as there is, still, a comparatively small number of scholars of Nubian heritage in either the Western or MENA academies. As such archives become more open to Nubians "to tell other, different stories" (p. 280), perhaps, then, the de-peopled vision of the region, so deftly unpacked by Carruthers, can finally be interrogated by the people most denied this past.

At the same time, the book's arguments could have been strengthened by examining in more depth salvage projects related to the imminent flooding of Nubia by the dam that *did* pay attention to people, not pots. Here, the ethnographic survey led by Fernea under the aegis of AUC's Social Research Center stands out. Commenting on the importance of such an undertaking, the American anthropologist argued that it was "unthinkable that a traditional way of life should pass out of existence without an adequate record," and expressed his hope that such a study would benefit "the Nubian people themselves."[2] The documentary records produced by the survey, especially the photographs of everyday life in Nubia, have in the ensuing decades been creatively repurposed by community members as strategic resources for heritage revitalization and for the cultivation of a collective memory of a lost homeland across generations. Given Carruthers' claim that the archaeological erasure of contemporary Nubians is an instance of "recolonization," a critical examination of a contemporaneous salvage project that explicitly defined itself against such erasure, even as it inevitably replayed the colonial logics embedded in the very idea of salvage, surely would have yielded important comparative insight.

Nevertheless, *Flooded Pasts* stands as a landmark contribution to scholarship on modern Nubia. The nascent field of Nubian studies has been dominated by the history and archaeology of ancient and medieval Nubia, as even a cursory look at the program for the International Conference for Nubian Studies, held every four years, makes clear. By examining how the construction of knowledge about Nubia's ancient past created the conditions for the displacement of its present-day inhabitants, this book will be of interest not only to scholars of the modern Middle East and Africa interested in questions of race and indigeneity as well as heritage and material culture, but also to community-engaged archaeologists and historians of science working across different world regions. I also might purchase copies for my Nubian family to read should we ever decide to give the Philae sound and light show a second chance.

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My Egypt Archive

Alan Mikhail (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022). Pp. 184. $26.00 cloth, $20.00 paper. ISBN 9780300260991

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If the Greek root *arche* embodies "both a beginning and a domain for the exercise of power," then, as Alan Mikhail deftly demonstrates, archival research in Egypt likewise functioned as a point of origin for becoming a historian and an arena in which the power of the Egyptian

[2] Fernea, Robert, "Ethnological Survey of Nubia: Statement of Purpose and Organization," in *Nubian Encounters*, ed. Nicholas Hopkins and Soheir Mehanna (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2010), 87.

state and social relations resided. *My Egypt Archive* contrasts the epistemophilic and cumulative impulses of a budding historian, eagerly seeking to obtain access to 18th-century documents, with the quotidian realities of doing history in the midst of a labyrinthine bureaucratic tangle of security permissions, building entry rituals, and complex social negotiations. The book's method, "critical self-abnegation in the service of cultural analysis," highlights the intricacies of research in Egypt (p. 8). The result is a critical meditation on the exigencies of archival work under less-than-ideal conditions marked by power differentials and institutional mechanisms of clearance and obstruction. In the process, we learn a great deal about the conditions of opacity and transparency within the archive, as in history, more broadly.

What the book conveys remarkably well, and in a manner quite distinctive from the large body of literature on the archive, is the range of visceral experiences entailing "personal relationships with archivists and other historians, lost pages, research leads that fizzle out, and all the messy experiences of daily life" (p. 9). At its most radical, the book de-fetishizes not only the Egyptian National Archives (Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya), but the entire process of archival research. Poetic musings on the archive as an oneiric space, "a place in which people can be alone with the past" while undoing bundles of documents in solitude, gives way, instead, to the curious convivial life of objects, from plastic cards and rickety old metal carts to documents and boxes, shuttled from one room to another. The romance of the archive, as we might wish to imagine it, yields to the "romantic violence" of making history (p. 95).

