was at another. The arrangement of these different closets was so odd, the closets themselves were so dissimilar the one from the other, that they were, as Shakespeare said, "Each monstrous, till its fellow came to match it."<sup>111</sup>

After praising the "disinterestedness" of the trustees, the member of Parliament cites their inept management as a waste of public funds. Banks, representing the museum, attempted to correct the record by pointing out that this account of the Memnon head in Montagu House was patently untrue. Nonetheless, the criticism stuck. Through this period, criticism of the public character of the museum expanded to cover the procedures of admission, the affordability of museum guides, and the costs of antiquities acquisition.

Although the gift of the Memnon head in 1819 might have been eagerly received by the trustees of the British Museum, it was not, and the reasons for this were not just aesthetic. In contrast to the acquisition of the Elgin marbles, the colossal head involved little expense to the museum. Still, coming on the heels of the sharp debate about the worthiness of public spending on other Mediterranean rocks, the Memnon head could not be easily championed at the museum. In that the statue's value could not be easily assimilated into the art-history order which privileged Greek and Roman art, and in that its historical significance was a cipher, the Memnon head was as much a burden as it was a blessing for the museum in 1819. Indeed, for a long time it was clearly easier for the trustees to continue their pursuit of expensive acquisitions in Greco-Roman statuary than it was to receive Egyptian antiquities free of charge. Arguably, what eventually changed the trustees' attitude toward Egyptian antiquities was probably not aesthetic debates or even the accumulation of solid historical information about the past. Rather, it was French success in the field of



collecting Egyptian monuments. Anglo-French rivalry in collecting was, during this period, fairly lopsided—acquisition agents, including both the French consul, Bernardino Drovetti, and the British consul, Henry Salt, found the Louvre much more eager to purchase what they collected, and it paid handsomely. In other words, the desire not to be left behind in the imperial rush of collection was likely the decisive pressure that changed the place of Egypt in the British Museum's collection.

#### THE MEMNON HEAD AS ARTIFACT

The story of the Memnon head speaks volumes about the cultural institution of the artifact at the moment of its emergence. It illustrates that the artifact is a product of a history of making and remaking, and that each of these moments of creation is itself expressive of social conflicts and cultural emergences. The story also suggests there is an abiding normative quality to artifacts. That is, they circulate in specific institutions and in doing so embody the rules and regulations of those institutions. The artifact can thus be said to articulate a matrix of social and cultural forces. That is, the artifact both joins and separates a number of fields of activity, the most obvious of which are the commercial and noncommercial aspects of the colonial enterprise emerging simultaneously in Egypt, England, and elsewhere. As the account of the Memnon head suggests, it may make more sense to define the artifact not in a positive sense, but rather in terms of interlocking tensions: it is sacralized as an object understood to be complete in itself (a work) and also the fragment of something larger (a piece);<sup>112</sup> it is both an instrument (of pedagogy) and an end (to be appreciated) in itself; it is sometimes a good for sale and most often a noncommodity;<sup>113</sup> it is an object both found and made; it belongs to both private and public interest; it is both a fact and a value;<sup>114</sup> and finally, impossibly, it is something both alienable and socially entangled.<sup>115</sup>

The concept of the artifact has had a special meaning in the disciplines of archaeology, museum studies, and art history: a product of human thought and labor, as distinct from objects taken from the realm of natural history. In labeling such objects artifacts, the art historian or archaeologist seeks not to evaluate them according to the aesthetic or cultural prejudices of the present, but, as much as possible, to understand the val-

ues and uses they may have had in their original context. For modern disciplines that study the material culture of the ancient past, *artifact* is both a useful label for classifying proper objects of study and a powerful concept that helps to move the horizon of interpretation beyond that of the immediate present. For archaeologists, to speak of artifacts may only involve two acts: to refer to a specific kind of material object, and to think according to the given theoretical concepts of the sciences whose objects of study are artifacts. For students of archaeology's history, however, it involves at least a third act: to employ the term "artifact" that belongs to a specialized discipline, ascribes its unique authority, and excludes others.

