

Restoring the Lost Empire: Egyptian Archaeology and Imperial Nostalgia in H. Rider Haggard's 'Smith and the Pharaohs' (1912)

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Abstract

This article focuses on H. Rider Haggard's 'Smith and the Pharaohs', a long short story published across three consecutive issues of *The Strand Magazine* (December 1912-February 1913). An occult tale of Egyptian fantasy, it depicts the adventures of James Ebenezer Smith, an archaeologist, as he searches for the long lost remains of an ancient Egyptian queen, a search that culminates in his perilous confrontation, in the Cairo Museum, with the assembled ghosts of the Pharaohs of Egyptian antiquity. The story, it is argued, represented a specific intervention in contemporary debates over the status of Egypt as a colonial protectorate, as a popular tourist destination, and as the object of a new wave of British archaeological endeavour. Drawing on a range of Haggard's non-fiction, in particular a series of polemical articles he wrote for the *Daily Mail* in 1904, I argue that 'Smith and the Pharaohs' should be understood as both a statement of Haggard's idiosyncratic views and a commentary upon the popular craze for Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this largely overlooked short story, he establishes an ideal of authentic interest in ancient Egypt to counter what he saw as the debasement of Egyptian antiquity in popular culture. I conclude by noting that Haggard's idealised relationship to Egypt, despite being predicated upon Conservative, imperialist, and orientalist attitudes, presents an intriguing parallel to the ideals of an emergent Egyptian nationalist movement.

H. Rider Haggard's 'Smith and the Pharaohs' (1912),¹ an occult fable involving ancient tombs, haunted museums, mummies, and undying love, also offers a revealing commentary upon the British public's fascination with ancient Egypt. Thus Haggard relates how a bank clerk named James Ebenezer Smith happens to seek shelter from the rain in the British Museum:

Wandering hither and thither at hazard, he found himself in the great gallery devoted to Egyptian stone objects and sculpture. The place bewildered him somewhat, for he knew nothing of Egyptology; indeed, there remained upon his mind only a sense of wonderment not unmixed with awe. It must have been a great people, he thought to

¹ See <https://archive.org/details/smithandpharaohs00haggrich>.

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himself, that executed these works, and with the thought came a desire to know more about them. Yet he was going away when suddenly his eye fell on the sculptured head of a woman which hung upon the wall.

Smith looked at it once, twice, thrice, and at the third look he fell in love. (142)

Confusion, awe, desire, love: Smith's responses to this chamber of treasures well capture the attractive power of imperial booty for contemporaries. Even so, the gallery gives access to ancient artefacts in quantities and a setting that leave them indecipherable, forcing the chance visitor to turn to its qualified mediator, the museum official, who only condescends to answer Smith's question after determining that 'his interest was genuine' (143). A decade later, this same concern with the authenticity of enthusiasm for Egyptian antiquity was to prompt Howard Carter to complain of the constant presence of tourists at Tutankhamen's tomb: 'It is not as if all our visitors were keen on archaeology, or even mildly interested in it. Too many of them are attracted by mere curiosity, or even worse, by a desire to visit the tomb because it is the thing to do' (Carter and Mason 1977: 149). Thus 'Smith and the Pharaohs' registers, in its initial museum scene, a real concern expressed by Egyptologists about the increasing mass appeal of Egyptian antiquity.

Like Haggard's fictional curator, Carter's lament gave voice to a view, increasingly prevalent in early twentieth century Britain, that tourism and popular culture were fomenting a facile curiosity in ancient Egypt which threatened to displace or prevent a more authentic relationship with the past. From such a perspective, the 'sense of wonderment' felt by Haggard's off-duty bank clerk represented, not a cause for optimism, but a barrier to true understanding. It is this problem—in effect, of distinguishing legitimate interest in Egyptian antiquity from ignorant spectatorship—that serves as Haggard's starting point in 'Smith and the Pharaohs'. But what did constitute legitimate interest in Pharaonic Egypt, for a writer like Haggard? And how did he seek to promote this interest in a short story about an occult encounter with the ancient past?

By way of answer to these questions, the following article offers a detailed analysis of the political and literary contexts within which 'Smith and the Pharaohs' was first published. Haggard's concern with the quality of interest the public displayed toward ancient Egypt, I argue, must be understood as an intervention in contemporary debates about the proper relation of archaeology and tourism. These debates, it will be

seen, originated in the new wave of archaeological work done by British archaeologists in Egypt after the British occupation of 1882. Tracing Haggard's engagement in these issues to a series of articles he contributed to the *Daily Mail* in July 1904, and then establishing their significance for the composition of 'Smith and the Pharaohs', I show how in this largely overlooked short story he sought to tailor an ideal of genuine interest in ancient Egypt to the class sensibilities of a very precise demographic, namely readers of the *Strand Magazine*. In developing an idealistic, nostalgic, and, above all, exclusive vision of ancient Egypt, Haggard aimed to present an alternative to what he saw as the debasement and commodification of the ideas, images and artefacts of Ancient Egypt by the forces of modern tourism and popular culture. I conclude by noting that Haggard's idealized relationship to Egypt, despite being predicated upon Conservative, imperialist, and orientalist attitudes, presents an intriguing parallel to the ideals of an emergent Egyptian nationalist movement at the start of the twentieth century.

