

Islamic History and Civilization

Studies and Texts

Editorial Board

Sebastian Günther
Wadad Kadi

VOLUME 83

BUILDING AN EGYPTIAN IDENTITY

Petra M. Sijpesteijn

Ask Mount Muqattam about the people who lived in the past: they have perished and all that remains of them is stones. Ask about Dalūka and the dam she built...¹

Ancient Egypt was a world largely closed to Egyptian Muslims. By the time of the Arab conquest, the ability to read hieroglyphs had long been lost and the meaning of the writings along with it.² Evidence for the understanding and use of ancient Egyptian learning peters out even before the Christian period.³ And yet the remains of Egypt's pharaonic past were everywhere to be seen, imposing and enigmatic, demanding explanation. Muslim reactions to all this were mixed.

On the one hand, the press was not good. The depiction of Fir'awn in the Qur'ān⁴ as the tyrant Pharaoh who terrorized Moses and his people until God suffered him to drown in the Red Sea in pursuit of the Israelites did the pharaohs no favors.⁵ Egyptian iconography, ubiquitous in the landscape, also posed a problem. The relentlessly anthropomorphizing nature of the ancient Egyptian pantheon, with its bizarre and unsettling animal-headed gods, only underscored the barbarously pagan character of its civilization.

¹ Tāj al-'Ulā Ashraf al-Ramli, cited by al-Idrisi, *Anwār 'ulwī l-ajrām*, 153.

² This is so despite al-Mas'ūdī's claim (*Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:401–2) that he has heard from a saint in Akhmīm what the "ancient writings" in some of the temples say. Elsewhere the same al-Mas'ūdī writes that the inscriptions and pictures that cover the excavated pharaonic statues "cannot be read by anyone of any of the religions," while "knowledgeable men claim that the writing disappeared from Egypt four thousand years ago" (*Murūj*, 2:419).

³ As shown by Cook, "Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt." However, see Haarmann, "Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt," and "Medieval Muslim Perceptions of Pharaonic Egypt," 618–20.

⁴ In the Islamic tradition Pharaoh has become a personal name rather than a title, referring to the ruler of Egypt at the time of Moses.

⁵ "Pharaoh" continues to be used to describe political leaders deemed un-Islamic in their behavior. Most famously the leader of the murderers of Egypt's president Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 called out after the killing "My name is Khalid al-Islambuli. I have killed Pharaoh. I am not afraid to die."

And yet on the other hand, ancient Egypt could not fail to impress. Its monumental remains conjured a glorious past of fantastically rich and potent rulers, possessed of resources and technological finesse of magical power. This impression gave rise to a genre of fantastical stories which traded on the supernaturally sophisticated know-how of the ancient Egyptians and the awe-inspiring strength of their rulers. At first sight, these stories seem to have functioned largely as entertainment, isolating ancient Egyptian history into a long-ago past, mythical and picturesque, distant and unconnected to the Egypt of their own times.⁶ But, as I will argue in this paper, more than this was going on.

One of the pre-Islamic monuments that found itself mythologized in this way was the so-called "Old Lady's Wall."⁷ The journey of the wall through the early Muslim imagination nicely highlights both the ambivalence with which Egypt's new conquerors confronted the country's rich and complex legacy, but also how, via this process, they developed a sense of identity as Egyptians, conjoined with and yet differentiated from their Arab neighbors. This identity was not built on an uninterrupted continuity with pharaonic Egypt or even on pre-Islamic memory. Rather it was the result of an active process of islamicization in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, in which the Egyptian landscape and its pre-Islamic history were absorbed, in often markedly re-envisioned form, into the Islamic project. In this extension of the Islamic conquest into Egypt's past, a new history was written for Egypt, in which its pre-Islamic heritage became an integral part of the country's path to the Muslim polity it would eventually become.

The case of the Old Lady's Wall belongs to this context of a process of colonizing and Islamicizing the Egyptian landscape. This paper will start by tracing the descriptions of the wall through the different accounts over time.⁸ Most importantly, however, it will examine the

⁶ See, for example, the descriptions of the Alexandrian Lighthouse by Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 1:187, and of the Pyramids by al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 2:399–406.

⁷ See Pellat, "Hā'it al-'Adjūz"; Basset, *Mille et un contes, récits et légendes arabes*, 97–98; idem, "légendes," 41; Maspero and Wiet, *Matériaux pour servir à la géographie de l'Égypte*, 72–73; Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī ṭabaqāt rabbāt al-khudūr*.

⁸ Some, however, consider these stories surrounding the wall merely "fantastic, not worth repeating" (*khurāfa lasnā narā dhikrahā*) (Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umārī, *Absār*, 2:306). "I have no idea who built this wall and what it was for in reality," al-'Umārī adds. Al-Tujībī writes after his account of Queen Dalūka that "God knows best," indicating some margin of doubt on his side (*Mustafād*, 172). Ibn Jubayr writes that "many different and divergent things are told about it and only God knows its secret" (*Rihla*, 58).

significance of this story, at the time when it first surfaced in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, for our understanding of the coming into being of an Egyptian Muslim society.

From Iraq to Egypt: the different versions

Most references to the *ḥā'it al-'ajūz* or *jidār al-'ajūz*⁹ appear in the *Faḍā'il Miṣr* ("Merits, Virtues, Excellences of Egypt") sections of books on Egypt, or else in works dedicated wholly to this subject, from the late third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. The virtues or excellences listed concerned Egypt's built and natural environment, its historical monuments, mountains and rivers,¹⁰ as well as events and figures associated with its history. They were taken from *ḥadīths* and related exegetical, historical and anecdotal material.¹¹ The story also figures in chronicles, geographical dictionaries and specialist works on monuments and pilgrimage sites, and in the encyclopaedic works of the later Middle Ages. Not surprisingly, its most extensive treatment is in works by Egyptian authors or writers who visited Egypt. The increased appearance of eyewitness reports in the seventh/thirteenth century gives us a glimpse into the emergence of a new and more

⁹ The wall is also called *sūr*, "dyke" (e.g. al-Idrīsī, *Anwār*, 153; Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharrīda*, 47) and *ḥiṣn* (al-Maqrizī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1:199). An alternative reading replaces *'ajūz*, "old woman," with *ḥajūz*, "barrier" (Ibn al-Faḥh, *Buldān*, 60; Pseudo-Abū Ṣāliḥ, *Churches*, f. 19b; al-Harawī, *Ishārāt*, 113).

¹⁰ See, for example, how in a story set soon after the conquest of Egypt, the Muslims colonize the Muqāṭṭam mountain outside Cairo and establish it as a Muslim graveyard. The Byzantine patriarch explains to the Arab conqueror and first governor of Egypt, 'Amr b. al-Āṣ, why the mountain has such a bold look. When God invited the mountains to honor him with their vegetation, Muqāṭṭam replied with such enthusiasm that it became denuded of all plants. God rewarded the mountain with lush coverage in the afterlife. The Muslims then decided that since only Muslims can enjoy such favorable conditions in the afterlife, the mountain is to be a Muslim graveyard (al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥuṣn al-muḥādāra*, 1:109. See also Sijpesteijn, "Sacrificing a Virgin to the Nile" [forthcoming] for an extensive discussion of this and related anecdotes that appear together on a third/ninth-century Arabic papyrus from Leiden University). That the mountain functioned soon after the arrival of the Arabs as a Muslim graveyard is clear from archeological finds as well as from medieval *ziyārāt* works (Ohtoshi, "Conception of 'Egypt' in the Pre-Modern Period").

