5

To Cairo

> The ancient descriptions of Egypt abound with the names of cities, of which most have undergone such considerable change that whoever tries to locate them would think that the country is deserted . . . so the ancient Egyptian cities have little by little disappeared, and have been replaced by others, many of which have, in their turn, fallen into oblivion. If the cities of Egypt appear to us to have undergone greater change than those of other countries, it is simply because we have more ancient accounts of them. (*Travels,* vol. I, 94–95)

As they made preparations to depart Alexandria, the members of the Danish expedition were about to enter the timeless land of Egypt. As we have seen, Alexandria had always been an anomaly, an outward-looking window on the Mediterranean world and the creation of outsiders. With the coming of the Arabs in the middle of the seventh century the window had effectively closed, and the vast majority of the inhabitants of the country reverted to their unchanging preoccupation with the river and the fertile land it had created. But there was a new group of outsiders who ruled this timeless Egypt, as there had been continuously at least since the coming of the Persians in the sixth century BC. The Persians had been followed by the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, and then by the Arabs. The Arabs had ruled through the Umayyad and Abbassid Caliphates until the middle of the ninth century. But they had been succeeded by a the Fatimids from the west and then by a series of usurpers, first Turkish and afterwards Circassian, Georgian and Mingrelian who had given the ruling classes of the country a Central Asian then a Cuacasian character. These had been followed in the sixteenth century by Ottoman Turks who brought the country under the nominal control of the greatest empire of its day. By the time the Danish expedition arrived in 1761, this latest domination by foreigners had already

lasted for nearly a thousand years. And, as it had been for the previous suzerains—Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Arabs—so it was for these latecomers: Egypt was a wealthy land, to be plundered of its resources. If there was a constant in Egypt, amid all this superficial change, it was this pillage and Niebuhr sees it at once:

> The Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and, finally, the Turks, all foreigners, who have ruled in succession in Egypt, and who seem to have dedicated themselves to ruining this fertile country by their misgovernment, annually extracted such considerable sums, and thereby reduced the means of subsistence of the inhabitants, that the country has necessarily become continually more depopulated and the number of cities reduced.[1]

The country was remote and unruly, and this gave ample scope to the unscrupulous representatives of the ruling powers, as well as the most disorderly of the locals. We have already seen the state of relations between the Bedouins and the settled population. We will see below, in greater detail, the relationships between the other factions in the country.

The members of the expedition would have preferred to travel overland to Cairo, if only to see the Delta. But, after the tumultuous events they had witnessed in Alexandria, it was not a risk they were willing to take:

> The Europeans who have published accounts of their journeys from Alexandria to Cairo all took one route, going first to Rashid, and from there to Cairo on the Nile. We would have preferred to travel overland, to see parts of Egypt that were still very little known. But, from the above, the reader can surely see that the nomadic Arabs made this course impossible . . .[2]

They left Alexandria by sea for Rashid (or Rosetta) on the 31st of October 1761. However, after leaving the city they had traveled only four leagues[3] before they were delayed by an unfavorable wind and some of the party decided to proceed overland with a group of Turks. Niebuhr waited and kept to the original plan, covering the remaining six leagues between the two cities and arriving in Rashid on the 2nd of November, about the same time as the others. With the effective end of European trade through Alexandria after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, riverine traffic had been

1. *Travels*, vol. I, 96.

2. Ibid., 54–55.

3. Niebuhr means throughout a German league, each of which was equal to 3.25 English miles or 5.23 of today's kilometers. For a full discussion of the various measures used in the eighteenth century, see the chapter on the Delta.

diverted to Rashid, and the latter city had become the entrepôt for merchandise moving between Cairo and the Mediterranean. There were consuls representing France and Venice in the city, as well as European merchants to see their merchandise onward to Alexandria or the Levant. The Europeans living in the city believed it was the site of the ancient seaport of Canopus, and twenty marble columns had been unearthed nearby that year and sent to Cairo. Niebuhr, able to take sightings again, determined that Rashid was at latitude 31° 24' 21". Perched on a height on the western bank of the river, it had a "charming view of the *Nile* and the Delta."[4] Baurenfeind sketched a view of the city that appears as Plate VI in vol. I of the *Travels*.

