

Power and music in Cairo: Azbakiyya

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ABSTRACT: In this article, the origins of the modern metropolis are reconsidered, using the example of Cairo within its Ottoman and global context. I argue that Cairo's Azbakiyya Garden served as a central ground for fashioning a dynastic capital throughout the nineteenth century. This argument sheds new light on the politics of Khedive Ismail, who introduced a new state representation through urban planning and music theatre. The social history of music in Azbakiyya proves that, instead of functioning as an example of colonial division, Cairo encompassed competing conceptions of class, taste and power.

Introduction

A.D. King recently raised the question of how ordinary citizens translate, accommodate or resist an aggressive, often colonial, urban planning policy.¹ A shining example of the modern metropolis, Cairo is often thought to be the result of such a policy, which cut the city into two halves. Yet, the Egyptians' interaction with the new environment has rarely been investigated because this policy was identified as a colonial anomaly. This theory lies behind J. Abu-Lughod's 'tale of two cities', which drew the borderline between a new, colonial, European Cairo and an old, traditional, Egyptian Cairo at the Azbakiyya Garden and its Opera House, which each embodied a colonial space.² J.-L. Arnaud corrected this view, arguing that Cairo's division was the embodiment of Ismail Pasha's interests (r. 1863–1879, khedive from 1867) and later the result of

* This article is a homage to M. Karkégi (1931–2011). M. Prokopovych was crucial in preparing the text and I benefited also from the help of A. El-Bindari, H. El-Kolali, M. Volait, R. Bodenstein, E. Akcan, A. Sabra, N. Shalaby, S. Rosselli, two anonymous reviewers and the editors of *Urban History*. For the transliteration of Arabic, I used the transliteration chart and guide of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Ottoman names are used according the modern Turkish orthography (Ismail, not *Ismā'īl*). I am grateful for the copy-editing of L. Mounzer. All remaining mistakes are mine.

¹ A.D. King, 'Writing transnational planning histories', in J. Nasr and M. Volait (eds.), *Urbanism: Imported or Exported? Native Aspirations and Foreign Plans* (Chichester, 2003), 1–14, and the Introduction of the editors.

² J. Abu-Lughod, 'Tale of two cities: the origins of modern Cairo', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 7 (1965), 429–57; *idem*, *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton, 1971).

a private market.³ M. Volait emphasized the khedivial extension of Cairo rather than its division.⁴ K. Fahmy, H.F. Ahmed and M. Elshahed radically criticized the supposed division itself.⁵ In this article, I interpret Khedive Ismail's autocratic scheme as an act of cultural transfer intended to fashion Cairo into a dynastic imperial capital. This was a logical albeit accelerated continuation of the previous Egyptian viceroys' urbanism. To contextualize Ismail's transfer and its afterlife, I employ the social history of music, which also helps to map urban pleasures. In this way, music destabilizes the explanatory power of histories of architecture and city planning by looking at urban spaces and buildings as they were in everyday use.

From the 'two cities' to the empty city

The modern history of Cairo has rarely been accompanied by studies in social or cultural history. This exclusion of the people from the city is due to the overrepresentation of architectural historians, to the interest of historians in earlier periods and to language limitations. Recent publications, such as Z. Fahmy's study of modern Egyptian mass culture, do not relate entertainment to urban change.⁶

There is general agreement that the khedive's visit to the Exposition Universelle de Paris in 1867 was decisive in inspiring the creation of a façade for European tourists attending the Suez Canal Opening Ceremonies in 1869, at the cost of an enormous debt.⁷ In 1876, the Dual Control was imposed on Egyptian finances by Britain and France, and Sultan Abdülhamid II, through their machinations, dismissed Ismail in 1879, leaving his heir, Tevfik, in charge of a bankrupt administration that was occupied by the British from autumn 1882. The colonial nature of urban planning was taken for granted in the shadow of this political history.

Abu-Lughod's theory was based on Ismail's imagined thoughts. The khedive, returning from the Exposition in 1867, was thought to have asked himself 'where in his crumbling capital was anything to rival what he had seen in Paris or even in London', and hence decided

³ J.-L. Arnaud, *Le Caire: mis en place d'une ville moderne, 1867–1907* (Paris, 1998), 357–9.

⁴ M. Volait, 'Making Cairo modern (1870–1950): multiple models for a "European-style" urbanism', in Nasr and Volait (eds.), *Urbanism: Imported or Exported?*, 17–50.

⁵ K. Fahmy, 'An olfactory tale of two cities: Cairo in the nineteenth century', in J. Edwards (ed.), *Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honour of George Scanlon* (Cairo, 2002), 155–87; H.F. Ahmed, 'Nineteenth-century Cairo: a dual city?', 143–72, and K. Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo: a revisionist narrative', 173–200, both in N. AlSayyad, I.A. Bierman, and N. Rabbat (eds.), *Making Cairo Medieval* (Lanham, 2005); M. Elshahed, 'Facades of modernity: image, performance, and transformation of the Egyptian metropolis', MIT MA thesis, 2007, 30–1.

⁶ Z. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford, 2011).

⁷ Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 177.

to 'polish' Cairo.⁸ French contemporaries were already referring to the large-scale transformation of Cairo that A. Raymond has described as 'Haussmannization'.⁹ Egyptian urban historians also hold Paris up as the model and European guests as the motivators for Ismail.¹⁰ However, Arnaud, Volait, Ahmed and recently Elshahed have all criticized the 'Paris along the Nile' trope.¹¹ Arnaud emphasized how Ismail's urbanization was a *mis en place*, a series of useless façades: 'les édifices publics ne sont pas mieux construits que des pavillons d'exposition'.¹² From the 'two cities' of Abu-Lughod, we arrive at Arnaud's *coulisses* without actors. Was Ismail's Cairo a despotic madman's empty Potemkin-village? Was he really an 'architectural fanatic',¹³ or so dull that he ordered a new Cairo solely for the comfort of his European guests?

Ceremony, entertainment, tourism: a dynastic square

Focusing on Azbakiyya (or in the vernacular, 'Izbikiyya'), D. Behrens-Abouseif revealed how this territory, originally a pond belonging to Amir Özbek in one of the outskirts of medieval Cairo, became a residential quarter for the Egyptian elite.¹⁴ Copts and European merchants had established homes on its north-western side (Muski) in the sixteenth century¹⁵ but Azbakiyya also played a central role in Egyptian popular entertainments throughout the early modern period.¹⁶ The most significant was the festival of *Faṭḥ al-Khalīj* (Opening of the Canal), celebrating the Nile's flooding of the Azbakiyya marsh every August via the canal on the west side.¹⁷ All Cairenes also celebrated *Shamm al-Nasīm*, the arrival of spring, while Muslims held their religious feasts there, such as the *mawlid*

⁸ Abu-Lughod, 'Tale of two cities', 440. Her theory may reflect an urban legend in Cairo, already registered in the 1890s: M. Sharubim, *al-Kafi fi Ta'rikh Misr al-Qadim wa-l-Hadith*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 2004; orig. publ. 1898), vol. IV, 186–7.

⁹ C. Blanc, *Voyage de la Haute Égypte* (Paris, 1876), 30; A. Raymond, *Le Caire* (Paris, 1993), 306, 311.

¹⁰ M. Scharabi, *Kairo: Stadt und Architektur im Zeitalter des europäischen Kolonialismus* (Tübingen, 1989), 79; 'A. 'A. 'Ali, *al-Qahira fi 'Asr Isma'il* (Cairo, 1998), 27–9.