¹¹ For this genre, see Sellheim, "Faḍīla"; Cobb, "Virtual Sacrality: Making Syria Sacred Before the Crusades," 38-9; Antrim, "Ibn 'Asākir's Representations of Syria and Damascus," 110-11. For Egypt, see Ibn al-Kindī, *Faḍā'il Miṣr*, 67; Ibn Zabīra, *al-Faḍā'il al-bāhira fī mahāsīn Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, 16-17, 151; Ibn Zūlaq, *Faḍā'il Miṣr*; and the section of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr* dealing with *ba'd faḍā'il Miṣr* (4-7). Cf. Robin, 'Moïses.'

and not fail to impress. of fantastically rich technological finesse of fantastical storied know-how of the of their rulers. At first ly as entertainment, past, mythical and of their own times.⁶ as going on.

itself mythologized The journey of the ely highlights both rors confronted the ia this process, they ed with and yet dif- ity was not built on t or even on pre-Is- e process of islami- uries, in which the e absorbed, in often ct. In this extension tory was written for integral part of the tually become.

context of a proc- dscape. This paper ough the different it will examine the

Lighthouse by Yāqūt, 399-406.

écits et légendes arabes, ur servir à la géographie bāt al-khudūr.

wall merely "fantastic, Allāh al-'Umari, *Absār*, or in reality," al-'Umari hat "God knows best," Ibn Jubayr writes that y God knows its secret"

locally-rooted relationship to Egypt's landscape and past. The personal observations and eye-witness reports that are represented as having preserved the descriptions cannot always be taken at face value as they often confuse different accounts, events, and places. Over the course of time, the story of the "Old Lady's Wall" became embellished and conflated with accounts of other Egyptian monuments. At the same time, current and antiquarian information was mixed without clearly separating them.¹²

The first reference to the Wall that survives comes from the Baṣran *littérateur* al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868–9), who included it among the thirty wonders of the world (a full twenty of which were in Egypt) in his *Kitāb al-buldān*. However, this reference, which does not appear in the preserved portion of the text, is known only from citations in later works.¹³ Al-Jāhiz's description, moreover, is very limited, mentioning solely that the wall extended from al-'Arīsh in the north to Aswān in the south, encircling Egypt in the east and west. Al-Jāhiz's account is quoted exactly by the later authors al-Idrīsī (d. 649/1251), in his *Kitāb Anwār 'ulwī 'l-ajrām fi 'l-kashf 'an asrār al-ahrām*, and Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 930/1524) in his *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fi waqā'i' al-duhūr*.¹⁴

A much more extensive treatment appears in the Egyptian Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's (d. 257/871) *Futūḥ Miṣr*. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam explains that when God destroyed Pharaoh and his companions, only slaves, workmen and women were left in Egypt. It was decided that Dalūka bint Zabbā,¹⁵ a woman of great intelligence and impeccable nobility, would

¹² For this characteristic of the geographical works, see Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 16–17.

¹³ *Wa-minhā [al-ajā'ib] ḥā'it al-'ajūz min al-'Arīsh ilā Aswān tuḥītu bi-arḍ Miṣr sharqan wa-gharban*. The extant part of the work does not contain this fragment (al-Jāhiz, *Rasā'il*, 4:109–51; cf. Pellat, "Jāhiziana III. Essai d'inventaire," 154; idem, "Nouvel essai d'inventaire").

¹⁴ Al-Idrīsī, *Anwār*, 22; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 1:13. The exact phrase (*ḥā'it al-'ajūz min al-'Arīsh ilā Aswān tuḥītu bi-arḍ Miṣr sharqan wa-gharban*) is quoted from Qādī Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qudā'i (d. 453/1062) by Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 2:210, s.v. "ḥā'it al-'ajūz" (see below note 35). Other, later authors mention the Wall more generally among the wonders of Egypt without referring to al-Jāhiz. See, for instance, *wa-min al-'ajā'ib ḥā'it al-'ajūz*, in al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 3:325; Ibn al-Kindī, *Fada'il Miṣr*, 67; al-Ḥarawī, *al-Ishārāt*, 112; Ibn al-Zayyāt, *al-Kawākib*, 11; and *min al-mabānī al-'ajība*, in al-Dīmahqī, *Nukhba*, 34; al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustaṭraf*, 1:628. Ibn Zāhira, *Fada'il*, 151 cites the phrase wordly anonymously.

¹⁵ Her name is written variously as: دلوكة, دلوكة, دلوكة. Alternative names of her father occur such as Zabbā, Zabā (Ibn Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 26, n. 11, 28); Zayyā (Ibn al-Zāhira, *Fada'il*, 16); Rayyā (Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 1:187; Ibn al-Zāhira, *Fada'il*, 16, n. 5); Zaffān (al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1:142).

id past. The personal presented as having at face value as they sees. Over the course me embellished and ments. At the same mixed without clearly

nes from the Baṣran it among the thirty ere in Egypt) in his does not appear in om citations in later limited, mentioning e north to Aswān in Al-Jāhīz's account is 9/1251), in his *Kitāb*, and Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 1100).¹⁴

ie Egyptian Ibn 'Abd Ḥakam explains that s, only slaves, work- led that Dalūka bint cable nobility, would

Humphreys, *Islamic His-*
swān tuḥīṭu bi-arḍ Miṣr
ot contain this fragment d'inventaire," 154; idem,

phrase (*ḥā'it al-'ajūz min n*) is quoted from Qāḍī 2:210, s.v. "ḥā'it al-'ajūz" ore generally among the stance, *wa-min al-'ajā'ib al-Kindī*, *Faḍā'il Miṣr*, 67; *min al-mabānī al-'ajība*, Ibn Zahira, *Faḍā'il*, 151

Alternative names of her *ūh*, 26, n. 11, 28); Zayyā on al-Zahira, *Faḍā'il*, 16,

rule Egypt. This is the point at which the "old lady" enters the story, since, at the time of her accession to the throne, Dalūka was a full 160 years old.¹⁶ Fearing that neighboring rulers would take advantage of Egypt's sudden lack of fighting men by launching an attack, she ordered a defensive wall be built around the country. The wall took six months to build,¹⁷ and enclosed the fields, villages, and cities of Egypt with a large canal crossed by bridges. Guards and lookout posts were placed every three miles, with smaller lookouts at every mile. Each watch post held two soldiers and their provisions. At the first sight of danger, the guards were to ring the alarm bells with which every post was equipped, thereby mobilizing all the other soldiers.¹⁸ Dalūka went on to rule for twenty years and thanks to her foresight, Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam says, Egypt enjoyed four hundred years of security. She carried out a program of repopulation by marrying the free women to manumitted slaves, so that eventually a male successor was old enough to succeed her. One of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's informants, the Egyptian traditionist 'Uthmān b. Ṣāliḥ (d. 219/834), mentioned that large parts of the Wall could still be seen in Upper Egypt.¹⁹ This story is the basis of most later accounts about the Old Lady's Wall and authors include it even when they offer additional information.²⁰

The Wall's next appearance comes with an alternative explanation for its coming into existence. The Iranian geographer Ibn al-Faqīh

¹⁶ It is also said that she was a hundred years old when she came to the throne (Yāqūt, *Buldān*, s.v. "ḥā'it al-'ajūz," 2:209). Her nickname is also derived from the long period that she ruled (al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 3:412; Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, 58 referring to *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*). Her advanced age put Dalūka in a different category from women of childbearing age, making her acceptable as a ruler, albeit only so long as no suitable man was available.

¹⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 27. Because of the large number of men working on it, another source adds (Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 2:210, s.v. "ḥā'it al-'ajūz").

¹⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī writes specifically that the guards were at a distance that could be covered by the voice (*Murūj*, 2:398), or that they used fire at night and smoke during the day to warn each other (*Murūj*, 1:392 cited by al-Nuwayri, *Nihāyat*, 15:138-9). Yāqūt mentions that fires were used at night while bells warned the guards during the day (*Buldān*, 2:209), and Ibn Zahira mentions that there were fires on the watch towers that were never kindled (*Faḍā'il*, 151).

¹⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 27.

²⁰ It is literally repeated by al-Maqrīzī (*Khitaṭ*, 1:38; 142-3; 199), referring to Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, and by al-Suyūṭī (*Husn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:44-5) and Ibn Zahira (*Faḍā'il*, 16-17) who cite it anonymously. Al-Mas'ūdī (*Murūj*, 2:398) and al-Nuwayri (*Nihāyat*, 1:392) use it, as does Yāqūt who has the information on the authority of "others (*ākhirūn*)" (*Buldān*, 2:209). Almost all other accounts on the wall make use of this description.