Such attentiveness to the materiality of the life of objects within the archive is coupled by the author with a concern for its built environment and its embeddedness within greater Cairo. The archive's architectural particularities—stairs, elevators, cubbyholes, windows overlooking the Nile, an informal café with crimson vinyl chairs, and the calligraphic sign adorning its entrance, as well as its location in the neighborhood of Bulaq, an area reclaimed from the Nile with a high water table and sodden soil underfoot (not a particularly inviting locale for the storage of centuries-old brittle paper, as Mikhail reminds us)—all play a part in this story. The imaginary Victorian stillness of the historian is replaced by the embodied phenomenology of everyday life: standing, sitting, bounding down stairs, leaning against a bar, waiting in endless traffic. Such a shift in attention toward embodiment engenders a marked self-consciousness about the relationship of the body-in-space as it becomes attuned to both architectural forms and power dynamics.

Drinking tea, researchers quibbling, the presence or absence of political speech, exorbitant displays of power and authority, class and gender dynamics, and even accusations of archival theft—all the chaotic business of doing history—is laid out by Mikhail as the Geertzian thick description of the work of culture. On this front, Chapter 5 on noise, aptly titled "Volume," is particularly instructive. We hear "voices declaring grievance and injury," as Mikhail admonishes us to listen for the noise and to the noise (pp. 61–62). Rather than conceptualize noise as the detritus that prevents us from performing the lofty, or "staid," to use his turn of phrase, work that we presume to do as historians, *My Egypt Archive* unabashedly presents it to us as constitutive of our work (p. 63). "History is done as it is made," Mikhail reminds us, "in the presence of others, in the living, breathing, messy, loud worlds where personalities clash, mobile phones ring, stomachs rumble, guns fire, and minds wander" (p. 62). We witness the politics of interruption and noise. Who speaks, or who can speak in the archive, and when? The "inescapable soundtrack" of the Egyptian National Archives is dominated by the institution's matriarch, Madam Amal, wielding her authority like a cudgel, projecting her voice whether chatting on her mobile, gossiping with coworkers, or chastising the basement staff for having lost track of request slips; indeed "hers was a perfected brand of bureaucratic performance art" (pp. 63–64). The messiness of doing history contrasts with the "extraordinary kind of aloneness" that Europeanists, in

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particular, tend to emphasize in romanticized discussions of archives.[1] Importantly, it helps us understand the collective affective registers, such as "exhaustion as a public state" (the subtitle of an art exhibit at Contemporary Image Collective in Cairo), explored by Sara Salem as indexical of "(Anticolonial) Revolution as a Felt Archive."

The question of bureaucratic authority suffuses the text, as it does everyday life in Egypt, whether through identity cards, photocopying permissions, or traffic stops, and the book is peppered with bureaucrats, including Ahmed sitting behind the entrance security desk, a man inexplicably guarding the stairs and elevators of the second floor, Abdel Rahman in the musty basement storage room, and the men and women of the photocopy department. And where there is bureaucracy, there is hierarchy, both that of the bureaucrat who wields their authority within what Albert Memmi termed a "pyramid of petty tyrants," as well as the state apparatuses that authorize such institutional structures and the hierarchies embedded within them. Unlike in the West, where one must often turn to critical theory to highlight the capricious nature of power and authority, the fact that the "law is the law," an authority without truth, based on a traumatic, irrational, and senseless injunction to obey, here it is intuitively understood, laid out for all to see.

What is unique about *My Egypt Archive* is the way that it brings to life the quotidian experience of working and living in Egypt. These experiences include idling for hours in endless traffic, encountering the inexplicable obstacles erected in one's search for knowledge, observing, sometimes passively, sometimes protestingly, the injustices of everyday life, what Mikhail collectively calls the "low frequency frustrations" of daily life (p. 9). Such injustices are amply recounted by the author, and the text makes no pretense to veil the multiplicity of forms of inequality that reside in the archive, just as in wider society. "The reading room of the archive," Mikhail observes, "was not a neutral space of objective knowledge production, a romanticized sanctuary of quiet reflection and thought. It was the place where reputation, status, nationality, and experience were the coin of the realm" (p. 2). Class background, urban or regional affiliation, national origin and place of domicile, educational status, and all the other hierarchies such as gender and religion, and even marital status, that we know to mark Egyptian state and society, saturate the experience in the archive. Given Mikhail's research between 2001 and 2010, such hierarchies of power, status, and stratification are even more heightened, as is the awareness of the capillaries of power embedded within the archive, especially as we see the mounting dissatisfactions with Hosni Mubarak's regime and its thirty-year emergency rule, along with the nepotistic power structures and crony capitalist networks that sustained it.