Distinguishing between these aspects of the discourse of artifacts allows one to recognize some of its peculiarities. Theoretically, the label of the artifact might be applied universally to all objects created by human culture. In practice, however, not all such objects are treated as artifacts for the simple reason that not every product of human civilization is put into a museum or studied as an example of material culture. This is an obvious but critical observation: there are specific disciplinary practices associated with the word *artifact*; and those objects known as artifacts exist as artifacts only insofar as they have been brought within the modern institutions of archaeology, museums, art history, and so on.<sup>116</sup> Thus the term *artifact*, despite the careful neutrality of its common disciplinary usage, is value laden in more than one sense.<sup>117</sup> Most important, the concept of the artifact has a rhetorical function in the traditional histories of Egyptology, such as in this recent account:

The exploits of Salt and Drovetti sometimes make sad reading these days. An archaeologist, or anyone who cares about the past, resents grave robbers and artifact hunters, for these people do irreparable damage to the remains of the past. It seems tragic that for more than a century the Nile Valley was subjected to the depredations of people like Salt and Drovetti, their hired plunderers, and others more destructive. This, however, was the prearchaeological age. Many professional collectors were well-intentioned people who thought they were performing a useful service to scholarship while making money. . . . There is some consolation in the fact that many of the antiquities that were taken from Egypt during the nineteenth century eventually found their way to museums where they could be protected and appreciated—indeed, many artifacts

were probably saved by being removed from Egypt—but even in those cases there was a loss that could never be made good.<sup>118</sup>

Indeed, traditional histories of Egyptology commonly assert that part of what distinguished the kind of intellectual work done by the first Egyptologists from the kind of work done by those antiquarians who came before was that Egyptologists worked on artifacts. In this way, the invention of the artifact was critical for legitimating Egyptology as a science and distinguishing it from its prehistory in the amateurism of antiquarian hobbyists and gentlemen excavators. With this in mind, one might reframe the distinction that was so crucial to Egyptology's self-making: while the word *artifact* may be used to denote objects of study, at the same time it connotes a range of values and practices associated with the institutions of modern science. Moreover, inasmuch as the emergence of Egyptological science was predicated on the invention of this new class of objects, it helped create a new class of experts whose knowledge granted them privileged access and authority over regions where antiquities were found.<sup>119</sup> Whether the treatment of the Memnon head I have traced here fully matches up to later, normative definitions of the scientific object known as the artifact is doubtful. For one thing, the head was intentionally collected as a unique piece, and its significance was initially debated in terms of aesthetics. For another, many of the methods associated with scientific archaeology—the attention to material composition, patterning, and the closed site—entered the field of Egyptology much later, during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, in nascent form, many of the key elements of artifact discourse were at work in the new treatment of the Memnon head, and as its treatment changed over the course of the early nineteenth century, they developed too. For this reason, it is a useful case for exploring the processes of how antiquarian treatments gave way to new practices, how pre-science became science.

More than merely describing a set of objects, the language of the artifact—which emerged at the same time as the acquisition of the Memnon head—organized its objects within a new form of knowledge and claimed them for new institutions of interpretative power. As a language for laying claim to objects, the discourse of the artifact is peculiarly normative, since it both implies and disavows claims of ownership. In the Memnon head's paper trail, appropriation and possession are major themes, yet the notion

that the artifact belongs to those collecting it is so taken for granted that it is seldom articulated. Moreover, at no point do any of the agents—the travelers, the acquisitionists, the consul, the trustees—involved in collecting and transporting the Memnon head to London lay claim to the object for themselves. Similarly, while the Memnon head may have come into the possession of the British Museum, it was not claimed as property either by anyone there or by anyone involved in the acts that effected its transport to England. In this sense, there is no deed that definitively establishes the object as the property of the British Museum. Its provenance attempts to explain why the object rightly belongs where it sits but succeeds only in telling how it got there. Thus one of the fundamental paradoxes of the artifact as a cultural object: it may be in the custody of those who proclaim themselves to be the best parties to conserve and study it, but it is not their property. According to artifact discourse, if the Memnon head must belong to someone, it belongs to civilization or humanity in the abstract. In this rendition, the British Museum claims to be not the owner of the piece but merely its custodian.