¹¹ Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 35–6; M. Volait, *Architectes et architectures de l'Égypte moderne 1830–1950: Genèse et essor d'une expertise locale* (Paris, 2005), 99; Ahmed, 'Nineteenth-century Cairo', 143–72; M. Elshahed, 'Paris was never along the Nile'. <http://cairoserver.com/post/14185184147/paris-was-never-along-the-nile>, accessed 30 Mar. 2012.

¹² Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 358.

¹³ G. Charmes quoted in Volait, 'Making Cairo modern', 21.

¹⁴ D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environments from Azbak to Ismail, 1476–1879* (Cairo, 1985), 23; 'A. al-R. al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wa-l-Akhar*, 5 vols. (Cairo, 1997), vol. II, 115–16, for mamluk houses, vol. II, 86.

¹⁵ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, 40–3.

¹⁶ G. Wiet, *Cairo: City of Art and Commerce* (Norman, 1964), 119–21; *idem*, 'Fêtes et jeux au Caire', *Annales Islamologiques*, 8 (1969), 99–128; Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, 24–5, 77–8; P. Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century* (Cairo, 2007; orig. publ. 1996), 13; S. 'Abdun, *Khamsun 'Aman min al-Musiqa wa-l-Ubira* (Cairo, 2000), 45.

¹⁷ P. Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (New York, 1994), 102, 105, 114; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, 'al-Nil' (J.H. Kramers); Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, 78; J.

(birthday celebration) of the Prophet Muhammad,¹⁸ or gathered after the Friday prayers to watch games or spend leisure time on the shores, boating at night in illuminated vessels on the pond.¹⁹ Leo Africanus reported on the 'mad, prankish and vulgar acts' that took place²⁰ while sheikhs battled against hashish consumption.²¹

During the French occupation (1798–1801), this neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city 'became the main square of the city', at least for the French, because Bonaparte had moved into a neighbouring palace.²² The Armée d'Orient built a theatre there in 1799 and after it was destroyed in the Egyptian revolt of 1800, they rebuilt a *Théâtre de la République*.²³ The French encouraged the popular festivals too, so that they might approach 'public women'.²⁴ Following the French retreat, the new Ottoman governor, Hüsrev Pasha, and his triumphant rival, Mehmed Ali Pasha (r. 1805–49), used Azbakiyya as their headquarters. *Fath al-Khalīj* and public dynastic feasts in celebration of marriage or circumcision continued to take place here during Mehmed Ali's rule.²⁵ During this period, and especially from around 1841, when, in a complicated international game, he received hereditary rights to rule Egypt from Sultan Abdülmejid, Cairo began a transformation to fit better for the role of a dynastic capital. Azbakiyya was central to this scheme because, in addition to its ceremonial function, it connected Shubra (a palace of the pasha) and the busy port of Bulaq with Cairo.²⁶

Among many other initiatives,²⁷ Azbakiyya's pond was drained, a School of Languages was built nearby, foreign consulates were established, the surrounding *waqf* land (religious endowment) was appropriated and its centre was turned into a public park by 1845 (Figure 1).²⁸ This park

Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York, 2007), 113–14. For a description in the 1820s, cf. E.W. Lane, *Description of Egypt* (Cairo, 2000), 82–3.

¹⁸ Al-Jabarti, 'Aja'ib, vol. II, 818; O.V. Volkoff, *Voyageurs Russes en Égypte* (Cairo, 1972), 153–4.

¹⁹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, 78; Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt*, 115, 123–4. In case of an earthquake, Cairenes also ran to Azbakiyya to seek safety in the open space. Al-Jabarti, 'Aja'ib, vol. III, 233–4.

²⁰ Wiet, *Cairo*, 121.

²¹ B. Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), 20.

²² Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt*, 70; Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, 71, 78.

²³ Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre*, 28–9.

²⁴ K. van Nieuwkerk, 'A Trade like Any Other': *Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin, 1995), 30.

²⁵ E. de Cadalvene and J. de Breuvery, *L'Égypte et la Turquie au 1829 à 1836* (Paris, 1836), 90–1.

²⁶ Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 42–3.

²⁷ Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 181; A. Sami Basha, *Taqwim al-Nil*, 3 parts in 5 vols. (Cairo, 2003, reprint of 1936), pt 2 (vol. II), 547–52.

²⁸ This *waqf* belonged to the Bakri family (information gratefully received from A. Sabra). M.L. de Bellefonds, *Mémoires sur les principaux travaux d'utilité publique exécutés en Égypte, depuis la plus haute antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1872), 596, indicates that the new park's designer was 'Murthan Bey', the minister of public works who studied in Europe. Such a description rather fits Muhammad Mazhar (d. 1873). Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil*, pt 2 (vol. II), 598; J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London, 1938), 161; M. Karkégi, 'Commentaires topographiques' (*L'Égypte*



Figure 1: Azbakiyya in the 1850s. A. Joanne and É. Isambert, *Itinéraire descriptif, historique et archéologique de l'Orient* (Paris, 1861), detail. Collection Max Karkégi, with permission.

might have been ordered for reasons of public hygiene²⁹ but also coincided with Ibrahim Pasha (r. 1848), Mehmed Ali's heir, ordering the extensive planting of trees, levelling the ground and building palaces nearby.³⁰ Schools continued to be built in the 1850s, and Said Pasha (r. 1854–63) ordered the resupply of water to the new square.³¹ Female prostitutes and dancers were banished from Cairo in 1834 (although not their male counterparts); later in the 1850s, they were permitted to return.³² The new garden became a popular promenade,³³ and hotels catering to European

d'antan, www.egyptedantan.com/egypt.htm, accessed 25 Mar. 2011), identifies 'l'ingénieur Marilhat' but P. Marilhat, an artist, painted a *Place de l'Esbekieh*.

²⁹ Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 189.

³⁰ Raymond, *Le Caire*, 300; Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 40.

³¹ Z. al-'A. Sh. al-D. Najm, *Misr fi 'Ahd al-'Abbas wa-Sa'id* (Cairo, 2007), 189, 192, 203.

³² Nieuwerkerk, 'A Trade like Any Other', 32.

³³ G. de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1851), vol. I, 141–2. I. Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land, Egypt and Italy* (London, 1852), 245, saw building materials in 1842 while according

tourists were established.³⁴ Some of the visitors already regarded this transformation, along with the other changes, as a symptom of Cairo losing its 'Arab' face.³⁵ As well as being a 'port' of entry (in addition to Bulaq's port the train station was built nearby in 1853) and a gateway for labour migration from rural Egypt, Azbakiyya and its environs (Muski especially) also functioned as a shopping district,³⁶ attracting prostitutes, singers, beggars and acrobats. Their presence did not stop the ruling dynasty from continuing to erect palaces³⁷ and from staging celebrations in the square. For instance, in 1849, Penbe, Abbas Pasha's mother, was welcomed there with three days of fireworks, just as Zeyneb, Said Pasha's sister, had been in 1854.³⁸ Azbakiyya, like other squares in Cairo, played an important role in representing political power via symbolic celebrations and simultaneously offered an open space for popular entertainments.

Music and death

The history of music reveals the everyday use of this space, since it is said that in nineteenth-century Egypt 'all classes [had] their particular songs';³⁹ or as E. Toledano underlined, coffeehouses with music 'were really an institution of the lower strata of Egyptian society'.⁴⁰ Music in Cairo embodies a complex mixture of urban and tribal traditions, with songs in both the vernacular(s) and in classical Arabic, thus pointing to 'the local' or 'the authentic' as the outcome of migrating tastes. It is remarkable how during the 1850s music became an essential feature of this territory, in the Arab, Greek, Italian and Armenian cafés,⁴¹ which were established nearby, on land rented by the government to cover the new garden's expenses.⁴² Despite the complaint that it was losing its Arab identity, Azbakiyya/Izbikiyya continued to be an Egyptian location, with some Europeans remarking that Cairo had remained 'oriental' in contrast to Alexandria.⁴³ The Arab coffeehouses hosted a local clientele and served

to V. Schoelcher, *L'Égypte en 1845* (Paris, 1846), 174, in 1845 it was still under construction. Cf. J.-J. Ampère, *Voyage en Égypte et en Nubie* (Paris, 1868), 233.