(d. 290/902) writes in his *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān* that Dalūka, an ancient queen, decided to build the wall on both banks of the river after her son had been killed by a lion (*sab'*), thereby avenging herself on all lions by preventing them from reaching the Nile.²¹ At the same time, Ibn al-Faqīh writes, the wall had a defensive function, either against the Ethiopians,²² the Nubians,²³ or all outside powers who wanted to conquer Egypt overland from the East. It also functioned as a talisman, containing images of the people surrounding Egypt and their preferred beasts of burden, as well as their weapons of choice. Enemy forces approaching Egypt were stopped and destroyed by the power of the images.²⁴ It is also said, Ibn Faqīh reports, that Plato²⁵ built the wall, at the request of some kings, over a length of thirty parasangs between Faramā and Aswān.²⁶

In his *al-Ta'riḫ al-majmū'* (universal history), the chronicler Ibn Baṭrīq, or Eutychios of Alexandria (d. 328/940), tells the same story of a queen building a wall around Egypt to protect it, but in this version the queen is Cleopatra, who ruled Egypt from 69 to 30 BC, and the

²¹ *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 60.

²² *Hājizān baynahum wa-bayna 'l-Ḥabasha*.

²³ To stop the Nubians from raiding Upper Egypt. See also below, n. 63.

²⁴ This information seems to be conflated with the accounts about the temples (*barābī*) in Upper Egypt which had been built at the order of Queen Dalūka by a sorceress and which were said to have been covered by images and filled with statues of "horses, mules, donkeys, ships, men" which were supposed to be directed towards the enemy so as to stop them (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 27-8; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:362, s.v. "Barābī."). Or, alternatively, they were built by the Queen herself and filled with statues of the people that surrounded Egypt and their mounts, as well as images of the people who might attack Egypt from the sea. "So if an army came from the Ḥijāz or Yemen, the images of camels etc. that were in the temples sank [in the sand] and the army with all its people and animals was also destroyed. If the invasion came from Syria the same happened as we have described before, with the images pointing toward the direction the army came from, and the army with its people and beasts was destroyed with the destruction of the images. The same happened with armies arriving from the west and with maritime expeditions arriving from Byzantium and Syria and organized by other kings" (al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 2:399-400; cf. al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 15:138).

²⁵ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 60. In Yāqūt's account, Plato's name is dropped and the wall is built "at the order of several kings." Yāqūt also cites the other accounts which he ascribes to Ibn al-Faqīh (*Buldān*, 2:209; cf. al-Baghdādī, *Marāṣid*, 1:374).

²⁶ Al-Harawī followed the wall for thirty days or less from Bilbays to Aswān (*al-Ishārāt*, 112). When Yāqūt gives a length for the wall he seems to have used both accounts, writing both that it is thirty parasangs and thirty days long (*Buldān*, 2:210), which of course amounts to the same.

īān that Dalūka, an
 aks of the river after
 nging herself on all
 1 At the same time,
 tion, either against
 vers who wanted to
 nctioned as a talis-
 ng Egypt and their
 is of choice. Enemy
 oyed by the power
 hat Plato²⁵ built the
 of thirty parasangs

the chronicler Ibn
 ls the same story of
 , but in this version
 to 30 BC, and the

below, n. 63.
 ants about the temples
 of Queen Dalūka by a
 s and filled with statues
 l to be directed towards
 ; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, 1:362,
 i herself and filled with
 ts, as well as images of
 ny came from the Ḥijāz
 -sank [in the sand] and
 l. If the invasion came
 ith the images pointing
 h its people and beasts
 happened with armies
 g from Byzantium and
 99–400; cf. al-Nuwayrī,

me is dropped and the
 e other accounts which
arāsid, 1:374).
 rom Bilbays to Aswān
 seems to have used both
 ys long (*Buldān*, 2:210),

enemy she seeks to repel is Octavian (later Augustus Caesar).²⁷ The wall extended from Nubia to the Mediterranean, to Faramā in the west and to Alexandria in the east. Ibn Baṭrīq adds that this structure is “now called the Old Lady’s Wall,” implying that it still existed in his time.²⁸

Another explanation for Dalūka’s decision to build the wall is given by the historian al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), who claims to have examined in person the traces of the wall that still existed in 332/943 during his visit to Upper Egypt.²⁹ In his global history, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar* (“The meadows of gold and mines of precious gems”), he writes that Dalūka built the wall to protect her son, whose fondness of hunting, she thought, put him in great danger of being attacked by wild animals or hostile kings and nomads. A protective wall around the country, patrolled by guards within earshot of each other and surrounded by crocodiles and other wild animals, was supposed to keep danger out and her son in.³⁰ The next author to mention the Wall is Ibn al-Kindī (d. ca. 360/970), son of the famous Egyptian chronicler (d. 350/961), who in his *Faḍāʾil Miṣr* only mentions the wall in passing as one of the wonders of Egypt.³¹

From the seventh/thirteenth century onward, versions of the story become more elaborate, with authors describing more details and retelling more variants, including more mundane explanations for the existence of traces of what seems to have formed some sort of continuous wall-like structure in Upper Egypt. Authors from this period also rely more often on their own observations. The traveler Ibn Jubayr (d. 611/1215) visited Upper Egypt in 579/1183 and described a wall extending from the district of Cairo to Aswān on the eastern bank of the Nile, destroyed in parts but whose ruins were visible in other places. In his travel account, Ibn Jubayr quotes from a work called *al-Masālik wa-ʿl-mamālik*³² that the Wall is named after a queen who

²⁷ This version is found again only in Pseudo-Abū Ṣāliḥ, who follows Eutychius exactly in his attribution of the wall to Cleopatra (*Churches*, 170). Pseudo-Abū Ṣāliḥ also mentions that the wall is “nowadays” called *ḥāʾit al-ʾajūz* (*Churches*, 59).

²⁸ Ibn al-Baṭrīq, *Annalenwerk*, §128–9.

²⁹ This is the second explanation he gives, after mentioning that Dalūka was put on the throne after Pharaoh’s death to protect the country and that she built a wall around it. Al-Masʿūdī here relies heavily on Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam’s version (*Murūj*, 2:398).

³⁰ Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, 2:398–9.

³¹ Ibn al-Kindī, *Faḍāʾil Miṣr*, 67.

³² I was unable to track down a reference to the Old Lady’s Wall in any of the known works with this title.

ruled for a long period, but, he adds, "many different and divergent things are told about it and only God knows its secret."³³ Al-Harawī (d. 611/1215), in his pilgrimage guide entitled *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā ma'rifat al-ziyārāt*, writes that "no one can ignore this wall" and followed its trail of traces along the eastern bank of the Nile from Bilbays in the Delta to Nubia, "upon the summits of the mountains and in the depressions of the *wādīs*." Al-Harawī adds that a similar wall is to be found on the western bank. But on the origins of the wall he has little to offer, saying only that "they claim that a woman ruled the land and built the two walls. God knows best."³⁴

The Baghdādī scholar and geographer Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) visited Egypt twice and writes that the Old Lady's Wall "continues to exist in our time," suggesting that he has observed it himself. However, his description consists solely of the earlier accounts of al-Jāhīz,³⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam,³⁶ and Ibn al-Faqīh.³⁷

Almost a century later, the wall functioned in an historical anecdote. In his abridgement of Ibn 'Asākir's monumental history of Damascus (*Mukhtaṣar Ta'riḥ Dimashq li-Ibn 'Asākir*), Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) describes the following event. Zabbān, son of the famous governor of Egypt, 'Abd al-'Azīz (in office 684–705), was murdered in 132/750, it was said, at the *ḥā'it al-'ajūz*. His horse tripped there and broke a leg, allowing his persecutors to catch up with him and dispatch him. Zabbān travelled in the company of the fleeing Umayyad caliph Marwān II (r. 127–132/744–750), who had been seeking refuge in the Upper Egyptian town of Buṣīr.³⁸

The Syrian scholar al-Dimashqī (727/1327), in his *Kitāb Nukhbat al-dahr fī 'ajā'ib al-barr wa-'l-baḥr*, credited Dalūka with two measures to protect Egypt after the destruction of Pharaoh and his men. Beside building the wall from al-'Arīsh to Aswān on the eastern bank of the Nile, she initiated a program of repopulation by manumitting

³³ Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, 58.