The story of the removal of the Memnon bust from Egypt narrates the movement of an object through time and space and also the emergence of new institutional practices of culture based on the artifact form. Still, an obvious question dogs this account of the Memnon head: was the process of artifaction not also an act of theft?

It is tempting to call the acquisition a kind of theft at least insofar as those involved in acquiring the Memnon head knew (or supposed) that the natives did not appreciate its true value and thus could be prevailed upon to surrender it without fair compensation. The facts of the transaction seem to fit the textbook definition of the crime of larceny. But how is it that even though the story I have told is well known (as it is), there has never been a consensus that (let alone serious consideration whether) the act was done in bad faith, or was criminal in nature? The lack of consensus is not because this acquisition was exceptional compared to what came after. On the contrary, the artifaction style by which the Memnon head was removed became the rule of acquisitions, and its example was repeated, with variations of course, throughout the nineteenth century.

Condemnations have always been raised against this kind of antiquities acquisition, both by Europeans writing at the time and in more recent

decades.<sup>120</sup> Because those individuals raising the criticism have been working at a distance from the centers of Egyptological and museum authority, however, their voices have been largely ignored. Similarly, for reasons I will discuss in subsequent chapters, there has never been a serious attempt on the part of Egyptians or Egyptian governments to repatriate objects collected in the nineteenth century, nor should we expect them to.<sup>121</sup> This apparent Egyptian indifference toward the transgressions of antiquities acquisition functions crucially in traditional accounts of Egyptology and has gone far to support the claim that the acquisition of Pharaonic antiquities could not have been theft. A key part of that argument, which has been rehashed from the 1810s until the present, is that Egyptians are more than indifferent in their attitudes toward Pharaonic antiquities: as Muslim iconoclasts and ignorant peasants, they pose a grave threat to the objects' survival. In this narrative, European acquisitions appear as acts of redemption, not dispossession. Once the objects were relocated to Europe, the language of conservation extended this line of thought and helped fuel the notion that the remedy for bad local government (in places like Egypt) is always European intervention. As we shall see, the notion that Egyptians did not care or could not manage their antiquities had its roots in a deliberate misrecognition of alternative Egyptian and Muslim traditions of thinking about and appreciating Pharaonic antiquities. In other words, fears about Islamic iconoclasm and peasant ignorance have had an important conceptual function in claims for colonial intervention. Because acquisition was represented as an act of conservation offsetting the kind of destruction to which antiquities were doomed if they were left in place, it was seen—and continues to be seen—as more or less legitimate. In the light cast by conservation discourse, the issue of acquisition is rarely described as illicit.

So, was the artification of the Memnon head a form of theft? Those who describe this history of antiquities acquisition in terms of theft have largely restricted their critique to claims about property rights.<sup>122</sup> I would argue, though, that such claims fail to grasp the particular *modus operandi* of acquisition carried on under the banner of the artifact and founded on the persistence of two not entirely incorrect impressions: on the one hand, the legal and commercial transactions that took place around antiquities collection were quite ambiguous; and on the other, acquisition was an act of preservation. Here one begins to see how the discourse of the artifact