The members of the expedition stayed with the Franciscans, the first of many such sojourns with Catholic religious orders in the East. They found the inhabitants of the city to be friendly, unusual enough in Egypt that Niebuhr made a note of it, and remarked that they wished that their stay could have been longer. But they were in some haste to reach Cairo, and on the 6th of November they left Rashid in a small flat-bottomed boat. Niebuhr took one sighting ashore near Deirut, but for the rest of the time was content to note the changes in the course of the river with his pocket compass and the elapsed time from bend to bend. But in this preliminary gathering of information the boatman was not cooperative, and "couldn't, or perhaps wouldn't" remember the names of the villages they passed. Pirates infested this stretch of the river and they posted an armed sentry at night. The obvious presence of Europeans in the boat was both a temptation and a deterrent, the prospect of plunder not being outweighed by the probability that the passengers were armed. The thieves were as at home in the water as the Europeans were on land, and would slip aboard unnoticed and even steal items from under the heads of passengers while they slept. So they often sailed at night, which made careful observation impossible and Niebuhr's detailed map of this part of the river was made only after several short trips he made while they were in Cairo.

Niebuhr's Sources on Egypt

In spite of Michaelis's comment above, Niebuhr suggests that the country was "very little known," at least to Europeans. What was the information about Egypt available to Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century? A review of the sources Niebuhr himself used in the preparation of the *Travels* will help to answer the question. A first group are the ancient authors, most of them Greek and Roman, including Strabo, Arrien, Pliny, Herodotus,

4. *Travels,* vol. I, 57.

Ptolemy, Agatharcides, Aristophanes, Diodorus Siculus, Curtius, Xenophon, Nearchus, and the anonymous author of the *Periplus of the Erythrian Sea*. The Greek Strabo (63 BC to 21 AD, est.) was the most catholic of the ancient geographers in terms of the breadth of his interests, which included history, ethnology, anthropology, and botany as well as geography. His seventeen-volume *Geography* included an account of Egypt, based on his residence there in 25–24 BC, during which time he ascended the Nile as far as the first cataract at Aswan. With regard to the location of certain of the ancient cities of the country, Strabo had stated that the Pyramids could be seen from Babylon and that Memphis was opposite that city, details that were important in establishing the site of the former capital of the country. Pliny the Elder, or Gaius Plinius Secundus, (23–79 AD), the Roman historian whose *Natural History* also survived, is cited by Niebuhr for his testimony that the Pyramids of Giza lay between Memphis and the Delta. As we will see below, the location of Memphis was still a matter of controversy in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Claudius Ptolemaeus (100–165? AD), or Ptolemy, was the Egyptian astronomer and geographer, who left a thirteen-part *Geography*, including maps and latitudes and longitudes, with a part devoted to Egypt. Ptolemy placed Memphis at latitude 29˚ 50',[5] important in that it showed the city to be well south of the bifurcation of the Nile. Flavius Arrianus, or Arrian, of Nicodemia (96–180 AD) whose most important work was the *Anabasis of Alexander*, was the most trustworthy source on Alexander the Great. We have already seen above his contributions to the history of Alexandria. Another contributor was Diodorus Siculus, a Roman and contemporary of Julius Caesar, who traveled to Egypt in 59 BC and, among other things, identified forty-seven tombs in the Valley of the Kings. His *Bibliotheca* included a description of Egyptian ruins. There were other sources as well, including Plutarch and Ammianus Marcellinus, who had contributed to Western knowledge of the ancient Egyptians and all these sources became available to western scholars of the Renaissance when the works of the ancients were opened again to critical examination. They were also available to Niebuhr in the preparation of his *Travels* and *Description*, some in the small traveling library the expedition carried with it. Most, we suspect, he found in the Royal Library in Copenhagen after his return.

5. Niebuhr himself, in spite of the fact that he correctly placed Memphis to the south of Cairo in the neighborhood of Saqqara, did not visit the site and so could not take his own sighting. However, he determined that the latitude of Cairo as 30° 2' 57" and this geographical evidence buttressed his argument that Memphis was not located in the neighborhood of Giza as some maintained.

But the greatest resource available to scholars was, surprisingly, Herodotus of Halicarnassus. Herodotus (484–25 BC) was the earliest of the classical sources, although even his account, dating from the mid-fifth century BC during the Persian period in Egypt, was written two thousand years after the building of the pyramids at Giza. The "father of history" has always been controversial, and he remains controversial to this day. A reading of his account of Egypt, largely comprising Book Two in *The Histories*, where he covers plant and animal life, the rise of the Nile, religion, the hieroglyphs, the major monuments, and quasi-historical anecdotes, demonstrates why. The mixture of fact with what appears to be patent fiction, involves him and the reader in a little conspiracy: it is difficult to believe that he doesn't know that he is putting the reader on. It is equally hard to believe that Herodotus doesn't know that the reader knows it too. He is careful to couch the most fantastic of his tales in the language of a reporter, claiming that he really doesn't believe them himself, but is only relating what others have said. This allows him to weave his characteristic tapestry, part fact, part fiction, part folk-tale, without being answerable for the result.