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'Smith and the Pharaohs' appeared in the *Strand Magazine* in three instalments between December 1912 and February 1913, accompanied by eight illustrations by Alec Ball. Its creaky plot centres on the archaeological career that Smith embarks upon after becoming infatuated with the statue of the unknown Egyptian queen. Learning the basics of archaeology, Smith invests a large sum of his own money in order to spend his summer holidays looking for her resting place. Although the tomb, when he finds it, turns out to be all but empty, Smith learns the queen's name (Ma Mee) and manages to salvage from the charred remains of her corpse a mummified hand and two of her rings. Returning to the Cairo Museum to record these finds, he loses track of the hour and is accidentally locked in among the mummies, sarcophagi, and statues. From a hidden vantage point, he witnesses a ghostly gathering of the kings and queens of Egyptian antiquity, who, it is revealed, assemble each year to vent their anger at the desecration of their graves by archaeologists and thieves. After inadvertently giving himself away, Smith is put on trial as a grave robber, only to be saved from execution by the intervention of Ma Mee, also present at the meeting, who explains that he is in fact the reincarnation of her dead lover. The ghosts release

and pardon Smith before disappearing. Before joining them, Ma Mee promises Smith a future reunion in the next life.

'Smith and the Pharaohs' is very much the product of contemporary British imperial relations with Egypt. It is in many respects a typical example of the Mummy fiction genre, a late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century vogue for tales featuring mummies and other paraphernalia of ancient Egypt. Critics have drawn attention to the close correspondence between the appearance of these narratives and the period of Britain's unofficial occupation of Egypt (1882-1914), arguing that such stories gave expression to a range of anxieties concerning the new relationship between the two countries (Bulfin 2011: 418). Thus Roger Luckhurst, in his examination of early twentieth century Mummy superstitions, argues that such stories are 'cogent narratives of the intrinsic violence of colonialism', and, as such, function as 'a currency for acknowledging and even negotiating the consequences of this colonial violence' (Luckhurst 2012: 241-42). In other words, fictional responses to Egyptian archaeology also, inevitably, register contemporary colonial conflict.

In a similar vein, Bradley Deane has argued that the reoccurrence of narratives of a frustrated sexual longing for long dead Egyptian women—such as Conan Doyle's 'The Ring of Thoth' (1890), H.D. Everett's *Iras: A Mystery* (1896), Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), and 'Smith and the Pharaohs'—betrays a concern with the so-called 'Egyptian question', the British government's intense prevarication over whether Egypt should be declared an official protectorate (Deane 2008: 384). For Deane, the political uncertainty of the British colonial project found expression in fictional depictions of orientalist sexuality (Deane 2008: 385). On this view, 'Smith and the Pharaohs' and other narratives in this genre exhibit a set of narrative and aesthetic features that collectively articulate a fictional engagement with the issue of Egyptian-British colonial relations. 'Smith and the Pharaohs' is a particularly distinctive instance of Mummy fiction in that it comprises both a statement of Haggard's idiosyncratic views on Egypt and a commentary upon the popular craze for Egypt of which Mummy stories were an integral part. A closer examination of Haggard's approach to archaeology in the story provides a useful starting-point for grasping the singular nature of his intervention in contemporary debates over Egypt. Haggard's attitude towards archaeology and the precision

with which he represents archaeological practices form an important subtext to the ‘Smith and the Pharaohs’, one that reveals the complexity of his beliefs about the status of the British Empire in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Haggard had a lifelong interest in Egyptology and in his autobiography recalled how ‘[f]rom a boy ancient Egypt had fascinated me, and I had read everything concerning it on which I could lay my hands’ (Haggard 1926: 1:254). He visited Egypt in 1887, 1904, and 1912, on each occasion going to archaeological sites and becoming acquainted with prominent archaeologists. Indeed, his diaries record how he was personally guided around Queen Nefertiti’s tomb by Howard Carter, and entered the tomb of Menepthah with legendary French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, the director-general of excavations and antiquities. As might be expected, such first-hand experiences are reflected in Haggard’s detailed depiction of the practicalities of archaeology in ‘Smith and the Pharaohs’, as when Smith reflects on the amount of money required to fund an excavation, the method for locating promising excavation sites, and the relationship between archaeologists and workmen.