³⁴ A. Humphreys, *Grand Hotels of Egypt in the Golden Age of Travel* (Cairo, 2011), 48–51.

³⁵ Le R.P. Laorty-Hadji, *L'Égypte* (Paris, 1856), 234–5.

³⁶ J. Carré, *Voyageurs et écrivains français en Égypte*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1988), especially the 'petits voyageurs', vol. II, 251–64.

³⁷ Apart from Zeyneb Hanım and Kamil Pasha's famous palace (*Sarāy al-Azbakiyya*), on the south side stood Ahmed (Tahir) Pasha's and Abbas Hilmi's palaces (E.W. Lane, *Cairo Fifty Years Ago* (London, 1896), 71) and during the rule of the latter, Said Pasha also acquired land at Azbakiyya to build a palace, Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil*, pt 3 (vol. I), 21.

³⁸ F. Konrad, *Der Hof der Khediven von Ägypten: Herrscherhaushalt, Hofgesellschaft und Hofhaltung* (Würzburg, 2008), 351 and 353.

³⁹ Laorty-Hadji, *L'Égypte*, 328.

⁴⁰ E. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge, 1990), 243.

⁴¹ A. Joanne and É. Isambert, *Itinéraire descriptif, historique et archéologique de l'Orient* (Paris, 1861), 972.

⁴² Bellefonds, *Mémoires*, 598.

⁴³ C. de Pardieu, *Excursion en Orient* (Paris, 1851), 36.

coffee, tobacco, hashish and music. E.W. Lane estimated that in the 1830s there were more than 1,000 coffeehouses in Cairo where, especially on evenings of religious festivals, musicians and storytellers performed.⁴⁴ By 1860, their number was estimated at more than 1,200.⁴⁵

Perhaps because of the increased foreign and domestic migration, a 'master' (*usṭā*), Mustafa, was given care of Azbakiyya in the 1850s.⁴⁶ It would be presumptuous to assert that earlier Egyptian traditions of entertainment at Azbakiyya were directly translated into the musical cafés of the mid-nineteenth century. However, the legendary Egyptian singer, 'Abduh al-Hamuli (c. 1840–1901), who came from Tanta to Cairo, was said to have sung in the Arab cafés of Azbakiyya in his youth (1850s), especially in the café of 'Uthman Agha, where he became an established artist and accumulated some wealth. He sang *muwashshaḥāt*, songs of perhaps Andalusian origin, belonging to an Arab art-song tradition.⁴⁷ Arab musicians and singers in the early 1860s were so abundant in the Azbakiyya coffeehouses that the European tourists could pointedly look down on their music.⁴⁸ Egyptian singers similarly looked down on European music as inferior.⁴⁹

Azbakiyya also had its dark side. Here, Italians and Greeks fought and killed each other and 'the music of the cafés was often mixed with the detonations of firearms'.⁵⁰ This aspect is reflected in a contemporary French poem: 'L'Ezbékiah haite la contrainte / et l'homme est là dans son Eden. / Si Paris a son labyrinthe / l'Ezbékiah est sans gardien.'⁵¹ In addition to Egyptian songs, Italian music was also present. Continuing earlier amateur evenings,⁵² the Teatro del Cairo in the Rosetti Garden hosted visiting Italian troupes in the 1840s.⁵³ At the end of the 1850s, there was a theatre close

⁴⁴ E.W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Costumes of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1860), 333.

⁴⁵ Joanne, *Itinéraire de l'Orient*, 972.

⁴⁶ Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya (The National Archives of Egypt, DWQ), Muhafazat Misr files (MM) 2002–000019 (p. 14), note from al-Ma'iyya al-Khidiwiyya to Muhafazat Misr, 11 Muḥarram 1273.

⁴⁷ M.K. al-Khula'i, *al-Musiqa al-Sharqi* (1904–6; Cairo, 2000), 142. K. al-Najmi, *Turath al-Ghina' al-'Arabi* (Cairo, 1993), 106, gives the coffeehouse of Shaykh Sha'ban. Yet Sha'ban was a singer-master of 'Abduh; cf. Q. Rizq, *Al-Musiqa al-Sharqiyya wa-l-Ghina' al-'Arabi wa-Nusrat al-Khidiwi Isma'il li-l-Funun al-Jamila wa-Hayat 'Abduh al-Hamuli*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1936–43); F. Lagrange, 'Musiciens et poètes en Égypte au temps de la *Nahda*', Université de Paris VIII à Saint Denis Ph.D. thesis, 1994, 67–71.

⁴⁸ E. Poutou, *Un hiver en Égypte* (Tours, 1860), 122–3; H. Baillièrre, *En Égypte: Alexandrie, Port Saïd, Suez, Caire: journal d'un tourist* (Paris, 1867), 206–11.

⁴⁹ Lane, *An Account*, 354.

⁵⁰ O. Audouard, *Les mystères de l'Égypte dévoilés* (Paris, 1865), 299.

⁵¹ C.-A. Breynat, *Le livret d'Égypte* (Paris, 1861), 42.

⁵² A certain Mm. Colrinde Rogé hosted a musical evening at her home. *Le Ménestrel*, 7 Jun. 1835, 4.

⁵³ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 245; De Nerval, *Voyage en Orient*, 112, 168–70; Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre*, 37–9. Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, 88–9, believes that this building was the French army's Comédie. This possibility may be excluded; cf. *Le Ménestrel*, 7 Jun. 1835, 4: 'il ne manque qu'un théâtre pour jouer l'Opéra'.

to Azbakiyya where visiting troupes performed Italian operas,⁵⁴ and in 1862 a theatre of uncertain location was advertised,⁵⁵ perhaps the same one that stood there in 1864.⁵⁶ Azbakiyya embodied immoral pleasure in the 1850s–1860s with its Arab and Italian music, both too vulgar for French taste.⁵⁷

Pre-colonial cosmopolitanism?

In its mixture of power and entertainment, this spot was unique in the mid-nineteenth-century Ottoman empire because Cairo was not a coastal city. Unlike Istanbul, Saloniki, Izmir/Smyrna, Beirut, Tunis, Tripoli(s) and most of all Alexandria, until the late 1860s the Egyptian capital had no dominant European or Europeanizing population. In these port cities, a Mediterranean coastal sociability resulted from incorporation into the world economy, economic and political migration, the fulfilment of maritime needs and colonial interests.⁵⁸ A crucial question, which cannot be tackled here, is the extent to which this coastal social hybridity, often labelled as cosmopolitan, affected the hinterlands. During Said Pasha's rule one may see in Cairo's Azbakiyya an inland development of a pre-colonial site of cosmopolitanism.

By the 1860s, Alexandria, with its new institutions (post offices, hotels, theatres, casino, etc.), had 'relegated Cairo to second place among Egyptian cities',⁵⁹ though perhaps, we must add, only in the eyes of the European visitors and the Ottoman Egyptian elite. The court spent the summer in Alexandria where Said Pasha hired European musicians for his private theatre.⁶⁰ In Alexandria, large groups of foreigners, not necessarily rich,⁶¹ mingled with an even poorer Egyptian workforce. Symbolic, private buildings, such as the Zizinia or the Rossini Theatre, announced the presence of individuals who consumed Italian or French art. In 1864, for example, they hosted a series by the diva A. Ristori, who travelled to Cairo for a single performance.⁶² Alexandria was more interwoven

⁵⁴ Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre*, 42.