Credulous he is not. His claim to have ascended the Nile as far as Aswan appears dubious, if only because he doesn't describe the monuments at Thebes. But many details in his description of Egypt we now know to be accurate: his careful description of the sacred ibis, the widespread use of barley beer, the eleven fathoms of muddy bottom a day's sail from the mouth of the Nile, the "black and friable" earth of the alluvium, the "sacred and common writing," the lower half of the pyramid of Mycerinus being cased with "Ethiopian stone" (red granite), among many others. These details could have been gleaned from other sources, and there are those who suggest that Herodotus never visited Egypt at all. But they are enough for some to substantiate his claim that he saw the country with his own eyes, sometime between 450 and 430 BC.

His history—probably learned from the priests of Hephaestus at Memphis—is confused, although he has the broad outline and many details right: his identification of the first king with Min is commonly accepted today in its variations as *the* 1st Dynasty Pharaoh. But his chronology is convoluted, covering "three hundred and thirty monarchs in the same number of generations," before arriving at "Sesostris, who succeeded them."[6] He correctly identifies the 4th dynasty Pharaohs Cheops (Khufu), Khephren (Khaphre) and Mycerinus (Menkaure) as the builders of the pyramids at Giza. But before reaching the 4th dynasty he has passed through Pheros, Proteus,

6. Sesostris appears to be an amalgamation of the 12th–dynasty pharaohs Senrowset I and Senrowset II with 19th-dynasty Ramesses II. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt.

and Rhampsinitus, all Greco-Egyptian folkloric blends with no historical basis in fact. He has also digressed into a discussion of Helen and Homer, and the impulse to weave into the history of Egypt details from his own national epic appeared as irresistible to this fifth-century BC Asiatic Greek as it would later to Jewish and Christian apologists. Herodotus also placed Memphis in the narrowest part of Egypt, lending further support to the contention that it lay south of Giza.

Niebuhr cites Herodotus for his statement that Egyptians made yearly pilgrimages to the cities of Heliopolis, and Busbastis and Busiris in the Delta.[7] The Delta seemed to Niebuhr to be less favored than Upper Egypt for the preservation of ruins, if only because of the greater population and the natural tendency to re-use the building materials from the ancient monuments. However, in his map of the Delta (see Chapter 10 below) he has indicated where there are "unmistakable monuments of ancient cities,"[8] and he suggests that the upper Delta is a rich vein for those interested in the location of the ancient cities of the country. Also interesting from our point of view, Niebuhr suggests that the modern city of Samanud is the old city of Sebennytos, the birthplace of Manetho. These citations generally have to do with geography, not surprising given Niebuhr's interests.

A second group of Niebuhr's sources is made up of the medieval historians and travelers, Arab and otherwise. The earliest appears to be the Egyptian Sa'id bin al-Bitraq (died 939 AD), alias the Patriarch Eutychius of Alexandria. His *Eutychii Annales*, or the "Annals of Eutychius,"[9] was an early purportedly historical text, beginning with creation and ending with the reign of the Caliph al-Radi in the tenth century AD, to which an Arabic history of Sicily was appended. Along with the chronologies it included lives of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Antioch, a chapter on "the Knowledge of Our Lord Christ," and chapters on the periods of Diocletian and Eutychius himself. The complete document was translated into Latin by Edward Pococke (see below) as *Contexio Gemmarium*, published in two volumes in 1658. It was a source document widely used by early Orientalists. Niebuhr cites it as evidence in his discussion of the relative location of the cities of Babylon and Memphis. Eutychius says that one crossed the Nile in going from Babylon to Alexandria and thus, Niebuhr reasoned, Babylon must have been on the east bank of the river. It could not therefore, be the same location as that of the ancient city of Memphis, which was on the west bank. We now know this to be true.

7. *Travels*, vol. I, 98.
8. Ibid., 96.
9. In Arabic known as the *Nizam al-Jawhar*, or the "System of the Essential."

Abu 'Abdullah Mohammed b. Idris al-Hamudi, or Sherif Idrisi, was another medieval historian and geographer. He was born in Ceuta in Morocco in 493 AH (1100 AD) and spent many years at the court of Roger II of Sicily. There, in 1154 he completed the *Kitab Rudjar*, or the "Book of Roger," a description of the world and probably the most important medieval work of geography. It was synopsized in Rome in 1619 and translated into imperfect Latin as *Geographia Nubiensis* by the Maronites Gabriel Sionita and Johannes Hesronita. Although incomplete and inaccurate, it was used widely by early Orientalists and was one of their most important early sources. Even in the middle of the eighteenth century, after the rise of Protestant Orientalism, Rome remained an important center for Oriental studies. As we have seen, von Haven spent time in the Eternal City preparing for the expedition, studying Syriac and Arabic at the *Collegeo Maronitico*. The Church still had important contacts in eastern societies through its missionary and educational work, and Rome still had lessons to teach those interested in Oriental studies.