did not obscure claims about property rights concerning antiquities but rather effectively shifted the field of claim and contestation altogether. Before the 1810s, Europeans had been taking antiquities from Egypt without ever speaking about preservation or calling their activities anything other than what they were: commercial exchanges among local, state, and diplomatic agents. There are many indications that this commerce was large and formed a substantial part of the off-season economic activities of portions of Upper Egypt.<sup>123</sup> Though the removal of the Memnon head relied on this commerce, the style of its acquisition was new in that it sought a moral grounding for its actions and sought to legitimate itself as noncommercial and disinterested. The peculiar form of moral discourse surrounding the acquisition of the Memnon head—the discourse of the artifact—combined elements of salvationism, altruism, and scientism. Taken together, these elements of artifact discourse illustrate why the act of acquisition, so often criticized, has rarely been associated with theft. More than that, however, the powerful and persistent capacities of artifact discourse also suggest that any serious critique of acquisition cannot be confined to claims about discrete acts of theft, since what was at stake was the emergence of a new, more diffuse form of power—a network joining material objects and human subjects, powerful states and shifting aesthetic sensibilities, scientific fieldwork and museum pleasures. If this issue were considered with regard to restitutive justice, it would become apparent immediately how the claim of theft fails to grasp fully the broader context of colonial power: while one might imagine a successful legal campaign to repatriate individual objects like the Memnon head, this would still not undo the history of colonial domination that artifact discourse helped produce.

These last insights are clearly reflected in the official accounts of the removal of the Memnon head, which, though indifferent toward discrete property rights, are deeply concerned with shifting power relations. In fact, the primary sources describing the Memnon head's removal are saturated with the description of imperial power and its effects, rules, and ambiguities. One might say that the story of the Memnon head's artification tells also of the intersection of four imperial powers. Most obviously, the acquisition of the Memnon head took place in the context of competition between the French and British empires. Quite literally, the acquisition agents saw their competition as one over spaces and objects, territories

which either empire might dominate. Acquisition concerns were not distinct from the diplomatic activities of each empire; moreover, the military capacities of each were marshaled to accomplish the task. These competitions in Egypt were then consciously reproduced in the museum collections of each empire's metropole. At the same time, British-French competition for antiquities took place in the territories of a third empire. The Ottoman Empire's grasp on North Africa was already tenuous by the 1810s, although Egypt would remain under Ottoman sovereignty, and later under nominal Ottoman suzerainty, for another hundred years. Although Belzoni's account tells the story of how British power might be projected into Upper Egypt and Nubia, the fact of Ottoman governance infuses its every page. Although Belzoni's depiction of Ottoman rule may have been motivated by the fact he had to negotiate with regional and local officials throughout his travels, the centrality of Ottoman rule in his account goes beyond the merely descriptive. For Belzoni and Salt, each empire implied a set of particular moral values. If these authors assumed the British Empire to be dynamic, fair-minded, efficient, and rational, they saw the Ottoman Empire as stagnant, tyrannical, corrupt, and ignorant. There was little new about this kind of Orientalist moralism save for the mediating role played by the specter of a fourth empire in Belzoni's account—Pharaonic Egypt. In many senses, it was the shadow of ancient empire that motivated acquisition in the first place.<sup>124</sup> Undoubtedly, a substantial share of the aesthetic and historical value that accrued in objects like the Memnon head derived from their association with one of the most powerful empires of the ancient world. And, as we shall see in the next chapter, the imperial character of Pharaonic antiquities could rub off on those powerful enough to hold them in their grasp.

## Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said:—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown  
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains: round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."  
—SHELLEY, "Ozymandias"

My account of the artification of the Memnon head has foregrounded the material aspects of the process of artification. For the most part, I have read sources indexically, as references to actual events, actual people, and an actual object. Of course, each source is also a representation. To observe this is to emphasize a point made earlier about the performance played by the paper trail of the provenance itself. That is, the archives did not merely tell the story of how the Memnon head became an artifact; they were also gathered to guarantee that very outcome. To underscore the substantive role played by representations in the artification process I want to briefly consider Shelley's sonnet "Ozymandias" since it too belongs to this body of texts bundled with the Memnon head. Much might

be said about the poem, but I will consider only three points: the first has to do with how it frames the object as a ruin; the second, with its use of prosopopoeia (personification); the third, with how it performs within the network of artifaction.