³⁴ Al-Harawī, *Ishārāt*, 113.

³⁵ Even though Yāqūt ascribes the account to Qādī Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qudā'ī, the words are exactly those used by al-Jāhīz (see above, n. 14).

³⁶ Following the exact same order, but containing some different formulations and additional information, such as the fact that at night fires were lighted at the top and that the wall could be built in six months because so many workers were involved in the building (Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 2:209–10).

³⁷ Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 2:209. Note that Yāqūt does not mention Aflātūn (Plato), but rather writes that "some kings of Egypt ordered the building of the wall."

³⁸ Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'riḥ Dimashq*, vol. 3, no. 199.

ferent and divergent secret."³³ Al-Harawī *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā* e this wall" and fol- he Nile from Bilbays ountains and in the similar wall is to be the wall he has little n ruled the land and

d. 626/1229) visited "continues to exist himself. However, nts of al-Jāhiz,³⁵ Ibn

an historical anecdotal history of *sākīr*), Ibn Manẓūr a, son of the famous 5), was murdered in e tripped there and with him and dis- ie fleeing Umayyad been seeking refuge

his *Kitāb Nukhbat* ka with two meas- uraoh and his men. on the eastern bank on by manumitting

bd Allāh al-Qudā'i, the

ferent formulations and e lighted at the top and rkers were involved in

on Aḥātūn (Plato), but of the wall."

Egypt's slaves and marrying them to the remaining free women.³⁹ Al-Dimashqī's account relies on Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, but uses a different formulation.

The North African scholar and travel writer al-Tujībī (d. 730/1330) also saw for himself the wall on both banks of the Nile during his *riḥla* on the way to Qūṣ. Part of it had been razed and only ruins remained, which he traced for several days. Al-Tujībī had been told that the wall extended to the end of the country of the Muslims, separating the Nile from the land beyond. Al-Tujībī offers yet another explanation for its existence,⁴⁰ writing that when the sorceress-queen Dalūka gave birth to her son, she had a horoscope made which warned that a crocodile would kill the boy. In a vain attempt to circumvent the prediction, Dalūka built the wall to protect her son from marauding crocodiles.⁴¹ One day, when the boy was grown up and after his mother had died, he went to look at the wall and asked why it had been built. When he was told it was to keep out crocodiles, he asked to be shown one, but this request was refused on the grounds that it was too dangerous. Once home again, he asked that a crocodile be made for him from wood so he might know what the animal looked like. A splinter of the statue cut his finger, causing a festering wound that did not heal and from which he eventually died.⁴²

Al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), who otherwise relies on the versions of al-Mas'ūdī, Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, and al-Dimashqī, records a very similar story in which the boy, wanting to know what animal was mentioned in his horoscope, receives a wooden statue of a crocodile; the figurine gives him such a fright that he dies.⁴³ The story of Dalūka's son destined to be killed by a crocodile recalls the ancient Egyptian

³⁹ Al-Dimashqī, *Nukhba*, 34. This is repeated in al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 1:392. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam emphasizes that the slaves were first manumitted before the noble women married them, but adds that it is this social background that explains the current status of Coptic men as subject to their dominant wives (*Futūḥ*, 28).

⁴⁰ Al-Tujībī (*Mustafād*, 172) also mentions the defensive function, as already found in Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam.

⁴¹ Or she built it when he grew up (al-Ibshīhī, *Mustatraf*, 1:628).

⁴² Al-Tujībī, *Mustafād*, 172.

⁴³ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 1:393. This story is repeated by al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustatraf*, 1:628. Al-Nuwayrī also quotes al-Mas'ūdī's account on the appointment of Dalūka and her decision to build a wall, adding that the wall extended from Rafaḥ, the coastal town between Palestine and Egypt, and Barqa in Cyrenaica (*Nihāyat*, 15:138). Al-Nuwayrī also gives the more general account (*Nihāyat*, 1:392), relying on Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam and al-Dimashqī without mentioning either of them.

story "The doomed prince," also known as "The prince, the dog, the snake and the crocodile," partially preserved on a single papyrus from the Middle Kingdom. When an aged king is given the prediction at the birth of his long-awaited son that the boy will be killed by a dog, a snake or a crocodile, he locks him up in a desert castle. When the prince grows up he convinces his father that he should travel the world to face his fate, accompanied by the dog that his father had given him. The prince is able to ward off an attack from a snake and a crocodile, but learns that the crocodile will eventually cause his death. The rest of the story is lost, but the similarities with the travails of Dalūka's son are striking.⁴⁴ Al-Nuwayrī had observed the wall himself as well, mentioning the town of Rafah for the first time, besides al-'Arīsh, as the northwestern end-point of the wall.⁴⁵

The travel writer Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umārī (d. 749/1349) also claims in his *Masālik al-abṣār fi mamālik al-amṣār* to have seen the wall himself. He found it made of mud brick, nowhere very high or wide, and mostly destroyed. Ibn Faḍl Allāh interpreted the wall as a barrier between the cultivated land and the desert, keeping the sand out. He challenges the claim of some authors that the wall extended northward to somewhere between al-'Arīsh and Farah, by asserting that there are no traces to be found of it in the north, only some ruins in Upper Egypt.⁴⁶ The books about Egypt that ascribe the building of the wall to Queen Dalūka, he says testily, recount "fairy tales that we do not want to repeat."⁴⁷

The Egyptian encyclopaedist al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) remarked in his *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fi šinā'at al-inshā'* that the wall, built by Pharaoh's successor Queen Dalūka, was located at the foot of two hills and was made of mud brick, while traces of it could be found both on the east-

⁴⁴ The story related by al-Tujībī and al-Nuwayrī confirms the end that Wiedemann added to his translation, in which the prince dies while fighting the crocodile through an accidental bite by his dog (Wiedemann, *Altaegyptische Sagen und Maerchen*, 78–85).

⁴⁵ *Min ḥadd arḍ Rafah* (Cf. Timm, *Ägypten*, 5: 2192–5) *ilā Barqa* (more recently known as Sumustā in the province of Beni Suef. Cf. Ramzi, *Qāmūs*, 2/3: 140; Timm, *Ägypten*, 5: 2413–14, probably not referring to the Pentapolis, which is also known as Barqa. Cf. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 170). (Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 15:138).

⁴⁶ Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umārī, *Abṣār*, 2:306.

⁴⁷ Ibn Faḍl Allāh adds that he does not know why and by whom the wall was built (*Abṣār*, 2:306).

prince, the dog, the single papyrus from which the prediction at the end will be killed by a dog, the serpent castle. When the traveler could travel the world his father had given him. In a snake and a crocodile, the end of his death. The rest of the travails of Dalūka's wall himself as well, besides al-'Arīsh, as

(d. 749/1349) also claims to have seen the wall to be very high or wide, and the wall as a barrier keeping the sand out. He also extended northward, asserting that there are some ruins in Upper Egypt of the building of the wall in the tales that we do not

(d. 821/1418) remarked that the wall, built by Pharaoh's son, of two hills and was situated on both on the east-

at the end that Wiedemann in his account of seeing the crocodile through the wall (*Reisen in Ägypten und Maerchen*, 78 -

in *al-Ilā Barqa* (more recently *Qāmūs*, 2/3: 140; Timm, 1988, 1:138), which is also known as *al-Ḥayāt*, 15:138).

to whom the wall was built

ern and western banks.⁴⁸ That traces of the wall could only be found in Upper Egypt is confirmed by al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), who writes that only a few pieces of it are to be seen near Aswān.⁴⁹ Al-Maqrīzī also presents information on the wall from Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam and al-Mas'ūdī, as well as an anecdote, unique to this source, which will be related in detail below.⁵⁰