Interestingly, Rome was also home to the greatest collection of Egyptian obelisks in the world, Egypt not excepted. They were thirteen in number and had been removed in Roman times. Most had fallen during the centuries of turmoil following the fall of the Empire, and laid buried for centuries before renewed interest in antiquities beginning in the sixteenth century had rescued them. The obelisk in Piazza San Giovanni in the Lateran, for example, the largest of all surviving obelisks, was removed from Karnak and taken to Rome in 357 AD. It fell at some unknown date and was only rediscovered in the sixteenth century, lying seven meters beneath the surface in the marshes near the Circus Maximus. It was re-erected in 1588. The story helps to explain why some of the early European attempts at reproducing the hieroglyphs were so clumsy: these prodigious masses, most of them covered with hieroglyphs, were unseen, hidden beneath the debris of centuries. Niebuhr cites the *Geographia Nubiensis* as incontestable evidence of the location of the city of Heliopolis.

Another medieval Arab source was Isma'il Imad ad-Din al-Aiyubi (1273–1331), or Abulfeda, a prince, historian, and geographer. Born in Damascus of a branch of the Egyptian Aiyubides, where the family had fled after their overthrow by the first of the Mamluks, he served in various capacities including that of governor of Hama, eventually acquiring the titles al-Malik and al-Saleh and the hereditary title of Sultan. But he is primarily known as a scholar and his geography, *Takwim al-Buldan* (or "Survey of the Countries") was completed in 1321 AD. Latin translations of the geography

appeared in Europe as early as 1650,[10] and one of the early chapters on Egypt is cited by Niebuhr as evidence of the location of Memphis.

We have already seen the dubious contributions of Benjamin of Tudela, or Rabbi Benjamin, the twelfth century traveler from Tudela in Navarre. Although Tudela was an early prize of the *reconquista* and had been in Christian hands since the ninth century, it had been a dependency of the Cordoba Caliphate and retained a large Moorish quarter. It is probably there whence Rabbi Benjamin came. He traveled with the intention of seeing synagogues all over the world and his itinerary suggested that he visited central Europe, Greece, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Ethiopia, India, and Egypt, although there is some question as to whether he saw many of these places with his own eyes. He wrote his account in Hebrew in 1160. It was printed in Constantinople only in 1543 and translated into Latin in 1575 by Arius Montanus.[11] There appears to be no doubt that Rabbi Benjamin actually was in Egypt and he provides valuable information on the location of Jewish monuments in Cairo. His contribution to ancient Egyptian history was more problematic.

Leo Africanus, or al-Hasan al-Wazzan al-Ziyati, was an Arab geographer of the sixteenth century. He was born in Grenada in 1496, of a distinguished Moorish family, shortly after completion of the re-conquest. He was taken to Africa as an infant and educated at Fez. He later accompanied an uncle as the envoy of the sovereign of Fez to Timbuktu, beginning a life of travel that took him throughout the Muslim world. He visited most of North Africa, Arabia, Persia, Armenia, Syria, and Egypt in various capacities, private as well as diplomatic and official. In 1517 he was captured by Christian corsairs and taken to Rome where Pope Leo X recognized him as a man of learning and settled on him a considerable pension. He learned Latin and Italian and converted to Christianity, taking the Pope's name as his own. His *Description of Africa*, written in Arabic, secured him the title "the African." He translated it himself into Italian in 1526 and, although it was full of grammatical errors, it came to the attention of Ramusio, the compiler of one of the great compendia of travels, who included it in his *Navigationi*. It was translated into French as the *Description de l'Afrique* in 1536. This is surely the version Niebuhr used. The editor advertised that no one had yet described that part of the world with so much detail, accuracy, and truth. It was a judgment widely shared and the work was translated into Latin, Dutch, English, and German and heavily used by European scholars. However, after the death of Leo X, the African fell from favor. He returned

10. It is probably the version printed by Gagnier in Oxford in 1723 to which Niebuhr refers.

11. The Latin was translated into French and included in Bergeron's *Recueil de voyages*, and it is probably this translation to which Niebuhr refers.

to Tunis and died a Muslim in 1585. Niebuhr refers to him for evidence of the development of the city of Cairo.