⁵⁵ *Le Ménestrel*, 7 Dec. 1862, 7.

⁵⁶ Audouard, *Les mystères de l'Égypte*, 199, 297–8.

⁵⁷ L.S.R. complains in 1868 that (French/European) 'musique n'existe pas en Égypte'. *Le Ménestrel*, 24 May 1868, 204–5. Bellefonds remarked that in the cafés 'actes d'ivrognerie, de débauche, de filouterie' took place, *Mémoires*, 599.

⁵⁸ S. Gekas, 'Colonial migrants and the making of a British Mediterranean', *European Review of History*, 19 (2012), 75–92.

⁵⁹ Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 48.

⁶⁰ DWQ/'Abdin/Diwan al-Khidiwi (Mutafarriqat), Carton 616, receipts and contract for Said Pasha's 'teatro francese' from Apr. to Sep. 1860, the first receipt dated Alexandria, 1 Apr. 1860.

⁶¹ W. Hanley, 'Foreignness and localness in Alexandria', Princeton Ph.D. thesis, 2007.

⁶² I. Papageorgiou, 'Adelaide Ristori's tour of the East Mediterranean (1864–1865) and the discourse on the formation of modern Greek theatre', *Theatre Research International*, 33 (2008), 161–75.

into international (especially Italian) social and economic life, but also embodied a more rigid model of cultural transfer.

Istanbul's modernization throughout the nineteenth century may have served the Ottoman-Egyptian elite as a model and a competitor equally loved and hated.⁶³ But again, unlike in Istanbul's Pera/Beyoğlu area, where European tourists, sailors and soldiers mingled with Ottoman Christians and Muslims in Italian and French theatres or Greek and Armenian coffeehouses listening to performances of French and Italian songs,⁶⁴ Azbakiyya in Cairo represented a leisure district where Egyptian traditions of entertainment were visible and audible side by side with Italian music. However, this mild inland version of coastal cosmopolitanism would soon change, through a process that was not unconnected to the rivalry with Istanbul.

Ottoman coastal urban culture functioned within an interregional entanglement with Greek (Athens), Italian (Milan and Livorno) and French (Marseille) cities. This entanglement was also manifest in the export of cultural goods and tastes, the best example here being the French-Italian musical competition in Istanbul in the 1860s. These developments were variously represented in inland Europe, especially in Paris: while the French Theatre in Istanbul was regarded as a victory over Italian opera,⁶⁵ the establishment of a theatre in Cairo (probably in Azbakiyya) in 1862 was ridiculed in the Parisian press. This last case is notable since Said Pasha engaged opera, ballet and vaudeville troupes and sought to invite, at his own cost, French journalists to attend the opening of the theatre, scheduled for early 1863.⁶⁶

The khedivial capital

Cairo changed significantly under Khedive Ismail, probably informed by the modernism of Istanbul, Alexandrian cosmopolitanism and his predecessor's development of Cairo as a dynastic garden. It is also hard to miss the continuity between Said's initiatives and Ismail's politics: the aforementioned theatrical subsidy was the blueprint for Ismail's legendary generosity with theatres, just as the first ceremony of the Suez Canal in 1862 (the waters of the Mediterranean entering Lake Timsah)⁶⁷ had

⁶³ J. Hanssen, 'History, heritage and modernity: cities in the Muslim world between deconstruction and reconstruction', in M. Cook (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 2010), vol. VI, 515-42.

⁶⁴ R.A. Sevengil, *Opera san'atı ile ilk temaslarımız* (Istanbul, 1959); M. And, 'Türkiyede İtalyan Sahnesi', *İtalyan Filoloji-Filologia Italiana*, 2 (1970), 127-42; and E. Aracı, *Naum Tiyatrosu: 19. yüzyıl İstanbulu'nun İtalyan Operası* (Istanbul, 2010).

⁶⁵ *La Comédie*, 17 Feb. 1867, 9.

⁶⁶ *Le Ménestrel*, 7 Dec. 1862, 7.

⁶⁷ Letter dated 28 Nov. 1862, Mr Thayer to Mr Seward, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States, and Accompanying Documents, to the Two Houses of Congress, at the Commencement of the First Session of the Thirty-eighth Congress*, 2 parts (US Government Printing Office, 1863), pt 2, 1197-8.

prefigured the grand opening in 1869. Ismail financed French/Italian art institutions and Arab experiments (Arabic journals, music, theatre) hoping for international recognition and local loyalty. 'An interstitial group, the cultural creoles', a term here applied mostly to Ottoman citizens with French/Italian education, and coined by J. Clancy-Smith,⁶⁸ mediated many of the cultural transfers from France and Italy.

The representation of political independence from the Ottoman centre, the casting of his dynasty as a new imperial family and the process of urban transformation were closely connected in Ismail's politics. Since Egypt was legally an Ottoman province, there was no way to erect public institutions except by using khedivial money as a type of royal patronage, acquiring private property or 'nationalizing' religious land into new public ('khedivial') spaces, thus, like his grandfather Mehmed Ali Pasha, Ismail appropriated *waqf* land and established public institutions from private possessions.⁶⁹ Relying on the surplus of the ephemeral cotton-boom, in his first four years Ismail undertook large public works (some of which served his own wealth), including a transport system in the countryside, a new canal system in Cairo and the embankment of the city and its islands; he also ordered the widening of Muski street, introduced gasworks in 1865, started new works at Azbakiyya and issued new street regulations in 1866.⁷⁰ Perhaps the most significant symbolic building was the giant palace 'Abdin, on which construction began in 1863. Finally, during Ismail's visit to Paris in 1867, his meetings with Baron Haussmann were decisive in persuading him to hire French experts in order to professionalize public works in Cairo.⁷¹

The ministers of public works were often reluctant or unable to execute his plans, and thus they were changed all too frequently. Nubar (January 1865), Murad (January 1866), Mehmed Sherif (November 1866, after whom the ministry temporarily ceased), Mazhar (November 1867), 'Ali Mubarak (April 1868), Linant de Bellefonds (February 1869), 'Ali Mubarak (July 1869), Bahgat (September 1870), 'Ali Mubarak (June 1871) all successively headed the ministry.⁷² As a sign of centralization, the office responsible for

Digitalized version: Foreign Relations of the United States, University of Wisconsin, <http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/FRUS>, accessed 25 Jun. 2012.

⁶⁸ J. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration* (Berkeley, 2011), 8.

⁶⁹ Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 183–5.

⁷⁰ Abu-Lughod, 'Tale of two cities', 437–8; Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 185. Widening Muski's street, order dated 28 Rabi' al-Awwal 1280 (9 Dec. 1863), in Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil*, pt 3 (vol. II), 512. Although not as significant as the aggressive urbanism from 1868, all in all this early urban policy was certainly more than 'aucun développement remarquable', as Arnaud states, *Le Caire*, 46.

⁷¹ Nubar Pacha, *Mémoires* (Beirut, 1983), 312; Raymond, *Le Caire*, 309; Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1001 Years*, 104–5; Volait, *Architectes*, 103–6.

⁷² Cf. Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil*, pt 3 (vol. II), corresponding *hijri* years.

urban planning (*Tanzim al-Mahrusa*) joined the ministry⁷³ but probably with little effect.⁷⁴ Arnaud rightly criticized Mubarak and Linant for claiming too great a share in Cairo's urban planning,⁷⁵ because the khedive interfered with their work via his personal administration (in Turkish *Daira-i Khassa*), his privy council (*al-Majlis al-Khusus*) and the Cairo Governorate (*Muhafazat Misr*), and he also contracted directly with Jean-Antoine Cordier's private La Société des Eaux du Caire. This interplay of competency, business and power dominate Cairo's urban historiography, but the everyday work of Egyptian engineers has escaped attention.⁷⁶ The khedive exploited the Egyptian workforce.