Particularly indicative of its author’s grasp of the realities of Egyptian archaeology is the emphasis given in ‘Smith and the Pharaohs’ to the professional antagonism between British and French archaeologists. Even after the British occupation of 1882, French archaeologists and Egyptologists continued to manage major archaeological institutions such as the Cairo Museum and the Department of Antiquities (Riggs 2013: 71), a legacy of nineteenth-century French archaeological dominance that looms large over the story. Thus ‘Smith and the Pharaohs’ references Auguste Mariette, the foremost nineteenth-century French Egyptologist and founder of the Department of Antiquities, as being Smith’s predecessor in the search for Ma Mee’s tomb. Likewise, Mariette’s regulations dictate which of Smith’s finds must be surrendered to the Cairo Museum authorities in the person of a ‘French savant’. Smith’s tense relationship with his Gallic counterpart stages what Haggard regarded as the institutionalised authority of French archaeology and the self-sufficiency and independence of the gentlemanly British amateur. The French savant emphasises the importance of serving the ‘public interest’ (151) by surrendering artefacts to the museum—an institution he refers to by the

pronoun 'we'—even as Smith continually defends his personal, individual connection to the finds.

As Haggard was aware, the independent British archaeologist of which Smith is an exemplar relied upon a very particular set of funding arrangements. Indeed, the question of finance sharply differentiated British and French approaches to archaeology. While the *Institut français d'archéologie orientale* was directly supported by the French government, its British counterparts at the Egyptian Exploration Fund were entirely dependent upon private sponsorship (Díaz-Andreu 2007: 122). The British public's seemingly insatiable fascination with Egypt—from the crowds that thronged exhibitions at the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum to the bestselling accounts of archaeological travels, such as Amelia Edwards's *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*—was central to their efforts to secure investors. British archaeologists effectively had to gamble on the chance of making a discovery sufficiently sensational to secure fame and further funding. Tourism, too, was an essential tool in stimulating interest in ancient Egypt, resulting in a mutual dependency between the two: archaeology made visible the wonders of the Pharaonic age which tourism then marketed to British consumers. Predictably, as Carter's disapproving reference to tourists suggests, the relationship was often fraught. This tension, which Elliot Colla has called a 'structural antagonism' (Colla 2007: 197), is central to Haggard's telling insistence in 'Smith and the Pharaohs' that interest in the ancient past be *authentic*, an insistence that is readily detectable in how the tale contrasts Smith's 'noble air' and professional altruism with those who 'find pleasure in disturbing graves and stealing the offerings of the dead' (162).

Haggard had recently launched a public attack on the cheapening of Egyptian archaeology by tourism in a series of six articles for *The Daily Mail* that appeared between 23 April and 22 July 1904. In them, he returned repeatedly to what he elsewhere decried as 'the wholesale robbery of the ancient Egypt tombs and the consequent desecration of the dead who lie therein' (Haggard 1926: 2:58). In an article titled 'The Trade in the Dead' (22 July 1904), he recounted a spectacle that he had witnessed on the streets of Luxor:

I saw the naked body of a little child lying in a wooden box outside a shop, to be purchased for a few piasters. Within was the corpse of a priestess in her painted

coffin; for a penny the Arab would lift the lid and show her with a ghoulish laugh. (Addy 1998: 51)

Haggard humanizes the ancient desiccated corpse as a ‘naked body’ in order to elicit distaste on the reader’s part towards the process of commodification that is under way. His description of customers paying to see the corpse of a priestess likewise underscores that this is a debased exhibition in which casual punters pay a trivial sum for a sideshow-style glimpse of the dead. Significantly, this dialectic of nudity and spectatorship also underpinned his indignation at the display of royal mummies at the Cairo Museum: ‘There they lie ... stripped of their royal ornaments and state, they repose in their glass cases for visitors to stare at’ (51). For Haggard—in light of his own travels, perhaps somewhat hypocritically—all Egyptian tourism represented a ghoulish defilement of the dead.

In his *Daily Mail* articles, Haggard also seeks to define an authentic interest against this macabre tourist trade by showing that archaeological exploration and analysis of the dead for the purposes of science are justified where spectacle is not. He proposes a practical solution, that ‘the royal bodies should be restored to their sepulchres’, arguing that if archaeologists should find it difficult to find the right tomb for each corpse, they should place the bodies ‘in the central chamber of the great pyramid, which is a cavity of no great interest, and pump it full of cement, so that it may remain inviolate forever’ (52). Haggard approves of continued archaeological excavations, but insists that the dead speedily be returned to their graves: genuine interest is firmly and unambiguously aligned with scientific endeavour and archaeological good practice. Haggard meant these articles to be polemical, a means of situating himself publicly in relation to what he regarded as an urgent topic of debate. These proposals, which he variously reiterated in magazine articles, his autobiography, and the letter pages of *The Times*, provide the main impetus for ‘Smith and the Pharaohs’.