Another Oriental source was the Latin translation of the life of Salah ad-Din by Baha ad-Din Yusuf Ibn Shaddad, an Arab biographer born in Mosul in 1145 AD. He was appointed Qadi al-Askar[12] of Jerusalem in 1190 by Salah ad-Din, shortly after the city was recaptured from the Crusaders. He died in 1235. His chief work was this biography which was translated into Latin by the Dutch Orientalist Albert Schultens[13] as *Index geogr. in vitam Salidini*. Niebuhr cites the work as evidence of the location of the city of Heliopolis and of the building program of Salah ad-Din in Cairo. Finally, there was Ibn Yousef al-Mukadessi Marai, whose *histoire des Soverains de l'Egypte*, was translated into German by Reiske, whom we will see later as one of Niebuhr's collaborators in his own works. It was cited by Niebuhr as a source for the Fatimid building period in Cairo.

The members of the Danish expedition were, of course, only the latest in a long line of Europeans that had sojourned in Egypt. There had been many travelers to the country between Rabbi Benjamin and the Danish expedition in the mid-eighteenth century, and many had left interesting accounts. Many of these accounts were also cited by Niebuhr as he prepared his *Travels.* We have already referred to Bernhard von Breitenbach, the German from Mainz who traveled to Egypt in 1484 and whose account appeared soon thereafter in Latin and German. The Polish Prince Radziwil, the Duke of Olica and Nieswitz, was a famous sixteenth century traveler who traveled to the Holy Land and then Egypt in 1583. His *Voyage to Jerusalem* was published in Polish, which was afterwards translated into Latin in 1601. These early Europeans, with their religious and cultural provincialism, tended to see Egypt through the lens of the biblical story of the bondage, a distortion rather like viewing an object through the wrong end of a telescope: it diminished rather than enlarged the object. The Arabs, whose tradition of history was not dominated by the story in the Hebrew Scriptures (although Muslims accepted its broad outlines), were more matter-of-fact about Egypt. However, beginning with the seventeenth century, this European view had begun to change and much valuable work was done in the few European sources that did exist. John Greaves, Thomas Hyde and Edward Pococke, in particular, made major contributions to a scientific understanding of the monuments of ancient Egypt.

12. Literally, "the judge of the army," the position later became important in the Ottoman times as an effective vice-chancellor of the Empire. Traditionally a Qadi al-Askar, or *Qazasker*, was appointed for each of the Asian and European parts of the Empire, respectively Anatolia and Rumelia. Rumelia was the senior position.

13. See Introduction.

Greaves (1602–1652) was an English mathematician who, in addition to his scientific pursuits, studied Oriental languages and was able to read works on astronomy in the original Arabic, Persian, and Greek. He was a contemporary of Archbishop Laud (see below) who became a supporter, and in 1638 he traveled to the East, including a visit to Egypt in his itinerary. Greaves spent his time in Cairo measuring the pyramids and collecting Oriental manuscripts. He was a precursor to Niebuhr in that he viewed the monuments in a spirit of scientific detachment and mathematical precision, carrying with him "a radius of ten Feet most accurately divided into Ten thousand Parts." His survey of the pyramids was the most thorough to date. He returned to England in 1640 and was chosen Sullivan Professor of Astronomy at Oxford. In 1646 he published his *Pyramidographica*. However in the general religious ferment of the age, he suffered from the opprobrium attached to those with too latitudinarian an approach to the subject of the Orient. His rooms were ransacked and many of his manuscripts were lost. The *Miscellaneous Works of John Greaves* was published posthumously in 1737 and was used by Niebuhr in the preparation of his own works.

Thomas Hyde (1636–1703) was another English Orientalist who brought a spirit of scientific detachment to the subject of the Orient. His career was like many of those we have already seen, beginning with an interest in religious matters before expanding into an interest in a more secular Orient. He matriculated at Oxford, devoting himself to Persian and assisting in the publication of Persian and Syriac versions of the Bible. In 1658 he became a reader in Hebrew at Queens College, received his MA in 1659 and was subsequently appointed keeper of the Bodleian Library. After taking orders, he occupied a series of religious posts before succeeding Edward Pococke as Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford in 1691. He then held the post of secretary and interpreter in Oriental languages to the government under Charles II, James II, and William II and was regarded as the greatest expert on Oriental subjects in Europe. In 1700 he published his most important work, *Historia religionis veterum Persarum eurumque majorum*, the first attempt to treat the subject of the ancient Persian religion in a scholarly way. He also published the text and translation of an Arabic treatise on astronomy by Ulugh Beg bin Shah Rukh[14] on the celestial latitude and lon-

14. He was the fifteenth century ruler of Turkestan and Transoxiana. Born in 1393, he was an astronomer, artist and theologian, and he is credited with making of Samarkand what Timur had only dreamed of. His astronomical work was particularly valuable, developing powerful new instruments and building an observatory in Samarkand, correcting the observations of Ptolemy in the process. He was less successful in statecraft and suffered from the ingratitude and eventual rebellion of a son who had him overthrown and executed in 1449.

gitude of the fixed stars. Hyde intended to publish a later compendium of various Oriental subjects. Death cut short the intention although Gregory Sharpe gathered together some of the parts and had them published in 1767 as *Syntagma Dissertationum et Opuscula*.