The garden and the state

Ismail had already chosen Azbakiyya as a ground for investment in 1863, after his investiture,⁷⁷ and he acquired two palaces at the southern side of the garden,⁷⁸ in an act that was also a sign of wealth redistribution within the ruling family. In the beginning, businessmen were allowed to establish a society to construct houses for sale in one of Azbakiyya's corners.⁷⁹ However, this society failed around 1866 and was thus dissolved.⁸⁰ Nubar Pasha, who 'loved his old Cairo', probably obstructed their activity.⁸¹ His reluctance to support these works, at least in Azbakiyya, can also be explained by the fact that he owned property nearby⁸² and that his foreign ministry occupied one of the surrounding palaces. Thus, by 1866, part of Azbakiyya had become an abandoned construction site.⁸³ It was perhaps at this point that the small European theatre was demolished.⁸⁴

⁷³ Volait, *Architectes*, 90–7; G. Alleaume, 'Politiques urbaines et contrôle de l'entreprise: une loi inédite de 'Ali Mubarak sur les corporations du bâtiment', *Annales Islamologiques*, 21 (1985), 155–6; Raymond, *Le Caire*, 310.

⁷⁴ For instance, the plan submitted in 1868 by 'Ali Mubarak was not implemented. Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 180. Original in Alleaume, 'Politiques urbaines', 147–88.

⁷⁵ Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 82.

⁷⁶ Arnaud thought that the mostly French documents in the (former) 'Ahd Isma'il (in the following AI) section of DWQ covered all that took place in Cairo in the period and so he did not use Arabic archival sources. Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 179–80.

⁷⁷ Nubar, *Mémoires*, 211.

⁷⁸ Halim Pasha's palace and the *munākh* of Ahmed Pasha was registered as *mīrī*-land, dated 3 Sha'bān 1280 (13 Jan. 1864). Sami, *Taqwīm al-Nīl*, pt 3 (vol. II), 534.

⁷⁹ Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 46.

⁸⁰ Perhaps due to Egypt's financial crisis in the summer of 1866 or to the 1865 European crash. G. Arboit, 'L'arme financière dans les relations internationales: l'affaire Cernuschi sous le Second Empire', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 46 (1999), 545–59, here 546.

⁸¹ Volait, 'Making Cairo modern', 26; Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 46; Nubar, *Mémoires*, 255.

⁸² Cf. Nubar's narrative in his *Mémoires*, 256–9, as opposed to Sami, *Taqwīm al-Nīl*, pt 3 (vol. II), 688 (order dated 8 Shawwāl 1283, giving compensation to Nubar for his house); and DWQ/MM 2002–000253, letter dated 23 Sha'bān 1285 (9 Dec. 1868).

⁸³ E.G. Danglar, *Lettres sur l'Égypte, 1865–1875* (Paris, 1876), 13–14.

⁸⁴ 'L'unique théâtre que possédait la ville du Caire a été démolí', *La Revue musicale de Paris*, 33 (14 Oct. 1866), 326.

The French, meanwhile, ridiculed the Egyptian public works.⁸⁵ Azbakiyya was deemed a 'cloaque affreux',⁸⁶ and was identified as an area to be dealt with urgently.⁸⁷

It is possible that it was the khedive alone who decided to turn Azbakiyya into a new type of public garden,⁸⁸ by buying/appropriating land, and even possible that this was the only public work he envisaged in the beginning (Figure 2).⁸⁹ He also ordered large private gardens to be attached to his new palaces.⁹⁰ (The khedive's love of gardens – one shared with all Egyptians – has been neglected in studies of urban change). Cordier's *Société* executed public works from early 1868, and destroyed many important smaller canals/wells (*sāqiya*) in the process, although the Egyptian engineers at *Tanzim* did their best to create new ones.⁹¹ Urban legend holds that Ismail's men set fire to those houses at Azbakiyya whose owners were reluctant to sell.⁹² By 1873, new roads and a new urban order – sometimes at the cost of aggressive demolition – had been implemented, along with the extension of the city.

It is important to recognize that the idea of a new public garden was closely bound to the idea of an independent state. Modern public gardens, connecting entertainment to public health, were a modern craze in the Ottoman, Habsburg, British and French empires as well as in the USA.⁹³ The public gardens of Paris and perhaps even the new public gardens in Istanbul (like Taksim Garden) were among the khedive's inspirations.⁹⁴ Conforming to the idea of the bourgeois state, instead of Azbakiyya 'sans gardien', the garden with fences and an entrance fee excluded those who

⁸⁵ A. Sacré and L. Outrebon, *L'Égypte et Ismaïl Pacha* (Paris, 1865), 243.

⁸⁶ Le Vicomte de Basterot, *Le Liban, la Galilée, et Rome* (Paris, 1869), 272.

⁸⁷ Abu-Lughod admits that Azbakiyya's new plan was first discussed and only then was the new district of Isma'iliyya drawn. She dates both as 1867 (!). Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1001 Years*, 106.

⁸⁸ Bellefonds, *Mémoires*, 599; cf. Volait, *Architectes*, 111.

⁸⁹ According to Fahmy, 'Ali Mubarak and Khedive Ismail agreed to start the transformation of Cairo at Azbakiyya. Fahmy, 'Modernizing Cairo', 177. However, in Dec. 1867, Ismail had already demanded to see the plans of the gardens in Paris. Volait, 'Making Cairo modern', 25.

⁹⁰ Volait, *Architectes*, 111–16.

⁹¹ Cf. the story of a new *sāqiya* 1865/66–1870s for *Sarāy al-Azbakiyya*, instead of the one which was destroyed by the French, in DWQ/al-Majlis al-Khususi, 0019–000313 and 0019–000316; and DWQ/MM 2002–000253, two letters dated 15 Rajab 1285, and more; cf. Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 51 (and n. 80), for the plan of Cordier (12 Mar. 1868).

⁹² Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre*, 52. Karkegi, 'Commentaires topographiques', referring to *Le Progrès Egyptien*, 17 Oct. 1868, 3, states that the theatre burned down. The khedive paid compensation to the owners of the burned houses, like Shaykh 'Ali al-Qabbani, DWQ/MM *daftar* 2002–000255.

⁹³ R. Rosenzweig and E. Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, NY, 1992).

⁹⁴ A perhaps important detail is provided by an article in which the citizens of Pera/Beyoğlu demand a new promenade/public garden, published in Sep. 1868, when the khedive visited Istanbul. *Levant Herald*, 4 Sep. 1868, 1. For the Taksim Garden, completed in 1869, Z. Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1993), 69.