Al-Ibshīhī (d. 852/1448), in his *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustazraf*, repeats the horoscope version of the story of the wall from al-Tujībī, as well as the history of Queen Dalūka's rule after the destruction of Pharaoh from Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam.⁵¹

Ibn al-Wardī (d. 861/1456) even wrote in his book on wonders (*Kharīdat al-'ajā'ib wa-farīdat al-gharā'ib*) that the wall encircled Aswān on two sides, functioning simply as protection for the city and its surrounding land.⁵² Ibn Zahīra (d. 888/1483), on the other hand, claims in his work on the virtues of Egypt and Cairo (*al-Fadā'il al-bāhira fī mahāsin Miṣr wa-'l-Qāhira*) that much of it still remains in his own time in Upper Egypt. Ibn Zahīra writes that there were continuously burning fires on the lookout posts along the wall, and that it extended from Farāḥ to Aswān, extending as far as Ifrīqiya, Wāḥāt (that is Wāḥāt al-khārija, the Khargā oasis in the western desert), and Nubia. His account, moreover, follows those that preceded him and there is no indication that he visited the area himself or that he had a realistic image of what a defensive wall might look like.⁵³ The Egyptian author al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), in his work on Egypt (*Ḥusn al-muhādara fī akhbār Miṣr wa-'l-Qāhira*) repeated Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's version, including its report that parts of it were still visible in Upper Egypt.⁵⁴ There is no indication that al-Suyūṭī ever visited the wall himself.

⁴⁸ Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 3:325. Elsewhere he writes that remains are located in the south of Egypt (*Ṣubḥ*, 3:412).

⁴⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:541.

⁵⁰ He quotes from Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 1:100-01; 1:387; 1:541-2; and al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 1:101.

⁵¹ Al-Ibshīhī, *Mustaṭraf*, 1:628.

⁵² Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharīda*, 47.

⁵³ Ibn Zahīra, *Fadā'il*, 16-17, 151. For this author, see Cook, "Abū Ḥamīd al-Qudṣī."

⁵⁴ 1:45.

The old lady and the wall

Queen Dalūka is associated in the sources with the building of other fabulous structures in Egypt, especially the ancient temples (*barābī*),⁵⁵ the Nilometers at Akhmīm and Anšinā, and the famous lighthouse in Alexandria.⁵⁶ It is through her association with these buildings that Dalūka is sometimes depicted as a sorceress possessed of magical powers.⁵⁷ She is described as the first Coptic ruler of Egypt, the founder of a new dynasty situated among the historical *ṭabaqāt* of Egypt's rulers between the Amalekites and the Persians,⁵⁸ and the holder of Egypt's throne for a period of between twenty to thirty years.⁵⁹

Her wall enjoyed a long afterlife. Medieval Arabic authors often claimed to have observed it or to have heard that parts of it still existed in their own time, mostly in Upper Egypt near Aswān and Qūṣ.⁶⁰ As late as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European travellers and scholars also wrote about the Wall as an archaeological reality.⁶¹ Even today, modern internet sites point to a site called Ḥā'it al-'Ajūz on the east bank of the Nile, between Beni Suef and Minya.⁶²

⁵⁵ Or rather, she ordered the sorceress Tadūra to build them (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 27; Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 1:362, s.v. "al-Barābī"). These are the temples found in Akhmīm, Memphis, etc.

⁵⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 16, 40; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:155, 204; Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 1:124, s.v. "Akhmīm", 1:187, s.v. "al-Iskandariyya", 1:362, s.v. "al-Barābī", 2:210, s.v. "ḥā'it al-'ajūz"; al-Qalqashandī, *ṣubḥ*, 3:412; Pseudo-Abū Ṣāliḥ, *Churches*, f. 80b; Ibn al-Zahīra, *Faḍā'il*, 178.

⁵⁷ Ibn al-Wardī (*Kharīda*, 47) calls her a *sāḥira*.

⁵⁸ That is, the third generation (al-Qalqashandī, *ṣubḥ*, 3:412).

⁵⁹ "Thirty or less" according to al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 2:399; "twenty" according to Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 28, repeated by al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn*, 1:45.

⁶⁰ Al-Maqrīzī writes that only a few traces of it can be found on the eastern bank of the Nile near Aswān (*Khiṭaṭ*, 1:199). Ibn Zahīra specifies that up to his time (*ilā ḥādḥā 'l-waqt*) many remains of it could be seen in the south (*Faḍā'il*, 16).

⁶¹ Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt*, 197-8, taken from Evetts, the nineteenth-century editor of Pseudo-Abū Ṣāliḥ's *History of Churches*, who mentioned that "it still exists in portions near Jabal at-Ṭair near Kūsiyah, and at other places." Jabal al-Ṭayr can be found on the road between Beni Suef and Minya (Cf. *Churches*, 59 n. 4; Cf. Seton-Williams and Stocks, *Blue Guide*, 482). See also the references in the *Description de l'Égypte* to mud-brick remains that, according to the locals, formed the remains of the Old Lady's Wall. The authors of the *Description* considered the Wall to have been built for defense against hostile invasion or the eroding forces of the desert, or that it functioned as a barrage to manage the inundation (4:7, 352-3, 378, 387; cited in Maspero and Wiet, *Matériaux*, 73.).

⁶² E.g. <http://www.visomap.com/place-fr/Ha'it+al+%60Ajuz/-457277>. But current travel guides, maps and geographical dictionaries do not mention it.

Then what was it? There are, of course, countless remains of ancient structures to be seen in Egypt that could have inspired the story of a wall that once encircled all the country's land and towns.⁶³ The observation of some authors that the wall was made of mud brick suggests that perhaps a more recent edifice lay behind the story.⁶⁴ On the other hand, other accounts clearly take their inspiration from ancient Egyptian temples and pyramids.⁶⁵ The Wall's association with a canal running along its base strongly suggests that some authors mistook some of Egypt's many dykes for (traces of) a Wall.⁶⁶

If the wall's purpose was defensive, against whom was it supposed to be defending? In several accounts it is said that the wall was designed as protection against Syria,⁶⁷ and its starting point in either Faramā, al-'Arish or Rafah on the Mediterranean coast in the Sinai desert might support this notion.⁶⁸ Other accounts see the wall reaching no farther north than the Delta.⁶⁹ Still others give the wall a more limited geographical function, interpreting it as a barrier against Nubian (or Ethiopian) incursions into Upper Egypt.⁷⁰ But while fortresses, towers and walls formed part of the defensive system of Egypt,⁷¹ there is no archaeological or historical evidence for such a wall stretching from

⁶³ See also Dijkstra, *Philae*, 28–9, where the supposedly archaeological evidence for the existence of a defensive wall between Egypt and Nubia is discussed. I would like to thank Jelle Bruening for pointing this reference out to me.

⁶⁴ Pellat repeats Maspero and Wiet's opinion that the mud-brick watch towers that Egyptians used to build until the modern period in the different wadis inspired the story of the Wall's regularly-placed watch towers (Maspero and Wiet, *Matériaux*, 73; Pellat, "Hā'it al-'Adjūz").

⁶⁵ By having one person, Queen Dalūka, responsible for all these buildings, and also by describing the Wall as covered or filled by talismanic figures.

⁶⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam is the first to mention this; al-Qalqashandī repeats it.

⁶⁷ The seventh-century *Chronicle of Khūzistān* relates that the Muslim armies had difficulty in conquering and entering Egypt (*Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 37, cited by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 185, n. 41). For the dating of this text to the 660s, see Hoyland, *Seeing*, 182–5. I would like to thank Robert Hoyland for providing me with this reference and his translation of the relevant passage.

⁶⁸ Al-'Arish (al-Jāhiz, Abū Šālih, al-Nuwayrī, al-Dīnashqī, Ibn Zayyāt, al-Qalqashandī, al-Ibshihī); Faramā (Ibn al-Faqih, Ibn Bitriq, Abū Šālih; and Rafah (al-Nuwayrī, Ibn Zahira, al-'Umarī). In some accounts it is only located in the northern part of the country (al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 5:138). See also the defensive wall against the Syrians that Diodoros of Sicily (fl. 60–40 BC) ascribed to the legendary ancient Egyptian king Sesōōsis (see below, p. 98).