Another of the early pioneers was Edward Pococke (1604–1691) the great English Orientalist whose research, in the words of P. M. Holt, "marked the emancipation of scholarship from bigotry and who, with the other great Orientalists of his time, laid the foundations of the modern understanding of Islam, its history and its culture."[15] Pococke was ordained in 1629 and shortly after was posted as chaplain to the Levant Company in Aleppo. He returned in 1636 to the newly established Chair of Arabic at Oxford, created especially for him by William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury and a great supporter of Oriental studies. Laud would later be tried and executed by the Long Parliament, in 1645, which put the whole subject of Oriental studies in jeopardy. The attitudes of the traditionalist, broad-minded clergy were increasingly out of favor with the Presbyterians and Puritans. Pococke survived the purge and devoted the remainder of his life to scholarship and publication. Like many other early Orientalists, he was a clergyman and he survived the vicissitudes both of the religious controversies that swirled about Oriental studies, as well as the increasing focus on science, which began to eclipse the traditional interest in languages. Pococke was widely quoted by Sale in the latter's *Preliminary Discourse* to the Koran. The *Specimen historiae Arabum* for which Pococke is primarily known, an excerpt from the Arabic *al-Muktassar fi'l dowal* of Abu'l Faraj b. al-Ibri, or *Bar Hebraeus* was, again in Holt's words, "profoundly erudite in content and noncontroversial in tone."

The above travelers and scholars had all contributed to a growing body of knowledge about Egypt in the middle of the eighteenth century. But the most detailed were the accounts of Norden and Richard Pococke, and to the latter Niebuhr owed his greatest debt. It is probably no accident that they were also the least credulous of travelers. We have already mentioned Frederick Ludwig Norden (1708–1742), the officer in the Royal Danish Navy who was dispatched on the first Royal Danish Expedition to Egypt in 1737. He sketched the antiquities of Alexandria before proceeding to Cairo where he arrived on July 7th, 1737. In the vicinity of the capital he examined the pyramid complexes of Giza and Dahshur, and he may have stumbled on the truth when he pronounced that the pyramids of "Dagjour" (Dahshur) had "suffered more, since they are more damaged: from whence one may presume that they are more ancient" than those of Giza. Built by Sneferu,

15. Holt, *Studies in the History of the Near East*.

the first pharaoh of the 4th dynasty and the immediate predecessor of Cheops, they were, in fact, earlier than those of Giza and inaugurated the age of the great pyramids. Norden quoted Herodotus on his (correct) assertion that the three major pyramids at Giza were built by Cheops, Khephren and Mycerinus.[16] He also offered the opinion that the age of the pyramids was much greater than commonly accepted:

> We must absolutely throw back the first epocha of the pyramids into times of so remote antiquity that the vulgar chronology would find a difficulty to fix the aera of them.[17]

Norden left for Upper Egypt in November of 1737, where he continued his mapmaking and sketching, eventually reaching Aswan in December of that year. He kept a detailed journal and filled it with impressions, maps and sketches of Meydum, Assiut, Karnak, Luxor, Esna, Edfu, and Aswan. At "Lukoreen" (Luxor) he was certain, correctly, that he saw the remains of ancient Thebes. The expedition returned to Cairo in February 1738, passing Pococke at Esna on the return journey down the Nile, and to Copenhagen later in the same year. His Egyptian material remained unpublished after his return to Denmark although he translated his journal into French. He was later assigned to England as part of his naval duties and was elected a member of the Royal Society in 1741. Norden attracted considerable attention with his publication in English in 1742 of *Drawings of some Ruins and Colossal Statues at Thebes in Egypt*. He died of consumption in February 1742 at the age of just thirty-four. But his unfinished work was entrusted by King Frederick V to the Danish Academy of Letters and Sciences and published in 1755 in French as *Voyage d'Egypte et de Nubie*. It was translated into English as *Travels in Egypt and Nubia*, appearing in 1757. In spite of the fact that Norden was a Dane, sent to Egypt on another Danish expedition, there is surprisingly little reference to Norden in Niebuhr's account. Niebuhr refers to Norden's description of the facing of the "second pyramid," where, as we have seen, Norden himself, having read his Herodotus, refers to the three pyramids at Giza by name.