Of the various representations attached to the Memnon head, Shelley's poem is undoubtedly the most famous. It was composed in the context of a friendly literary competition with Horace Smith, as both men, like much of the London lettered class, followed reports of the head's imminent arrival.<sup>1</sup> The poem's literary power results from how it explores monumentalization as an uncertain act of signification.<sup>2</sup> It accomplishes this effect by conceptually linking the crafts of the sculptor and the poet, each of whom (in his own way) creates works of art intended to last beyond the historical moment in which they are made. At the same time, however, "Ozymandias" injects real ambiguity into the question of the meaning-making art since each artist—the sculptor who "mocks" and the poet who ironizes—creates a work that has, in a sense, a life of its own, one that cannot be reduced to the intent of the humans making it. Shelley's poem is a study of the gesture of monumentalization insofar as it explores this theme both in its depiction of the sculptor and in its own form as a poem.<sup>3</sup>

As critics have pointed out, Shelley relied heavily on the accounts of travelers like Diodorus Siculus, Pococke, and Denon who visited the Memnonium.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the poem signals this fact at the beginning: "I met a traveler from an antique land / Who said . . ." It is not especially surprising that Shelley would seek inspiration for his poem in the extensive body of travel writing on Egypt. Yet it is striking that the central image of the poem—the "colossal wreck"—would be framed in such a way as to emphasize its received, citational quality. In so doing, the poem gestures toward the authority of experience in travel writing of the period. What has not been fully appreciated is how Shelley imagined the place—a "desert" of "lone and level sands"—as being outside of human society. While the Memnonium may not have been as populated as other Egyptian temples and tombs during this period, it is abundantly clear in the accounts of Belzoni and others that the place was far from uninhabited. Of course, it is beside the point to fault Shelley's lack of realism because his poem depopulates the Memnonium. It is, however, salient to observe how much his image corresponds to the view—expressed by Belzoni and others—that the antiquities of Egypt ought to be separated from the modern inhabit-

ants. In order to produce the illusion that the ancient past is immediately available, "Ozymandias" necessarily removes the object from its social context. This act of rendition mirrors in essence the radical recontextualization that Egyptian antiquities underwent as they were brought under the sign of the artifact.

Still, the poem does more than this. The act of citation puts a double distance between any place called here and the scene described. The ruin lies far away across space and time; the expanse is extended again by the fact that it appears as received speech. Yet, for all the distance marked by geography, antiquity, and irony, the poem performs a close examination of the statue. In the sense that it is a study of an object, the poem telescopes us directly into the presence of the ruin. Here, we are with the postantiquarian scholar of art who closely studies the individual piece of work as a totality in itself, though one that opens up onto other hermeneutical scenes. This intimate study of the face quickly leads to a consideration of the relation between the sculpture's artist and his subject, the tyrant Pharaoh. The poem suggests that the sculpture of the king is not an unambiguous one, since the very gestures which indicate the subject's power ("wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command") also attest to the control of the artist, whose "heart" created the statue and whose "hand" appears to have mocked his subject. Critics have focused on this description of the relationship between artist and king in order to argue that Shelley is here asserting the power of the creative arts over politics. But, more germane to thinking about the Memnon head as an artifact, we might recognize Shelley's effort—in pure imagination—to read for an original context (the relation between patron and artist) through which one might interpret subtle, even ironic, aspects within a work of Egyptian art. In other words, the "study" enacted in the poem was precisely one that art historians could not yet perform. In this sense, the poem prefigures a later moment when the Memnon head would become a historical artifact, just as it anticipates the historian's eye studying it.