By virtue of being a magazine short story, ‘Smith and the Pharaohs’ was particularly well suited to furthering Haggard’s argument. The concision of the format allowed him to deliver what is essentially a compact political parable. The story is, in effect, an extended anecdote: a series of events that result in Smith’s trial for grave robbing. As a result, the story’s moral—that greater respect is due to the dead of ancient Egypt—is made abundantly clear. Equally, the greater speed of

composition and publication inherent in writing for periodicals served to confer a quality of immediacy upon the story. Haggard uses this immediacy to place his story in direct relation to current Egyptology, having the narrator of 'Smith and the Pharaohs' making frequent reference to exhibitions and events putatively taking place contemporaneously with the plot events of the story. For example, the objects that Smith retrieves from Ma Mee's tomb are, Haggard's narrator explains, 'needless to describe, for are they not to be seen in the gold room of the Museum, labelled 'Bijouterie de la Reine Ma-Mee, XVIIIeme Dynastie. Thebes (Smith's Tomb)'?' (149). Haggard's rhetorical address to his audience, like his mimicking of curatorial discourse, distances the narrator from the finds, implying that they exist in a reality outside the story. In this regard, the story closely resembles the shorter articles written for journals such as *Illustrated London News* and *Century Magazine* by Egyptian Exploration Fund luminaries Amelia Edwards and Flinders Petrie, which regaled readers with detailed accounts of new archaeological finds in Egypt. Notwithstanding its fantastical nature, Haggard's story should thus be seen as in dialogue with contemporary archaeological developments and as engaging directly in the debates that surrounded them.

As fiction, however, 'Smith and the Pharaohs' differs significantly from the arguments rehearsed by Haggard in his *Daily Mail* articles. Both seek to distinguish genuine interest from mass tourism. Where scientific endeavour functions as an index for authenticity in the articles, 'Smith and the Pharaohs' presents the reader with a more complex and far-reaching explanation of what constitutes genuine interest in ancient Egypt. Indeed, the narrator of 'Smith and the Pharaohs' dismisses the insularity of a scientific worldview within the first few pages of the story, declaring instead that the story will deal with experiences that cause 'the old divine doubts, to rise again deep in our hearts' (141). Haggard invokes an esoteric conception of Egypt more appropriate to a tale intended for readers of the *Strand Magazine*, defining genuine interest in the past in terms of those qualities and values that he might expect to share with the audience for his story. This particular relationship—between the writer and the audience he presumes for his tale—is based on Haggard's appeal to certain common political and class based ideas and values: 'Smith and the Pharaohs' was specifically tailored for the *Strand's* middle-class and Conservative audiences

(Cranfield 2013: 6). As will be seen, three aspects of Smith's identity in particular exemplify what Haggard saw as a respectable interest in Egypt's ancient past: a knowledge of science tempered by scepticism; an ability and willingness to invest time and money; and a politically Conservative worldview.

The story's sceptical attitude closely reflects the *Strand's* own editorial stance. It was an attitude the *Strand* maintained even as it began to engage more fully with early-twentieth-century scientific developments. Of central importance to the *Strand's* position on science was their selection of writers for the magazine. As J. L. Cranfield argues, the magazine cast its writers in the role of 'advocate[s] for the interests of the readership in direct contact with the original producers of knowledge' (Cranfield 2013: 11). Contributors knew enough from contact with professionals to be able to inform the magazine's audience, but as laymen were able to maintain a critical distance. Both poles are important: *Strand* readers were felt to be hungry for new knowledge and dependent upon its provision by learned writers. Haggard fitted this role perfectly, having direct contact with Egyptologists and archaeologists and being familiar with the details of their work, and the entertainment value of his story is everywhere bolstered by the attempt to inform.

At the same time, the story serves to mark the limits of science's explanatory power, thereby allowing Haggard to explore some of the more spiritual and ideological aspects of engagement with ancient Egypt. Crucially, Smith is not just an archaeologist but a middle-class bank clerk with the private wherewithal to become an archaeologist in order to settle a matter of interest. In other words, Smith shares the audience's desire for self-improvement, and thus demonstrates a key characteristic that signals his genuine interest in Egyptology—the ability and inclination to invest. Smith invests time, money and energy into his quest for the truth about Ma Mee. His evolution from bewildered bank clerk to competent archaeologist hinges on his ability to order 'all the best works on Egyptology' from the local bookshop, and he achieves expertise through hard work and application: 'he tackled those books like a man, and being clever and industrious, within three months had a fair working knowledge of the subject' (143).² The narrator presumes a similar

² These characteristics also mark Smith as exemplary of the popular image of the Victorian archaeologist. In *Popular Receptions of Archaeology*, Susanne

commitment to popular edification from the reader: '[a]t times we are inclined to agree with [scientists], especially after it has been our privilege to attend a course of lectures by one of them' (141). Haggard's inclusive 'we' suggests a community shared by narrator and reader that attends and is intelligently critical of popular scientific lectures.

This supposition finds support in the *Strand's* advertising pages. 'Smith and the Pharaohs' appeared in the same issues as notices for correspondence courses such as The Pelman School of the Mind and The London Correspondence School and magazines such as *Brain Power and Mental Efficiency Illustrated* and the Caxton Publishing Company's *Business Encyclopaedia*. Their adverts demonstrate the importance of self-improvement for the magazine's middle-class readership and the extent to which this readership believed such edification to be attainable through the right amount of application. Equally, the emphasis that the story places on the inadvertency of Smith's first encounter with Pharaonic Egypt—he 'drifts' in to avoid the bad weather—marks him as a recognizable figure to readers who took access to institutions of intellectual improvement for granted. Smith's willingness to work hard, and his easy relationship to the sources of knowledge are designed to chime with an audience that shares those values, and so the story encourages them to believe that the gap between curious beginner and eminent archaeologist is, with the right amount of application, fordable.