But Niebuhr owed his greatest debt of all to Richard Pococke (1704–65), the English traveler and divine who is not to be confused with, or apparently related to, the Edward Pococke we saw above. Niebuhr remarks that Pococke "examined everything with so much care and intelligence, and

16. See Herodotus, *The Histories,* Book 2, 131–33. The first direct proof, other than Herodotus, of the names of the builders came only in 1837. In that year Howard Vyse blasted out entrances to three relieving chambers of the first pyramid. Hieroglyphics left by workmen in one of the chambers included the royal name of Cheops and this confirmed that he had built the pyramid. See Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids*.

17. Norden, *Travels in Egypt and Nubia,* vol. I, 109

of all of them left the most complete account."[18] As mentioned above, he was in Egypt in 1737, and made a tour of the country, examining Alexandria, "Grand Cairo," and the Giza complex. He, too, names the builders of the great pyramids as reported by Herodotus. He visited Memphis, correctly identifying its location on the west bank of the Nile, the subject of an ongoing controversy. He also saw Saqqara, Dahshur, and Fayoum where he searched for the famous labyrinth. As mentioned above, he passed Norden in Upper Egypt late in the year and ascended the Nile as far as Ethiopia, examining the granite quarries, Philae, and the cataracts. Along the way he stopped at Thebes and measured some of the ruins at Karnak. From Upper Egypt he returned to Cairo before proceeding to Arabia Petraea and Mount Sinai, where he speculated on the journey of the children of Israel during the Exodus. He returned to England in 1742 via, among other places, Jerusalem, Baalbeck, and Cyprus. In 1743 he published *A Description of the East*, which was far superior to the usual traveler's fare on the Near East. No less a critic than Gibbon described it as "of superior learning and dignity."[19] Pococke's works would be Niebuhr's constant companion during the sojourn in Egypt, perhaps a part of small traveling library the expedition carried.

The many accounts of Egypt occasionally sparked controversy, and Pococke and Thomas Shaw (1694–1751) tilted in print over the location of Memphis. Shaw was an English traveler and antiquary who began his career in the East, like so many others we have seen, as a man of the cloth. He was made chaplain to the English factory at Algiers in 1720 and traveled widely from that base, going to Egypt, Sinai, and Cyprus in 1721 and afterwards to Jerusalem, Palestine, and North Africa. Returning to England in 1733, he was made a fellow of Queens College, Oxford and a member of the Royal Society. He published his *Travels or Observations Relating to Several Parts of Barbary and the Levant* in 1738. Parts of it were challenged by Richard Pococke, and Shaw issued supplements in 1746 and 1747 which were included in the second edition of the book. Niebuhr refers to the dispute between Shaw and Pococke over the location of the ancient Memphis. Pococke was closer to the truth, placing Memphis on the west bank of the Nile near Mitrahina while Shaw maintained that it was located at Giza. That did not prevent the authors of *An Universal History from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time*[20] from coming down on the side of Shaw:

18. Pococke, *A Description of the East*, 43.

19. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall, of the Roman Empire,* Chapter li, n. 69.

20. The work of many contributors, the *Universal History* was a multi-volume compendium first published in England in 1736–44 and afterwards updated frequently. The first eighteen volumes were of ancient history from the Flood to the early Christian period, "drawn from the most authentic documents of every nation." The modern portion

> The city of Memphis was in the same place as the present village of *Geeza*. This we learn from Dr. Shaw, whose observations on Egypt and Arabia Petrea are more worthy of praise, and preferable to those of all modern accounts for their truth, at least plausbility, erudition, accuracy, and judgment . . . in a word, his book still stands up after all the envious and malicious attacks, whose authors have taken up their pens to imitate or discredit him, and have sunk into the oblivion, or at least are read with the contempt that they so rightly deserve.[21]

Niebuhr is plainly scandalized by the dispute and the strength of the emotions it excited. Greater men than Shaw have maintained equally wrongheaded notions, and one is reminded of Richard Burton's dispute with Speake over the source of the Nile. It was Sieur de Villamont, who arrived in Egypt in 1590, who is credited with first placing Memphis at its correct site to the west of the river and south of Giza. But this did not end the controversy and in the eighteenth century we find Pococke and Shaw still at each other's throats over the issue. After reviewing the available evidence, Niebuhr casts his vote, correctly in this case, for Pococke and Villamont.