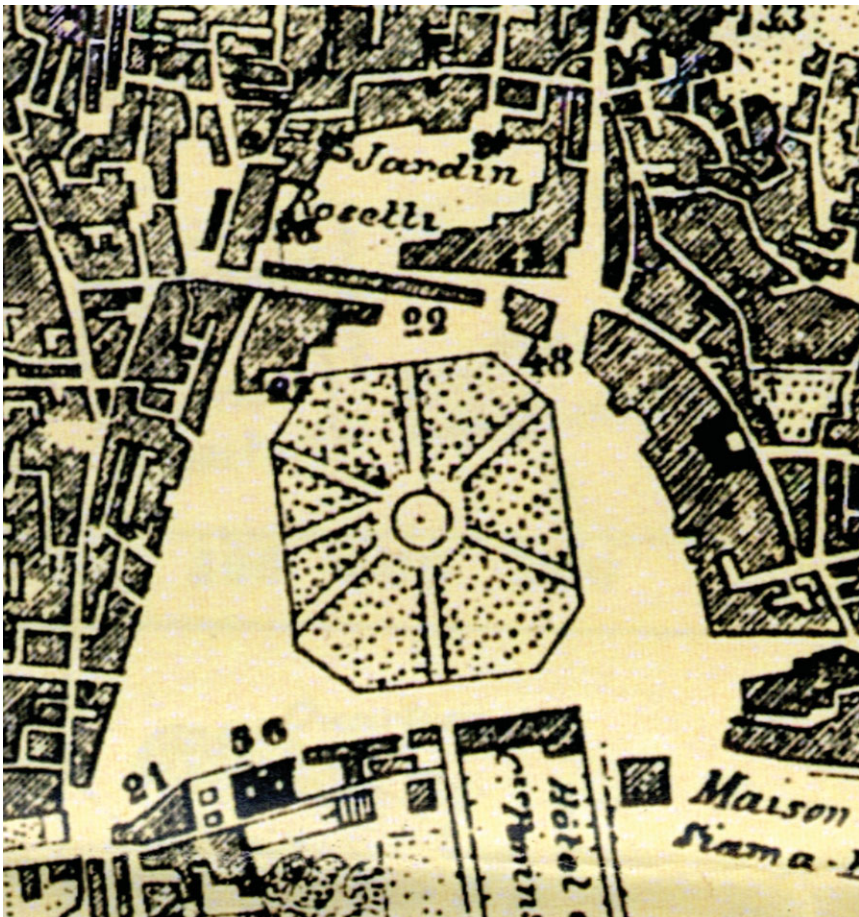


Figure 2: (Colour online) Azbakiyya in the 1850s. Plan du Caire, F. Levernay, *Guide-Annuaire d’Egypte* (Alexandria, 1868), detail. Collection Max Karkégi, with permission.

could not pay or had no decent clothes or manners. In this way, the new garden embodied a new social hierarchy.

The visitor to ‘oriental’ Cairo in 1863 would not have recognized Azbakiyya in 1873: the smaller, European, fenced garden contained kiosks, a restaurant and a garden theatre (Figure 3). Below Azbakiyya, a new quarter filled up the triangle between Azbakiyya, Bulaq and the palace of Qasr al-Nil, labelled as ‘Ismailiyya’ (Wust al-Balad, ‘Downtown’ and Tahrir Square); it was for a time called in the Arabic press *Ismā‘īliyya bi’l-Azbakiyya*. Parcels of land, measured by Cordier’s *Société* or by

Muhafazat Misr,⁹⁵ were distributed free to the Ottoman-Egyptian elite and to Europeans on the condition that they build houses. Cordier's company executed most of the public works, damaging not only the old mansions but also the Misafirkhane Palace.⁹⁶ Although some work on the garden had already begun in 1868, it was ultimately the last public establishment to be completed (1872) in the territory.⁹⁷

Music as civilization

Let us turn back to music at Azbakiyya, where a Comédie, a Circus, an Opera House and a Hippodrome were ordered by the khedive, while other urban works were executed in 1868–69. These 'public' buildings exemplify the khedive's personal interference in urban planning. In the nineteenth-century western European theory of music theatre relaxation was connected to a particular idea of cultured sociability. Draneht Bey, the superintendant of the new Opera, chatting with an Arab journalist in 1871, pointed out that music theatre is 'the relaxing side of civilization'.⁹⁸ All such buildings were 'khedivial' not only in name, but as they were built on *mīrī* land, the khedive's *Daira-i Khassa* financing their yearly budgets, they were in his personal possession.⁹⁹ Thus, the exact responsibilities of the urban authorities were unclear in the beginning.¹⁰⁰

Given that these buildings did not respond to the needs of an existing audience, their creation is often interpreted as a west–east colonial transfer.¹⁰¹ Yet the Ottoman context explains that their creation resulted from an interregional, yet autocratic, transfer. The first mention of a planned theatre in Cairo dates from September 1868 when the khedive was visiting Istanbul,¹⁰² and an Ottoman Armenian impresario, the Francophile Seraphin Manasse, was invited to 'migrate to Cairo' from the Ottoman capital.¹⁰³ It is remarkable that Istanbul was perhaps not

⁹⁵ Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 73–5, mentions only Cordier. However, for instance, MM's engineer 'Ali Mansur executed the measurement of *Junaynat al-Ṭawāshī*, DWQ/MM 2002–004267, order dated 19 Ṣafar 1285 (6 Jun. 1868).

⁹⁶ DWQ/MM 2002–000253, from MM to Ashghal-i 'Umumiyya, 19 Sha'bān 1285 (5 Dec. 1868).

⁹⁷ G. Delchevalerie, *Le parc public de l'Ezbékieh au Caire* (Ghent, 1897), 2.

⁹⁸ *Al-Jawā'ib*, 12 Apr. 1871, 2, as translated in Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre*, 61–2.

⁹⁹ Order to Nāzīr al-Māliyya, dated 17 Ṣafar 1287, Sami, *Taqwīm al-Nīl*, pt 3 (vol. II), 861–2.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, MM repeats that *muṣarrifāt al-Tiyātrū wa-l-Jambāz al-Khuyūl laysat min al-tabā'iyyat li-Muhāfazat* (the expenses of the Theatre and the Circus do not belong to the Governorate). DWQ/MM *daftar* 2002–000256 (p. 95), MM to *Umur-i Khassa*, 12 Dhū al-Hijja 1285 (26 Mar. 1869). Later, it had to be clarified that not even the gardens of the theatres were in the care of the MM. DWQ/MM *daftar* 2002–000262 (p. 25), 20 Sha'bān 1286 (25 Nov. 1869).

¹⁰¹ E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), 114.

¹⁰² DWQ/AI Carton 80, to Kiamil Bey, 22 Sep. 1868.

¹⁰³ *Levant Herald*, 16 Oct. 1868, 2.