⁶⁹ To *ḥayyiz Miṣr* (Ibn Jubayr) or to Bilbays (al-Harawī).

⁷⁰ Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 2:209.

⁷¹ See, for example, the defensive wall which is supposed to have been built to keep the nomadic Blemmyes isolated (Maspero and Wiet, *Matériaux*, 73).

north to south on both banks of the Nile, or even merely on the east bank. The wall is rather a topos. But what then does it signify?

Islamicizing Egypt

Beware of manumitted slaves, raging youths, slave armies and arabized peasants.⁷²

The theme of ancient rulers building fantastically large defensive walls to protect against outside forces is not unique to Islamic, let alone Egyptian history.⁷³ Diodoros of Sicily (fl. 60–40 BC) ascribed to the legendary ancient Egyptian king Sesos̄sis the building of a defensive wall against the Syrians, “from Pelusium to Heliopolis, 1500 stades long right through the desert.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604–562) is said to have built two defensive walls extending from east to west between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Xenophon described having seen remains of this wall in 402 BC,⁷⁵ and since then ancient and modern writers have tried to associate it with different archaeological remains.⁷⁶ What these walls share is often not so much a strategic rationale as a political one. As Sesos̄sis is “thought to have surpassed all former rulers in power and military exploits,”⁷⁷ the wall becomes evidence for his exceptional magnificence. Similarly, ancient walls, from the Great Wall of China to Hadrian’s Wall, were built less to seal or to quarantine—an almost impossible goal in practice—than to overawe. Hence we find the reverse phenomenon of supernatural provenance being ascribed to awe-inducing walls, from the Cyclopean

⁷² *ihdharū ’l-’abid al-mu’attaqin wa-’l-ahdāth al-muttaḡhirin wa-’l-jund al-mu’tabiddin wa-’l-nabaṡ al-musta’ribin*. Al-Mas’ūdī reports that this ancient inscription, written in hieroglyphs on one of the pyramids in Akhmīm, was read out by the saint Dhū ’l-Nūn and related to al-Mas’ūdī by the locals during his visit to the town (*Murūj*, 2:401).

⁷³ Consider too the Gorgan wall along the Caspian Sea in northern Iran, which was erected by the Parthians and extended and repaired by the Sassanians. It became known as the Gates of Alexander, referring to the legendary wall that Alexander the Great was said to have erected to keep out the people of Gog and Magog.

⁷⁴ Diodorus Siculus, 1:57.4. Nothers mentions in his commentary that there is only literary, and no archaeological evidence for this wall (*Griechische Weltgeschichte*, 297, note to 57.2ff.). Sesos̄sis, more usually spelled as Sesostris, is a composite figure. The same legendary king is credited with the creation of a defensive system of canals from Memphis in the south to the Mediterranean in the north (1:57.3).

⁷⁵ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 2:4:12–13.

⁷⁶ Barnett, “Xenophon and the Wall of Media.” I am grateful to Peter Verkinderen for pointing out this parallel to me, and to Wilfred van Soldt for guiding me through the ancient Near Eastern references to the Wall.

⁷⁷ Diodorus Siculus, 1:58.3.

merely on the east
does it signify?

armies and arabized

large defensive walls
Islamic, let alone
BC) ascribed to the
building of a defensive
opolis, 1500 stades
hadnezar II (r. 604–
ending from east to
phon described hav-
ce then ancient and
fferent archaeologi-
so much a strategic
it to have surpassed
the wall becomes
larly, ancient walls,
l, were built less to
d in practice—than
ion of supernatural
from the Cyclopean

rīn wa-l-jund al-mu'ta-
this ancient inscription,
was read out by the saint
visit to the town (*Murūj*,

n northern Iran, which
ie Sassanians. It became
wall that Alexander the
and Magog.

entary that there is only
iche Weltgeschichte, 297,
a composite figure. The
re system of canals from
7.3).

al to Peter Verkinderen
for guiding me through

walls of Mycenae and Alexander's Gates protecting against Gog and Magog, to England's various Devil's Dykes.

In the case of the Old Lady's Wall in Egypt, a purely defensive rationale is even more suspect than usual. Since ancient times, Egypt has formed a well-contained and clearly defined political and geographical unit. The Nile and the Delta were the only arable land, beyond which desert stretched to the country's borders. Egypt was bounded by the Eastern Desert and the Red Sea in the east, the Mediterranean in the north, the Libyan Desert in the west, and the Fourth Cataract in the south. Even the mighty Sesoösis is said to have thought that only 275 kilometres or so of wall were necessary. The Old Lady's Wall, however, encircles the *whole* of Egypt. This seems to be a specifically Islamic innovation and this uniqueness is directly related to the historical circumstances of Egypt in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century Egypt, when the story of the wall first appears in the historical record.

Queen Dalūka's story, though ascribed to the Copts in the Arabic sources, is first extensively dealt with in third/ninth- and fourth/tenth-century *Faḍā'il Miṣr* works. While there are of course numerous examples of female rulers in ancient Egypt, no pre-Islamic accounts about a queen ruling Egypt after Moṣes' exodus and the subsequent pharaoh's drowning exist. No pre-Islamic tradition exists, moreover, of Egypt having been left bereft of male inhabitants after this event.⁷⁸ Queen Dalūka cannot be identified with a historical figure, but one female Egyptian ruler seems to have influenced the image of Dalūka and seems at times to have been conflated with hers. Queen Cleopatra (r. 48–33 BC) is known in the Muslim tradition as "the great builder" and many of the building projects ascribed to Cleopatra are also associated with Dalūka, such as the lighthouse in Alexandria.⁷⁹ Even the building of a great wall surrounding Egypt is ascribed to Cleopatra as we have already seen.⁸⁰ Finally, both women were known for their extraordinary cleverness and capable administration.⁸¹ As has been shown for other regions and places, the *Faḍā'il* collections can be used

⁷⁸ In the Jewish tradition there are, however, discussions concerning the number of men to have died with the pharaoh in the Dead Sea (Ginzberg, *Legends*, 3:43 and the notes in volume 6. I would like to thank Jan van Ginkel for this reference).

⁷⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 40–1.

⁸⁰ Pseudo-Abū Ṣāliḥ, *Churches*, 170. See also, "and she [i.e. Cleopatra] raised a dyke against the waters of the sea and stone and earth" (John of Nikiou, *Chronicle*, LXVII.5).

⁸¹ El Daly, *Egyptology*, 133. According to El Daly, in the confusion with Cleopatra Dalūka and Zulaikha both appear. Zulaikha is the name given in the Islamic tradition to Potiphar's wife.

both to reconstruct the topography and rituals associated with holy places, as well as the discursive qualities of these stories.⁸² The *faḍā'il* works on Egypt are aimed at establishing Egypt as a self-evident Muslim space, as the earlier, Baghdad-centred impulse to inventory and classify turned, in the third/ninth century, into a need for an Egyptian Muslim identity distinct from the rest of the Muslim world. This need was felt both by those Muslim Arabs who had settled in Egypt during and after the conquests and by the (still relatively small number of) Egyptian converts to Islam.

After the conquest of Egypt in 642 Muslim soldiers were confined to the garrison cities from which they were supposed to continue their conquest of North Africa. It is only from the second half of the second/eighth century onward that we start to encounter larger numbers of Arab Muslims in the Egyptian countryside on a more permanent basis. But while Muslim Arabs from that time mixed and interacted with the indigenous population, social and economic prejudices kept islamicization in check. It was not until the third/ninth century that Egypt acquired a truly "Islamic" ambience, with more Arabic-speaking converted Muslims appearing in the sources, and with a Muslim Arab population established in the countryside for several generations. Egyptian Muslims now felt sufficiently strongly connected to their land to want to set it and themselves off against the rest of the Islamic empire. Egyptian converts would be interested as well in presenting a special *Egyptian* Islam.