A larger irony lingers, however, in the juxtaposition of the sculpture's inscription ("Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!") and its current state of ruin and neglect. One function of this writing is to lend voice and words to the inanimate object. The image on which the poem ends is like that of a colossal statue speaking with no one to heed his words save the modern traveler or reader of inscriptions. What is the significance

of representing this object as sneering and communicating? Similarly, Belzoni portrayed the Memnon head as a living thing when he described it as smiling at him at the thought of being taken away. To call this kind of figure personification is correct, but that observation does not flesh out the full meaning. What Shelley's poem describes in figurative terms is thus more or less what the statue actually is: the product of human labor; a representation of a human form that has a relation to human life; a representation that has an association with human power. By imagining the lively aspect of the statue, Shelley's poem reactivates the human aspects of the object that were congealed in the stone.

The personified figurative language of literary descriptions—in Belzoni, in Shelley, and elsewhere—is a useful correction to the impression that artifacts are the passive objects of actions and processes performed by human actors. It becomes a dominant theme in much European (and later Egyptian) literature about Pharaonic antiquities (especially that about mummies). This tradition of prosopopoeia suggests that there might be traces of the human in the object itself, or at least qualities in the artifact, like agency, that one normally associates with human life. Indeed, the literary description of the object often returns to this point in order to reveal something that the other forms of discourse do not: namely, that its existence is entangled with the lives of the humans around it and in that sense it might be said to have a life. In this way, Shelley's poem compels us to ask, What if artifacts are not inert? What if they are not just the instruments or consequences of history making, but rather agents within it? This second question may appear strange, since it runs contrary to the common assumption that agency is a uniquely human attribute. Yet it may be that the prosopopoeic literary descriptions capture this aspect of the artifact more accurately than prosaic accounts.

The point might be made differently: the artification of the Memnon head entailed catching it in networks of concepts, writing, sciences, and practices normally associated exclusively with humans. Artifacts brought into such networks, and assimilated into such institutions, helped those who controlled them produce claims that were not just about the ancient past, but also about the modern present. These claims had, as we shall see, profound implications for how Egypt's modern rulers—colonial and nationalist—would legitimate their power. Just as the knowledge and power produced in relation to artifacts must become entangled with their

matter, so too must human agency, when it is constructed in relation to objects, share some life with them. In this regard, the personified artifact resonates with the notion of the *actant*, since it too describes how power might obtain in the matter of an object when it is part of an assemblage of social and political relations.<sup>5</sup> Shelley's sonnet thus suggests that the artifact is a prosthesis in the performance of human power relations and a material site within a network of forces that encompasses humans and nonhumans alike.

A final point with regard to the poem's association with the Memnon head artifact and the issue of entanglement. Recall that Shelley's poem derives from a long tradition of travel writing on Pharaonic antiquities and in that sense might be said to be a secondary (or tertiary) artifact in relation to the object itself. However, the poem's publication predated the arrival of the Memnon head in London, and its light no doubt helped illuminate the object itself. We know also that John Keats visited the Egyptian collection at the British Museum during the early months of the Memnon head's arrival, and was inspired to write at least seven poems on ancient Egyptian themes as a result. Is it accurate to say that the meaning of "Ozymandias" derives from the object it is said to represent or that the image created by the poem is what informs the museum-goer's experience of the artifact? To frame the relationship between artifact and representation in terms of the familiar conundrum raised by the original and the copy misses what was likely a more crucial aspect, namely, that when joined together, poem and statue (or artifact and provenance, or object and representation) formed a network of concepts, images, and material facts powerful enough to make it seem natural and inevitable that the Memnon head would now reside in London for the contemplation of the British public. In this way, Shelley's poem does more than describe an Egyptian monument or problematize the gesture of artistic monumentalization. In monumentalizing the alienability of objects found in Egypt, the poem is part of the wider set of networks that together effected the Memnon head's artification. "Ozymandias" is thus more than a poem about an object. It is an instance of how in the emergent institutions of Egyptology and Egyptomania there was "no important difference between stories and materials."<sup>6</sup>