Smith also invests financially in archaeology. His excavations are only possible because he is able to commit three hundred pounds of his own money, a considerable sum for that time. Haggard underscores Smith's financial suitability for his chosen path. While we learn little about Smith's educational background or family situation, Haggard offers a detailed account of his economic history: a path from wealth to penury, through misadventure and back to fortune, through the shrewd investment of a modest inheritance. Smith is a sensible investor with an

Dueterberg examines the enthusiastic reception granted Heinrich Schliemann by the British public. She argues that the immense popular appeal he had was largely due to his ability to fashion himself as a self-made man whose achievements were the result of hard work, quick learning and dedication (213). Dueterberg also notes that Schliemann's archaeologist forbearers, Henry Layard and Henry Rawlinson, served as positive examples of hard work and dedication in Samuel Smiles's influential book of self-improvement, *Self-Help* (1859).

astute sense of moderation: '[t]hen (and this shows the wise and practical nature of the man) he stopped speculating and put out his money in such a fashion that it brought him a safe and clear four per cent' (141). Tellingly, Smith makes his fortune through speculation, a motif that, as Francis O'Gorman has noted, was 'a financial practice about which Haggard thought hard and which, for many commentators, helped define the economic identity of late Victorian capitalism' (O'Gorman, 2007: 165). Financial speculation was an object of particular fascination for Haggard, O'Gorman argues, because of its inherent combination of 'accident, vulnerability, and luck'. Smith's background in speculation stages a tension between careful investment and chance, a tension that is particularly relevant to archaeology.

Smith's forays into archaeology share with speculation this particular combination of 'accident, vulnerability, and luck'. He invests money in excavations but cannot be certain that this investment will yield the discovery of Ma Mee's tomb. In common with other archaeologists of the time, he relies on luck as much as dedication, and luck (or more accurately, destiny) guides him to his discovery since he is drawn by a 'strange instinct' to the hidden entrance to Ma Mee's tomb: a bay in the hillside that geological, archaeological, and local knowledge had discounted as a possible location. Smith's spiritual connection to Ma Mee sustains him after he reaches the limits of what science and money can achieve; as with speculation, there is a quality that brings success, beyond sensible hard work. Though essential and valuable, investment provides only a partial answer to what the story presents as an authentic connection to Egypt. Smith locates the tomb for the same reason that he is, at the end of story, saved from execution—destiny in the form of a birth-right based on his past life as an Egyptian courtier.

As this occult plot twist suggests, Haggard's version of a genuine relationship with Egyptian antiquity is even more exclusive than it first appears. Smith exemplifies the qualities comprising genuine interest that Haggard wishes to define. Readers of the *Strand Magazine* could have been counted upon to recognise and approve of those qualities, namely, a willingness to invest time and money and a knowledgeable but sceptical attitude to science. Genuine interest is, in a sense, a function of bourgeois class identity. However, Smith is also possessed of a birthright, a spiritual connection to ancient Egypt. This supplementary quality reveals Haggard's interest in authenticity to be an expression of particular

ideological position. The combination of investment and destiny situates Haggard's construction of authentic interest squarely within a Conservative worldview. For Haggard, ancient Egypt is a gentleman's club to which only a select few are admitted. Recognising this aspect of Haggard's definition of genuine interest allows us to see his portrayal of ancient Egypt for what it is—a gesture of Conservative wish-fulfilment.

In 'Smith and the Pharaohs' Haggard evokes ancient Egypt as a High Tory utopia. Consider the account of Smith waiting outside Ma Mee's tomb, surveying the valley below:

By now the moon was up, revealing all the sad, wild scene in its every detail. [. . .] Once, thousands of years ago, a procession had wound up along the roadway which was doubtless buried beneath the sand whereon he stood [. . .] [he saw] The priests, shaven-headed and robed in leopards' skins [. . .] the mourners, rending the air with their lamentations. . . . Pharaoh himself in his ceremonial robes, his apron, his double crown of linen surmounted by the golden snake, his inlaid bracelets and his heavy, tinkling earrings [. . .]. (146)

Smith's archaeological knowledge enables him to imagine in detail the mourners present at a Pharaonic funeral, right down to the minutiae of their dress. His vision presents the ancient Egyptians in a tableau vivant in which the pomp and ceremony of the Pharaoh and his court are arranged spatially before him. Moving from the mourners, to the priests, to the Pharaoh himself, Smith visually captures the hierarchy of the Egyptian court in an ideal image of feudal social relations.