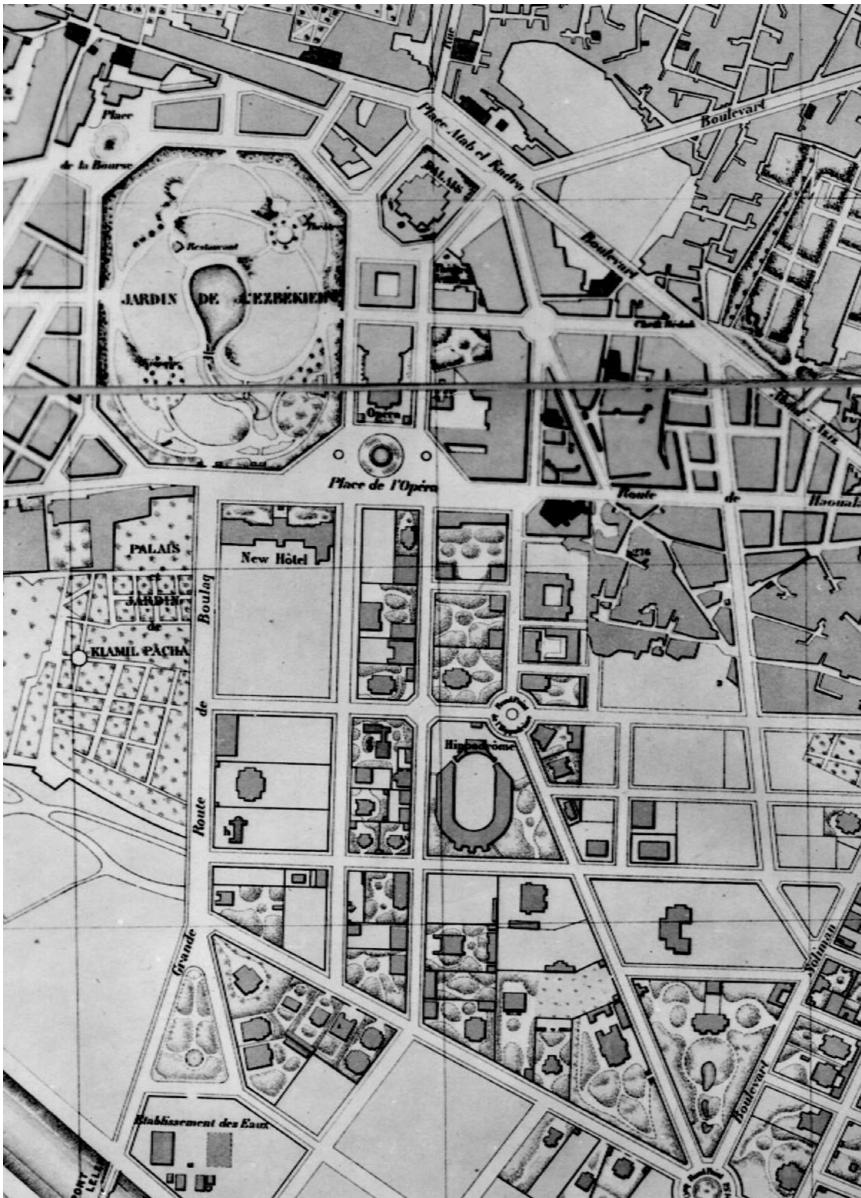


Figure 3: Azbakiyya in the 1850s. Plan Général de la ville du Caire, by Grand Bey, 1874, detail. Collection Max Karkéji, with permission.

only a source of inspiration for building a French theatre but that the first impresario also came from this imperial capital. On the other hand, a German architect, Julius Franz (1831–1915), designed all the



Figure 4: Comédie (E. Bécharde, 1874). Collection Max Karkégi, with permission.

playhouses¹⁰⁴ with the exception of the Opera.¹⁰⁵ The music theatres were concentrated within a small territory on the south side of the Azbakiyya Garden. The first one, a Comédie, faced a police station ('Zaptiyye' (*Zabṭiyya*)), which might have been instrumental in the direct supervision of pleasure. It was built by demolishing the ruins of Ahmed Tahir Pasha's palace.¹⁰⁶ The building itself had a curious look because it indeed resembled a palace. It contained '116 stalls, 46 orchestra stalls, 18 pit boxes, 18 first class boxes and 18 second-class boxes', with some screened boxes for the harem,¹⁰⁷ beautifully ornamented.¹⁰⁸ The inaugural performance by Manasse's French operetta troupe from Istanbul took place on 4 January 1869 (Figure 4).

¹⁰⁴ He had been the chief architect of the khedivial palaces (*Bāsh-muhandis 'imārāt-ī saniyya*) since 1863. Volait, *Architectes*, 67. DWQ/MM 2002-000255 and 2002-000256, several dispatches during 1285 (1868-69).

¹⁰⁵ Carl von Diebitsch (1819-69) had drawn a plan of a theatre for the khedive that resembles the final Comédie (Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität Berlin, Universitätsbibliothek, inv. n. 41638). Hector Horeau (1801-72) also had drawn a never-realized plan of an Egyptian theatre in Apr. 1870 (Victoria and Albert Museum, published in P. Dufournet, *Hector Horeau précurseur: idées, techniques, architecture* (Paris, 1980), 124-5). I am grateful to R. Bodenstein and M. Volait for calling my attention to these images.

¹⁰⁶ Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, vol. IV, 187.

¹⁰⁷ Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ I. al-Ayyubi, *Ta'rikh Misr fi 'Ahd al-Khidw Isma'il*, 2 vols. (1922; Cairo, 1996), vol. I, 292.

Franz also designed the Circus in collaboration with a French engineer, Régis de Curel.¹⁰⁹ Although French colonialism did not export circuses,¹¹⁰ it was built in the tradition of the circuses of imperial Paris that were copied all over Europe.¹¹¹ Its inauguration took place on 11 February 1869, by a French circus company (Theodore Rancy).¹¹² Again, special lodges for the harem with a thin wire screen in front were included, just as they had been in Istanbul's Gedikpaşa Circus-Theatre. Mattatias Nahman, a Greek Jewish merchant, bought the building in May 1872 and the 'Mattatias-building' was erected in its place in 1873.¹¹³

If the Circus was a specific French fashion, the idea for an Italian Opera might have been a response to the imperial opera fever in Paris, Vienna, St Petersburg, Brazil and in Istanbul, where in February 1869 Sultan Abdülaziz planned to erect an Imperial Opera.¹¹⁴ The khedive first ordered the recruitment of an opera company from Paris in February 1869,¹¹⁵ and then the construction of an Opera House in around March. It is accepted that Pietro Avosciani, an Italian decorator, who designed the Zizinia Theatre in Alexandria, was the architect of the Opera,¹¹⁶ although the architect Franz may have had a role in drawing the plans.¹¹⁷ The worldwide competition between Italian and French music was thus extended to Egypt.

¹⁰⁹ Volait, *Architectes*, 106. Franz might work under/with an Egyptian, Muhammad Bey, at the time *ma'mūr al-abniyya* ('commissioner in charge with buildings'). S.A. Isma'īl, *Ta'rikh al-Masrah fi Misr fi al-Qarn Tasi* 'Ashar (Cairo, 1997; repr. 2005), 31 n. 2, with reference to *al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya*, 8 Apr. 1869. I had no access to this number.

¹¹⁰ C. Dupavillon, *Architectures du cirque, des origines à nos jours* (Paris, 1982), 175.

¹¹¹ H. Thétard, *La merveilleuse histoire du cirque* (Paris, 1978), 218.

¹¹² Many European visitors thought the 1869 autumn opening its inauguration (for instance, Blanc, *Voyage*, 41), yet the Circus was already in use during the spring of 1869, its troupe (Rancy's) already having arrived on 6 February 1869. *Levant Herald*, 18 Feb. 1869, 4.

¹¹³ M.-L. Crosnier Leconte and M. Volait, *L'Égypte d'un architecte: Ambroise Baudry (1838–1906)* (Paris, 1998), 63 and n. 53.

¹¹⁴ *Levant Herald*, 9 Feb. 1869, 3.

¹¹⁵ *Levant Herald*, 24 Apr. 1870, 10.

¹¹⁶ S. 'Abdun, *'Ayida wa-Mi'a Sham'a* (Cairo, 1975), 47; N. Ulacacci, *Pietro Avosciani: cenni biografici* ([Leghorn], 1871); L.A. Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella Civiltà Egiziana del Secolo XIX*, 2 vols. (Alexandria, 1906), vol. I, 294–408; J. Tagher, 'Pietro Avosciani, artiste-décorateur et homme d'affaires', *Cahiers d'histoire égyptienne*, 4 (1949), 306–14; G. Douin, *Histoire du règne du Khédive Ismail* (Rome, 1934), 470–1; Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 59–61; C. Pallini, 'Italian architects and modern Egypt', in *Studies in Architecture, History and Culture: Papers by the 2003–2004 AKPIA@MIT Visiting Fellows* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 39–50; Volait, *Architectes*, 51, 106. Other names include Julius Franz (A. Mubarak, *Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya*, 20 vols. (Cairo, 1886–89; repr. 1980–2007), vol. XVIII, 241); 'Fasciotti and Rossi' (T. Mostyn, *Egypt's Belle Époque: Cairo and the Age of the Hedonists* (London, 1989; repr. 2006), 72, without any further reference); 'Avosciani and Rossi' (Cairo Opera House: www.cairoopera.org/history.aspx, accessed 2 Nov. 2009). Avosciani was certainly the entrepreneur. Draneht Bey accepted his offer to be engaged to 'direct the construction and the decoration of the Theatre' ('engagé à diriger la construction et la décoration du Théâtre'). This letter (dated 21 Apr. 1869) is quoted in a letter, DWQ/AI Carton 80, from 'Nazir de la Daira Hassa' to Avosciani, 18 Sep. 1869.