Finally, with Jacob Bryant, we will complete our review of the near-contemporaries of Niebuhr and their contributions to the nascent discipline of Egyptology. It will represent a return from the secularists to a man who attempted to reconcile what he knew of ancient history with the Hebrew Scriptures. Bryant is a relative modern, and his syncretic effort demonstrates that such attempts depended not on the century or the state of knowledge or the scientific temper of the age, but on the predilections of the author. The effort to reconcile secular with what purported to be sacred history would continue in the nineteenth century with a figure like Piazzi Smyth who as we have seen, was the national astronomer of Scotland, and the twentieth with Flinders Petrie, probably the greatest of all Egyptologists. This was long after advances in Egyptology and geology, to name only two disciplines, had armed scholars with the tools to better disentangle historical fact from legend.

Bryant was a Fellow of Kings College, Cambridge and former Secretary to the Duke of Marlborough. His *Observations Relating to the Various Parts of Ancient History* published in Cambridge in 1767, is probably as

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in 42 volumes, *The Modern Part of a Universal Modern History*, covered the period from the rise of Mohammed to the then present day. The complete sixty-volume set contained an astonishing 128 million words, and served as a kind of eighteenth-century precursor to the Internet. Niebuhr probably used the German translation *Algemeine Welt-historie von Angebum der Welt bis auf gegenwaertige zeit* (Halle, 1744–91). Like the English editions it had a modern supplement, *Historie der Neuern Zeiten.*

21. Quoted by Niebuhr in *Travels,* vol. I, 104.

close as any of the works we have seen in attempting to reconcile science with the Bible. It would be difficult to imagine a more rigorous proponent of the type. After animadversions on the lack of rigor of those attempting to establish the place of residence of the Israelites in Egypt, Bryant goes on to state in the preface that there *are* sources that have never been contested, one of those being the Bible.

But Bryant exceeded even himself with his later syncretic work, *A New System, or, an Analysis of Ancient Mythology* published in 1774–76. A sampling of the part on Egypt is probably not untypical of a certain kind of contemporary Egyptology:

> The Mizraim seem to have retired to their place of allotment a long time before these occurrences (note: dispersion of the Cushites) . . . The country, of which they were seized, was that which in aftertimes had the name of Upper Egypt. They called it the Land of Mezor . . . The lower region was a great morass, and little occupied . . . In the process of time, the Mizraim were divided into several great families, such as the Napthuhim, Lehabim, Ludum, Pathrusin, and others . . . At last, the Titanic brood, the Cushites, being driven from Babylonia, fled to different parts: and one very large body of them betook themselves to Egypt . . . They took Memphis with ease, which was then the frontier town in Egypt . . . There are many fragments of ancient history, which mention the coming of the Cushites from Babylonia into the land of the Mizraim . . . An account of this sort is to be found in Suidas. He tells us that Ramesses, the son of Belus (of Babylonia) who was the son of Zeuth, came into the region called Mestraea, and gained sovereignty over the people of the country. He was the person whom they afterwards called Aegyptus and the region was denominated from him.[22]

The conflation of Hebrew, Babylonian, Greek, and Egyptian myth and its repackaging as historical truth was typical of the effort, although it was not without a hint of truth. Egyptian prehistory shows unmistakable, although still puzzling, signs of Mesopotamian influence.[23] Needless to say, Bryant was not a traveler but a compiler and the work had the decided odor of the study, not the field. He did use sources that were legitimate in spite of his penchant for wrong-headed synthesis. The history of Egypt, by far the largest of the treatises, is largely devoted to the period when the Israelites were purportedly

22. Bryant, vol. II., 233–35.

23. See Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 397–98.

in the country. Niebuhr obviously read the book after his return. It does not appear to have colored his views of ancient Egypt, as we will see below.

We left Niebuhr and his companions adrift on the river in early November, the north wind in the winter an ally as they beat against the strong current of the Nile. Occasionally it was necessary for the boatmen to land and drag the flat-bottomed boat with ropes when the wind died down. On the 7th of the month in the vicinity of Deirout, finding the inhabitants friendly, Niebuhr took out his instruments and established the latitude of the place as 31° 13'. It was the last observation he would take before they reached Cairo, and he reverted to the practice of simply noting the bearing of the bends in the river and elapsed time between landmarks. He was not the first to notice the lush verdure on either side of the river, the flat-roofed huts made of unbaked brick, and the date groves and pigeon cotes rising above the level surface of the Delta. They arrived at Bulaq, the port of Cairo, on the evening of the 10th of November, 1761 and settled down for an enforced stay of nearly a year. Egypt was an afterthought in the expedition to Happy Arabia. As we have seen, had it not been for Hussein Bey Kashkasha's decision to brook no further extortion from the Bedouins of the Hejaz, Europe might have been deprived of Carsten Niebuhr's careful observations in the country. The world of scholarship can be grateful for Hussein Bey's truculence.