Utopian visions were a common feature of evocations of ancient Egypt in Haggard's day. Thus J. C. M. Garcia describes the ideological attractions of Pharaonic Egypt for many archaeologists at the beginning of the twentieth century:

The past was seen as a golden age of innocence, firm beliefs and hierarchical social order whose values, if restored in present times, would ensure the regeneration of a decadent society. [. . .] [S]upposedly unchanging Pharaonic Egypt and its hierarchical society began to be appreciated as an exemplary conservative alternative, another lost paradise of beauty and spirituality which fed the nostalgia for an idealized past apt to compete with the present, at least in the realm of fantasy. (García 2009: 177-8)

Ancient Egypt functioned in such nostalgic accounts as a sharp rebuke to the current state of the British Empire. Many Conservatives believed, like Haggard, that Britain was in decline as a result of its

waning economic stature, its growing electorate, and its Liberal government's reluctant attitude to expansion (Porter 2004: 225). For such critics, Ancient Egypt—agrarian, aristocratic, and financially stable—represented an idealised image of what Britain's own Empire might be.

Two aspects in particular underpinned this comparison: Egypt's agrarian economy and its feudal class relations. The enthusiasm displayed by Egyptologists for the longevity of ancient Egypt's agrarian economy and the hierarchical class structures that supported its economy mirrored the worries expressed over the state of British agriculture. A few years earlier, while researching for his non-fiction description of the state of British agriculture, *Rural England: Being an Account of the Agricultural and Social Researches Carried out in 1901 and 1902* (1902), Haggard had toured the English countryside, whose land-owning class he saw as in terminal decline as a consequence of the so-called Great Depression. In sharp contrast, in an article titled 'An Egyptian Date Farm—the Financial Aspect' that appeared in the *Times* on 11 October 1912, he encouraged readers to invest in the reintroduction of date farms onto the banks of the Nile:

this land, which has been bare desert [. . .] was irrigated and under cultivation in ancient days. Possibly here were situated the estates of some of the gentlemen-farmers of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, whose bones the civilized peoples of today are now engaged in dragging from the neighbouring tombs. (Haggard 1906: 77)

Haggard portrayed Egypt as imaginatively and economically fertile, a country awaiting only an external impetus in order to enact a restoration of its past glories. Haggard advances nothing less than the re-seeding of ancient Egypt by British investors. And he based his economic argument squarely on archaeological evidence: because Egypt had provided these opportunities once, it might be expected to again.

In several other journal articles from these years, Haggard depicted Pharaonic class relations as similarly ripe for restoration and suggested that Egypt's *fellaheen* or agricultural labourers represented a fundamental connection between the land of the Pharaohs and present-day Egypt. They were, in effect, living archaeological remains. Haggard reiterated this view repeatedly. Writing in *Travel Magazine* in December 1908, for example, he claimed that the blood of the Pharaohs survived 'in the boys who drive the tourists' donkeys or in the fellaheen who labour in the fields, the proud race of the Egyptians' (Haggard 1998c: 62). The

statement bears comparison with how the protagonist of 'Smith and the Pharaohs' watches a group of *fellaheen* dragging a sarcophagus on a tramway:

As they dragged they sang an echoing rhythmic song, whereof each line ended with an invocation to Allah. [. . .] Just so, reflected Smith, had their forefathers sung when, millenniums ago, they dragged that very sarcophagus from the quarries to the Nile. [. . .] The East may change its masters and its gods, but its customs never change. (Haggard 1998a: 152)

The widespread belief among British commentators that Egypt's customs never changed or, more accurately, that its culture still bore clear traces of its four-thousand year old heritage, fostered a view of the *fellaheen* as what nineteenth-century cultural anthropologist Edward Tylor termed 'survivals', that is, vestiges of previous cultures that have outlived their initial purpose. The overtones of racial degeneracy which this view implied were a feature of much writing about Egypt (Garcia 192). Without seeking to downplay the fact that Haggard's own view of the *fellaheen* was both historically inaccurate and morally repugnant, we can note that he viewed archaeological objects as neither static nor inert but as seeds for the potential restoration of long-vanished civilisations. Writing in the *Daily Mail* on 22 July 1904, he described the transportation of excavated Mummies to the Cairo Museum as recorded by a guidebook:

The Museum Barge arrived [. . .] laden with the cargo of kings! It was remarkable that between Luxor and Kaft on both sides of the Nile the *fellaheen* women followed the boat, uttering loud cries, and with their hair all dishevelled, while the men fired guns as they do at funerals (Haggard 1998b: 52)

While the funeral seems to describe the remnants of an ancient culture, its power for Haggard lies in its ability to evoke present feeling, the possibility that these sentiments are still current and, indeed, may have the potential to transform into something else. This depiction of ageless loyalty to a ruling class suggests the role that Haggard imagines for the *fellaheen*, as a ready-made peasant class able to fulfill his fantasy of a present-day Pharaonic Egypt.