Part ethnography, part memoir, part social history of Egypt in the 2000s, this engrossingly written book will be relevant to scholars interested in the archive tout court, as well as those about to embark on archival research in Egypt, including those who intend to use the adjacent and less august Dar al-Kutub, which houses manuscripts and printed books. The writing is so crisp as to summon visually, particularly for those who have been to the Egyptian National Archives, the space itself and to conjure it for those who have not. My only criticism is that the book could have explored in far more detail what the daily experiences in the archive meant for the finished products of history. How, precisely, did it influence the writing of the specific histories crafted by scholars in its wake? Indeed, Mikhail asks, "where does the experience of doing history go when writing history? How, more abstractly, do the conditions of the production of history affect the history that is produced?" (p. 10). To these partially unanswered questions, I would add: how do the conditions under which history is produced affect our narrative arcs—lachrymose, sanguine, or neutral, for instance? How do

[1] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Encounters: Cultural Histories (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 72–73, 80–81.

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such conditions affect our relationship to larger historiographical debates or even our views on the philosophy of history itself?

One might be so bold as to suggest that it is precisely through the experience of archival exhaustion that a different form of knowledge might be created. Rather than be lulled by the false transparency embedded in the excessive impulse to accumulate, what Mikhail provides instead is a musing on our "critical relation to our own archival and evidentiary desires."[2] Thus, for example, in an experience to which so many of us who work on the Middle East can relate, Mikhail wryly remarks that after a mere week in the National Archives of the United Kingdom, he "left, quite proudly, with ten thousand photos," only to have "cursorily read a few of these documents at the time" and, subsequently, "a scant few more. Slow thinking, understanding, and transcribing make for better historians than quick scanning, rapid checking, and partial reading" (p. 96). The brilliant assertion that "transcription is thinking and, ultimately, proves much more productive than the camera's mass capture" (p. 96), then, is a lesson well learned amid the complicated bureaucracy known as the Egyptian National Archives.

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Arabic Glitch: Technoculture, Data Bodies, and Archives

Laila Shereen Sakr (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023). Pp. 194. $85.00 cloth, $26.00 paper. ISBN: 9781503635883

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Arabic Glitch: Technoculture, Data Bodies, and Archives by Laila Shereen Sakr deftly remixes and traces the history of the Arabization of the Internet, critical virtual and material glitches that catalyzed the Arab Uprisings, and embraces Alaa Abdel-Fattah's invitation and invocation to "fix your own democracy" (p. 4). *Arabic Glitch* is uniquely situated at the intersection of science and technology studies, theory and practice of contemporary digital art, data archiving and analytics, political mobilization, and Middle East Studies – provoking us to think in new ways about the emergence of vast data bodies that shape our contemporary lives and the importance of procedural literacy.

At the book's core, Sakr asks us to center "the Arab uprisings as ground zero for imagining this (new) kind of global digital politics" (p. 15). *Arabic Glitch* draws on stories from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, and more to disrupt popular narratives centering Western social media and technology as the catalyst for the Arab Uprisings, demonstrating how Arab techno-culture has informed and enabled decades of cyber activism. Sakr is not only the narrator of this story; she was an active participant in developing this early Arab techno-logical landscape and is a contemporary digital archivist and algorithmic artist. Her story, and those of her fellow techie-activists, many of whom have faced severe state repression, is

[2] Brian Connolly, "Against Accumulation," *J19: Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 2, no. 1 (2014): 172–179, 177.