This budding sense of Egyptian Muslim identity got a major push from the arrival of a new group of Persian and Turkish Muslims in Egypt. These had arrived in 211/826 with the army of 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir to restore 'Abbāsīd control over the province.⁸³ Their Persian names and the technical expressions they introduced appear in the papyri.⁸⁴ The Turkish soldiers who would eventually establish an independent dynasty in Egypt (the Ṭulūnids) exerted power at the expense of the local Arab-Egyptian elite.

As a descendent of the old Egyptian Muslim elite, Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam gave voice to these sentiments in the first local Egyptian history, *Futūḥ Miṣr*. On the one hand, Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam could not avoid describing

⁸² Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*; Cobb, "Virtual Sacrality"; Antrim, "Ibn Asākir's Representations of Syria and Damascus."

⁸³ Kennedy, "Egypt as a Province in the Islamic Caliphate," 81–2, 85.

⁸⁴ Frantz-Murphy, "The Economics of State Formation in Early Islamic Egypt."

the Old Lady's Wall in his chapter on the *faḍā'il* of Egypt. Vestiges of the structure were still readily seen in the south of Egypt at his time. But the story of the Wall and the queen who built it were also crucial materials for Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's enterprise of underwriting the process of Egyptian identity formation.

Conclusion

Queen Dalūka and the wall she built around Egypt signalled a new phase in the history of the country—a history that was set in a remote past but that played out very much in the third/ninth century when it was written down. Dalūka had stayed behind in Egypt when Pharaoh and his men chased Moses and the Hebrews into the Red Sea, where God destroyed them. Dalūka and the other remaining Egyptians, on the other hand, were saved and their offspring purified. Dalūka's rule symbolises a break with the rejected past of Pharaoh's Egypt. Like the great flood that destroyed all rejected humans, the Red Sea flushed away the tyrannical ruler and his cohorts. And just as Noah was allowed to start anew on earth, literally filling the land with his seed, so Dalūka stood at the beginning of a new generation of Egyptians and a new Egyptian entity. Hence, Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam traces all specific traits of current Coptic Egyptians to these events. Most strikingly, he explains the servility of Coptic men to their wives to the fact that they descend from slaves, married by Dalūka to the Egyptian women at the lack of available free Egyptian men.⁸⁵ It was the beginning of Egypt's Coptic history, a history that could and should be connected to the story of the Arab Muslims themselves. The *faḍā'il* explain this connection in many *ḥadīths* in which the prophet Muḥammad tells the Muslims to treat the Copts well: after all, they are related to the Arabs either through their ancestor Hagar, or through one of the Prophet's wives and through Maryam, the mother of his only son.⁸⁶

By pointing to the physical remains of Dalūka's story in the Egyptian landscape, third/ninth-century authors brought the Old Lady's Wall into their own time, giving it not only life but meaning. The wall and the people who built it had disappeared, but at the same time its traces

⁸⁵ *Futūḥ*, 28.

⁸⁶ Both were Egyptians (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 2-7). For these *ḥadīths*, see especially Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, 68-70, 121-2.

were present to be observed, touched, and even tasted. Al-Maqrīzī tells the story, relayed by his informer al-Su'ūdī (d. 807/1409),⁸⁷ of how, when al-Su'ūdī and his travelling companions observed the wall in Upper Egypt, one of the party—in the manner of a true tourist—took one of the mud bricks out of the structure. Everyone was amazed by the large size of the brick, which surpassed any mud bricks known to them. Excited, each member of the company wanted to hold and examine the brick and it was reverently passed among them. Suddenly, it fell to the ground, bursting open to reveal a giant broad bean (*ḥabbat fūl*), much larger than anything ever seen by the party. They peeled it and found that it had remained unspoiled and untouched by worms; rather, it was “as if it had just been harvested.” The group decided to eat the bean piece by piece, “as if it had been kept for them from the ancient time and past centuries when things did not die until they had fulfilled their nurturing function.”⁸⁸ The wall's function could, in fact, not come to full closure until the Muslim period when the members of this party were able to release and consume the bean. This anecdote provides a connection between the ancient Egyptian past and the Muslim present. More importantly, without changing or challenging the story of the Wall and its builder, it gives the Wall a new meaning for Islamic Egyptian history. The miracle of the perfectly-preserved bean is set in Muslim Egypt and is precipitated through Muslim intervention. It transforms the Old Lady's Wall into a monument for a Muslim Egypt distinct from its past, but incorporating all its monuments and history.

The story of Dalūka and her wall gave a unity and a history to the communal past of Arab Muslims and Egyptians, an enterprise that had become especially important by the third/ninth century when significant numbers of Egyptians started to convert to Islam and when the Arab Muslims who had settled in Egypt felt their privileged position threatened by the newly-arriving Turkish rulers and Persian administrators. This history of Muslim Egypt started with Queen Dalūka and her wall, a creation of the third/ninth century. That Dalūka's memory can still evoke this association for modern-day Egyptians is shown

⁸⁷ This is Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Su'ūdī, a resident of Qūṣ (al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-'uqūd*, 2:202–3). I am grateful to Frédéric Bauden for help in identifying this person. He is cited only in al-Maqrīzī's *Khitāt*, where he is called Muḥammad al-Su'ūdī (ed. Sayyid 1:101) or Muḥammad al-Mas'ūdī (ed. Wiet, 166).

⁸⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Khitāt*, 1:38.

nicely by a discussion on an internet forum, isuez.com: "Does anyone of you know who queen Dalūka is?" A visitor to the site gives the answer: "The first queen of Egypt."⁸⁹

Bibliography

- Abū Šālih al-Armanī. *Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*. Translated by B.T.A. Evetts. Oxford: Clarendon, 1895.
- Antrim, Zayde. "Ibn Asākir's Representations of Syria and Damascus in the Introduction to the *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 109–29.
- al-Baghdādī. *Marāsid al-ittīla'*. Edited by 'A.M. al-Bajāwī. Cairo, 1373–4/1954–5.
- Barnett, Richard D. "Xenophon and the Wall of Media." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 83 (1963): 1–26.
- Bashear, Suliman. *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997.
- Basset, René. *Mille et un contes, récits et légendes arabes*. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1924.
- . "Contes et légendes arabes." *Revue des Traditions Populaires* 17 (1902): 34–42.
- Butler, Alfred J. *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Chronicle of Khuzistan*. Anonymous chronicle edited and translated by I. Guidi in CSCO 1–2, *scr. syri* 1–2, Paris, 1903, 15–39/15–32; translated by T. Nöldeke in "Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik," *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften philosophisch-historische Klasse* 128 (Vienna, 1893), 9.
- Cobb, Paul. "Virtual Sacrality: Making Muslim Syria Sacred Before the Crusades." *Medieval Encounters* 8 (2002): 35–55.
- Cook, Michael. "Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt." *Islamica* 57 (1983): 67–103.
- . "Abū Hamīd al-Qudṣī (d. 888/1480)." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 28 (1983): 85–97.
- Dijkstra, Jitse H.F. *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298–642 CE)*. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2008.
- al-Dimashqī. *Kitāb Nukhbat al-Dahr fī 'ajā'ib al-barr wa-'l-bahr*. Edited by M.A.F. Mehren, as *Cosmographie de Chems-ed-din abou Abdallah Mohammed Ed-Dimichqui*. Saint Petersburg, 1866.
- Diodoros Siculus. *Griechische Weltgeschichte, Buch I-IX*. Translated by G. Wirth and O. Vöh, introduction and commentary by T. Nothers. Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1992.
- Elad, Amikam. *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
- El Daly, Okasha. *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*. Berkeley, 2005.
- Fawwāz, Zaynab. *Al-Durr al-manthūr fī ṭabaqāt rabbāt al-khudūr*. Beirut, 1999.
- Frantz-Murphy, Gladys. "The Economics of State Formation in Early Islamic Egypt." In *From al-Andalus to Khurasan*, edited by P.M. Sijpesteijn *et al.*, 101–14. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1936–42.
- Haarmann, Ulrich. "Medieval Muslim Perceptions of Pharaonic Egypt." In *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, edited by A. Loprieno, 605–27. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