Haggard's glorification of ancient Egypt represented more than just an antiquarian fascination with the past. In the land of the Pharaohs he saw a possible avenue for the regeneration of what he considered a

decadent, declining British Empire. ‘Smith and the Pharaohs’ imagines the landscape and archaeological remains of ancient Egypt as containing the potential for a restoration of Pharaonic greatness, and he thereby presents an alternative, Tory conception of the imperial project. His concern with identifying a genuine interest in the past is therefore grounded in a desire to establish a set of qualities necessary for inclusion in such a project. Through Smith’s intellectual and economic investment, and his spiritual communion with the ancient Egyptians, Haggard expresses a class solidarity with the aristocracy of the past, and a shared community of social status and ideology.

Curiously, Haggard’s imperialistic ideological investment in ancient Egypt had a corollary in one strand of nationalistic sentiment in early-twentieth-century Egypt. Most particularly, Pharaonism [*al-fir’awniyya*] shared a similar concern with exalting Pharaonic Egypt and using it as a template for the future. Since its inception in the mid nineteenth century, Pharaonism had gained increasing popularity among Egyptian nationalist intellectuals, and in the twentieth century it would play a significant role in nationalist politics despite being criticized as an attempt to separate Egyptian nationalism from an Islamic or pan-Arab nationalism (Janowski and Gershoni 1997: 82). For Pharaonists, archaeology provided a vision of the past that enabled them to define an ideal of Egyptian nationhood based upon territory: the shared experience of a people across the ages in a single geographical space. It claimed historical continuity between the ancient past and Egyptian modernity, and cast modern Egypt’s increasing financial stability and technological advancement as a potential return to such greatness (Colla 2007: 126). The future, it claimed, would be created by a return to the past.

Like Haggard, Pharaonists sought to define an authentic approach to history. This interest in the legitimacy of historical perspective was largely due to Pharaonism’s intellectual debt to European Egyptology. As Elliot Colla argues, Egyptian antiquity was ‘no less a source for contesting colonial hegemony than it had been for legitimating it’ (150). Pharaonists were dependent upon the discoveries of British, French and German archaeologists to provide the information and symbols that they reclaimed for nationalist ends. As Colla explains, Pharaonists felt that:

Egyptians needed to learn to feel their ancient history. That is, they needed to visit museums and put themselves in a position to experience their country’s ancient

monuments. In short, Egyptians were called upon to become tourists in their own country. (Colla 2007: 151)

Pharaonicists depended upon European archaeology, tourism and mass culture even as they defined themselves against them. Thus Pharaonicists were equally motivated to distinguish their own version of an authentic connection with the past from western appropriation. The similarity of these circumstances—a valorisation of an ideal of ancient Egypt, the expression of Egypt as a key to the future, and an uneasy relationship to the infrastructure that provided access to the ancient past—explains how Haggard and the Pharaonicists could find themselves treading significant portions of the same imaginative ground.

This is not, of course, to imply any other kind of equivalence between the ideas of the Pharaonicists and Haggard. Nonetheless, it is possible to trace a number of interesting similarities and differences between Pharaonism and 'Smith and the Pharaohs'. The meeting of the ghostly Egyptian royalty toward the end of the story conveys some of these similarities. Cleopatra opens the meeting with a short speech; Menes, the first recorded king of Egypt, follows with his own. Cleopatra admits that she was 'the last monarch who ruled over the Upper and Lower lands, before Egypt became a home of slaves' (159); which Menes mirrors with his claim that he was 'the first who joined the Upper and Lower Lands' (159). Notably, geography marks the existence of Pharaonic Egypt. Menes is the first because he united Upper and Lower Egypt, and Cleopatra is the last because she witnessed its division. The symbolic value of reuniting Upper and Lower Egypt in the modern era was a concern that surfaced in both Pharaonicist writing (Colla 2007: 148), and in Haggard's articles, where he lamented the British government's decision to cede administration of Sudan in 1883 (Haggard 1998d: 64).

Significantly, the similarities shared by Haggard and Pharaonicists in their appropriations of ancient Egypt rest on a disdain for tourism but also a fundamentally similar conception of Egypt's imperial potential. Yet the essential issue of Egyptian independence separates Haggard's thinking from that of the Pharaonicists. Haggard's writing on Egyptian nationalism expresses disgust and fear, prompting him to declare, in an article for *Windsor Magazine*, of the prosperity he claimed British rule had brought to Egypt: 'bread will always breed an eater, within a few years' time there will be hundreds of thousands more Egyptians, most of

them hating and agitating against the Western power that brought them into being' (Haggard 1998d: 66). Haggard's evocation of a shapeless, unreasoning horde helps to illuminate the ambiguity of the gathering Pharaohs in his story. While Pharaonic Egypt was, for him, an object of approbation and an inspiration, it also represented an unavoidable existential threat, not least due to its association with Egyptian nationalism.

British imperialists were especially nervous about Egyptian nationalist violence in the period just prior to Haggard's composition of 'Smith and the Pharaohs'. In 1910, Ibrahim Nassif al-Wardani, a member of the nationalist Watani Party, had shot and fatally wounded the Egyptian Prime Minister Boutros Ghali (Tauber 2006: 603). Wardani claimed that he had killed the prime minister as a reprisal for Ghali's role in the prosecution and punishment of villagers involved in the so-called Denshawai Incident, an altercation between British soldiers and locals in the village of Denshawai in 1906 that had prompted the inflicting of brutal, disproportionate punishments on the villagers by the British administration (Fahmy 2008: 8). Nationalist writers at the time had written of the injustice of the British colonial government's action in European newspapers, sparking an international outcry, and causing questions to be raised in the British parliament (Sayyid-Marsot 1969: 173). The incident had become a rallying point for nationalists, and the shooting of Boutros Ghali became the first of a series of such assassinations. There was, as such, a growing anxiety among the British establishment about the potential for political violence (Porter 2004: 210). These anxieties were further stoked by police revelations that the assassin had belonged to one of the many secret societies which had sprung up in and around Cairo. Fearing an upsurge in nationalist conspiracies, the British administration tasked the Cairo Police with the formation of a new bureau for gathering intelligence on these clandestine bodies (Tauber 605).

This context lends an obvious significance to Haggard's fictional account of a group of elite Egyptians who secretly gather to discuss their grievances and the potential for revenge. The humiliation expressed by the Pharaohs at the dispersal of their remains by European powers is especially apparent. As Menes reminds the crowd: 'Others of us lie in far lands. ... Man-kau-ra, he who built the third of the great pyramids, the Pyramid of Her, sleeps, or rather wakes in a dark city, called London,

across the seas, a place of murk where no sun shines' (159). In response, an unnamed speaker laments that 'bones of mine [. . .] [are] hid in the blackness of a great ship [. . .] tossing on a sea that is strewn with ice' (160). Both statements not only express resentment at the loss of their remains but, in an inversion of the conventional metaphor of British colonialism, characterize the West as a place of darkness opposed to Egyptian light. Smith watches the meeting from his hiding spot, combining feelings of the 'closest attention and considerable anxiety' (160). The restricted view, Smith's heightened nervousness, and the acute threat of discovery emphasise that the words of the Egyptians are not meant for outside ears. His vantage point grants him access to a world that not only excludes western participation but also imagines its destruction.

Smith accidentally makes a noise, and all eyes train upon him as he nervously climbs down from his hiding place. No longer the watcher, he is the watched: their eyes 'fixed upon him, [. . .] a bone had a better chance of escaping the search of a Röntgen ray than he of hiding himself from their baleful glare' (161). His transformation from voyeur to participant, from viewer to viewed, is a reminder of the threat that it was believed such secret societies held –Smith is rendered helpless before a hostile crowd of Egyptians. Additionally, the reference to Röntgen rays alludes to Grafton Elliott Smith's pioneering use of X-ray technology to ascertain the age and cause of death of mummified corpses. It is an allusion that positions the archaeologist as the exemplary modern scientist, who subjects the material of history to rigorous technological analysis. Smith's observation destabilises that position by granting the gaze of the ancient Egyptians similar investigative power, thus highlighting the inversion of subject-object positions. As Nicholas Daly points out, this scene shows a reversal of the archaeologist's role: 'Haggard's story brings the expert face to face with the prospect of his own objectification' (Daly 2004: 106). The museum exhibits examine the archaeologist. But this reversal highlights a further significance: Smith again finds himself in a museum, being scrutinised and the extent and quality of his interest in Egypt being assessed. Haggard's story returns to the issue of what constitutes an authentic engagement with ancient Egypt, but this time with ancient Egyptians, not British museum officials, serving as arbitrators.

The question of the legitimacy of Smith's interest in the past bookends his archaeological career. An examination of the qualities that Smith is expected to display—by the director of the museum, by the readers of *The Strand* and by the undead pharaohs—enables us to see beyond the limits of the Mummy genre within which commentary upon this story is so often confined. Haggard's knowledge of Egypt, and his familiarity with the romance genre and the exigencies of the short story format meant that he could navigate, critique, and position himself in relation to dominant representations of ancient Egypt. In the character of Smith he presents a set of qualities that he presumes will meet with approval from *Strand* readers: a knowledge of science and a romantic disposition; an ability and willingness to invest time and money; and a specifically Conservative class sensibility. These qualities grant access to what Haggard considers the real Egypt, a Conservative reimagining of the country as an imperialist nostalgic fantasy. Even so, this vision was to remain bound by the tensions of British colonial rule. In the context of an emerging Pharaonicist nationalism, the story's concern with the question of genuine interest stands revealed as anything but parochial or trivial. Rather, it stages a central issue for European interactions with Egypt and its past. As the story reaches its end, and Smith must prove that his interest in the Pharaonic past is genuine or face execution, he does so by claiming Egyptian heritage—'I was one of you' (162)—revealing 'Smith and the Pharaohs' as a strikingly ambivalent expression of Haggard's position on Egypt and Empire.

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