⁸⁹ ؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟ الملكة الملوكه http://www.isuez.com/forums/t6652.html (09/05/2009).

asted. Al-Maqrizī tells
807/1409),⁸⁷ of how,
observed the wall in
of a true tourist—took
ryone was amazed by
y mud bricks known
wanted to hold and
ong them. Suddenly,
it broad bean (*habbat*
party. They peeled it
untouched by worms;
The group decided to
pt for them from the
not die until they had
action could, in fact,
l when the members
bean. This anecdote
an past and the Mus-
g or challenging the
l a new meaning for
ectly-preserved bean
gh Muslim interven-
ument for a Muslim
its monuments and

and a history to the
enterprise that had
entury when signifi-
Islam and when the
privileged position
nd Persian adminis-
Queen Dalūka and
it Dalūka's memory
Egyptians is shown

Abd al-Raḥīm al-Su'ūdī,
um grateful to Frédéric
in al-Maqrizī's *Khīṭat*,
Muḥammad al-Mas'ūdī

- . "Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt." *Bulletin of the School for Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980): 55–66.
- al-Harawī. *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā ma'rifat al-ziyārāt*. Edited and translated by J.W. Meri, as *A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide to Pilgrimage*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004.
- Hoyland, Robert G. *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997.
- Humphreys, R. Stephen. *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*. Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam. *Futūḥ Miṣr*. Edited by C. Torrey, as *The History of the Conquests of Egypt, North Africa and Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922.
- Ibn Baṭrīq. *Das Annalenwerk des Eutychios von Alexandrien: ausgewählte Geschichten und Legenden kompiliert von Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq um 935 A.D.* Translated by M. Breydy. *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vols. 471–2. Louvain, 1985.
- Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī. *Masālik al-absār fi mamālik al-amṣār*. Edited by 'A.A.b.Y. al-Sarīhī. Abu Dhabi, 1424/2003.
- Ibn al-Faqīh. *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*. Edited by M. J. de Goeje. Leiden: Brill, 1885.
- Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad b. Ahmad. *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fi waqā'i' al-duḥūr*. Edited by M. Muṣṭafā. Cairo, 1379/1960.
- Ibn Jubayr. *Rihla*. Edited by W. Wright and M.J. de Goeje. Leiden: Brill, 1907.
- Ibn al-Kindī. *Fadā'il Miṣr*. Edited by I.A. al-'Adawī and 'A.M. 'Umar. Cairo, 1391/1971.
- Ibn Manẓūr. *Mukhtaṣar Ta'rikh Dimashq li-Ibn 'Asākir*. Edited by M. al-Ṣāghraji. Damascus, 1405/1970.
- Ibn al-Wardī. *Kharīdat al-'ajā'ib wa-farīdat al-gharā'ib*. Edited by M. Fakhūrī. Beirut, 1991.
- Ibn Zahīra. *al-Fadā'il al-bāhira fi mahāsin Miṣr wa-'l-Qāhira*. Edited by M. al-Saqqā and K. al-Muhandis. Cairo, 1969.
- Ibn al-Zayyāt. *Kitāb al-kawākib al-sayyāra fi tartīb al-ziyāra*. Cairo, 1325/1907.
- Ibn Zūlāq. *Fadā'il Miṣr wa-akhbārūhā wa-khawāṣṣuhā*. Edited by 'A.M. 'Umar. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2000.
- al-Ibshīhī. *al-Mustatraf fi kull fann mustazraf*. Edited by S. al-Harawī.
- al-Idrīsī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-'Azīz. *Kitāb Anwār 'ulwī 'l-ajrām fi 'l-kashf 'an asrār al-ahrām*. Edited by U. Haarmann. *Beiruter Texte und Studien*, 38. Beirut: Frans Steiner Verlag, 1991.
- al-Jāhiz. *Rasā'il*. Edited by 'A.S.M. Hārūn. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964.
- John of Nikiou. *The Chronicle of John Coptic Bishop of Nikiu*. Translated by R.H. Charles, London, 1916.
- Kennedy, Hugh. "Egypt as a Province in the Islamic Caliphate." In *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, edited by C. Petry, 62–85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 62–85.
- al-Maqrīzī. *Khiṭaṭ al-Mawā'iz wa-'l-i'tibār fi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-'l-āthār*. Edited by A.F. Sayyid. London, 2002–3.
- . *Durar al-'uqūd al-farīda fi tarājīm al-a'yān al-mufīda*. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002.
- Maspero, Jean and Gaston Wiet. *Matériaux pour servir à la géographie de l'Égypte*. Cairo, 1919.
- al-Mas'ūdī. *Murūj al-dhahab*. Edited and translated by C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille. Paris, 1914.
- al-Nuwayrī. *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab*, Cairo, 1342/1923.
- Ohtoshi, Tetsuya. "Conception of 'Egypt' in the Pre-Modern Period: Preliminary Essay." *Mediterranean World* 16 (2001): 15–33.
- Pellat, Charles. "Hā'it al-'Adjūz." *EP*, 3: 71.
- . "Jāhiziana III. Essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre jāhizienne." *Arabica* 3 (1956): 147–80.
- . "Nouvel essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre jāhizienne." *Arabica* 31 (1984), 117–64.
- al-Qalqashandī. *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fi ṣinā'at al-inshā'*. Cairo, 1913–22.
- Robin, Christian. "Entre Moïse et Pharaon," *Égypte/Monde arabe*, première série, 7 (1991).

- of the School for Oriental
 ranslated by J.W. Meri, as
 Press, 2004.
 Darwin Press, 1997.
 ury. Princeton University
- History of the Conquests of
 Press, 1922.
 ausgewählte Geschichten
 Translated by M. Breydy.
 Louvain, 1985.
 r. Edited by 'A.A.b.Y. al-
- je. Leiden: Brill, 1885.
 i' al-duhur. Edited by
- en: Brill, 1907.
 Jmar. Cairo, 1391/1971.
 ited by M. al-Şaghraji.
- by M. Fakhūri. Beirut,
- lited by M. al-Saqqā and
- iro, 1325/1907.
 by 'A.M. 'Umar. Cairo:
- urāwī.
 n fi 'l-kashf 'an asrār al-
 8. Beirut: Frans Steiner
- ānjī, 1964.
 lated by R.H. Charles,
- te." In *The Cambridge*
 Cambridge University
- wa-'l-āthār. Edited by
- irut: Dār al-Gharb al-
- phie de l'Égypte. Cairo,
 de Meynard and Pavet
- od: Preliminary Essay."
- nica 3 (1956) : 147-80.
 1 (1984), 117-64.
- remière série, 7 (1991).
- Ramzi, Muḥammad. *al-Qāmūs al-jughrāfi li-'l-bilād al-Miṣriyya*. Cairo, 1953-68.
 Sellheim, Rudolf. "Faḍila." *EF*, 2:728.
 Seton-Williams, Veronica and Peter Stocks. *Blue Guide. Egypt*. London and New York,
 1988.
 Sijpesteijn, Petra M. "Sacrificing a Virgin to the Nile in a Ninth-Century Arabic Papyrus"
 Forthcoming.
 al-Suyūṭī. *Husn al-muḥādara fi akhbār Miṣr wa-'l-Qāhira*. Beirut, 1418/1997.
 Timm, Stefan. *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*. Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig
 Rechart Verlag, 1984-92.
 al-Tujībī. *Mustafād al-riḥla wa-'l-ightirāb*. Edited by 'A.H. Mansour. Tunis, 1395/1975.
 Wiedemann, Alfred. *Altaegyptische Sagen und Maerchen*. *Volksmund*, Vol. 6. Leipzig:
 Deutsche Verlagsaktiengesellschaft, 1906.
 Xenophon. *Anabasis*, Books I-VIII. Translated by Brownson, Carlton L. Loeb Classical
 Library, Harvard University Press, 1998.
 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. *Kitāb mu'jam al-buldān*. Beirut, Dar Sader, 1995.