¹¹⁷ 'M. Frantz-Bey, architecte du khédive, a réduit de 150.000 Francs le mémoire de l'entrepreneur Avosciani, constructeur du Théâtre-Italien du Caire, rien que pour la peinture décorative'. *Le Ménestrel*, 15 May 1870, 191. Perhaps an 'Ali Rida Bey was also responsible. Isma'īl, *Ta'rikh al-Masrah*, 53 (without reference).

The khedive's wooden Opera House belonged to the theatre type dubbed 'scène classique avec salle classique',¹¹⁸ an old-fashioned style of theatre construction.¹¹⁹ (Wood was widely [re]used in Cairo and in general in Ottoman lands because it was cheap.) Scenery, furniture and props were imported from Paris,¹²⁰ whereas the interior was decorated by Italian painters.¹²¹ The Opera opened on 1 November 1869 with a performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, preceded by a cantata in honour of Ismail,¹²² as a prelude to the Suez Canal Opening Ceremonies. However, like the gunshots of the early 1860s, music and death were still fused in Azbakiyya: 10 workers died during the construction (Figure 5).¹²³

If we consider that the Hippodrome opened in 1870 (designed by Franz, demolished in 1881),¹²⁴ and that the Garden with its garden theatre (presumably again designed by Franz)¹²⁵ opened in 1871, the cumulative impression is that the khedive replaced the mild cosmopolitanism of mid-nineteenth-century Azbakiyya with an imperial leisure district (see Figure 3). Azbakiyya kept its main function – the mixture of power and entertainment – but with a new visual, architectural and musical expression. The theatres and the garden embodied an imported imagination about imperial representation that announced hegemony to ordinary Egyptians and European visitors through visual and artistic means. The recently erected buildings offered new ceremonial spaces where Egypt's ruler could be celebrated both by his subjects and the international chorus, though previous Ottoman symbolism and the Egyptian popular ceremonies were markedly different.

The Opera: a school for the elite?

Clearly articulated traditions of entertainment succeeded each other; for example Arab art music gave way to French ballet. Yet, with dynamic

¹¹⁸ L. LeBlanc and G. LeBlanc, *Traité d'aménagement des salles de spectacles*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1950), vol. II, 4–5.

¹¹⁹ C. Garnier, *Le théâtre* (Paris, 1871), 401–6; cf. P. Pougnaud, *Théâtres 4 siècles d'architectures et d'histoire* (Paris, 1980), 5.

¹²⁰ Cambon, Chevet, Despléchin, Daran et Poisson, Robecchi, Sachetti. *Le Ménestrel*, 4 Jul. 1869, 247.

¹²¹ S. Abdoun (ed.), *Genesi dell' 'Aida', con documentazione inedita*, Quaderni dell'Istituto di Studi Verdiani 4 (Parma, 1971), 147–51, a text under the title 'Il Teatro d'Opera del Cairo nota di Saleh Abdoun', here: 148. Repeated in unknown author, 'Histoire de l'Opéra du Caire', *Bulletin Annuel de L'Atelier d'Alexandrie*, 1 (1972), 53–7, at 54.

¹²² Contrary to popular belief, neither *Aida* was ordered (or performed) for this occasion, nor did any visiting celebrity monarchs (Emperor Franz Joseph of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy or Empress Eugénie of France) attend the first evening; cf. F. Ribeyre, *Voyage de Sa Majesté Impératrice en Corse et en Orient* (Paris, 1870), 124–59. Emperor Franz Joseph only visited the Opera on his way back to Europe.

¹²³ Letter of Avosciani, quoted in an essay of Abdoun ('Abdoun) which is annexed to Abdoun, *Genesi dell' 'Aida'*, under the title 'Il Teatro d'Opera del Cairo' nota di Saleh Abdoun, here: 148.

¹²⁴ Volait, *Architectes*, 106.

¹²⁵ Isma'il, *Ta'rikh al-Masrah*, 31 n. 2.



Figure 5: (Colour online) Khedivial Opera House and the Circus, around 1870, unknown photographer (perhaps E. Béchard?). Collection Max Karkégi, with permission.

urban change and the creation of symbolic western European imperial entertainments, Cairo also became the uncontested cultural capital, not only of Egypt, but of the whole Ottoman Arab world, joining the international market of the opera/theatre business. Its Opera especially served as a school for educating and disciplining a new urban elite, be they Egyptian Turks, Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Greeks or Italians.

During Draneht Bey's superintendancy (1869–78), the Opera House retained a strict Italian repertoire, hosting stars like Ferrucci, Valentine, De Gioza, Colonnese, Galletti, Zacchi, Colonnese Caryton, Augusti, la Pozzoni and Grossi; even employing Giovanni Bottesini as conductor for the 1871–72 season (for *Aida*'s premier). Draneht Bey imported ballet troupes and famous dancers, such as Monplaisir, Cucchi and Pertholdi in 1870–71.¹²⁶ The khedive's *Daira-i Khassa* financed the enormous costs, including the writing and premier of *Aida*, intended as a 'national' Egyptian opera.¹²⁷ Due to both the financial crisis and the scarcity of audience, the Circus was

¹²⁶ Compiled from various letters in DWQ/AI Carton 80 and the international press of 1869–75.

¹²⁷ Letter of Draneht Bey to Verdi, in W. Weaver, *Verdi: A Documentary Study* ([London], 1977), 225.

sold, while the Hippodrome and the Comédie were often closed in the late 1870s.

During these years, the audience at the Opera House consisted mostly of the Ottoman Egyptian court of the khedive, Egyptian ministers, some Ottoman cultural creoles and the *haute bourgeoisie* of the rapidly increasing European migrant community. The khedive obliged the ministers to pay for the boxes, and he sent free tickets to schools. Some of the young Egyptian elite students employed tricks to get in.¹²⁸ Ismail was keen on inviting European journalists to the major symbolic events, including both the Suez Canal Opening Ceremonies in 1869 and the premier of *Aida* in 1871. He also invited visiting aristocrats to his Opera, thus creating an aura of prestige around it.¹²⁹ When his system could no longer pay the debts in 1876, the theatres were transferred to the state. Around 1879, after Ismail's fall and Draneht Bey's (now pasha) retirement, an inter-ministerial committee was formed (*Comité des Théâtres*) to supervise the Opera House until 1900. It became a contested public space during the first decade of the British occupation, the transitional years of the 1880s. The growing cosmopolitan and colonial audience, both the Europeans and the Europeanizing Ottoman Egyptian elite (especially the khedivial family), used the Opera House for their pleasure, served by Italian or French troupes and even by Ottoman Turkish-speaking Armenian performers from Istanbul.¹³⁰

Pleasure from below?

It is within this framework that new relations between class, taste and music/theatre were forged at the various levels of a society under khedivial and British rule. Ordinary Egyptians could now articulate their relation to imported urbanism only via an instrumentalized concept of pleasure as connected to discourses of progress and modernity. The dynamic transformation of Cairo and Khedive Ismail's propagandistic attempt to stage himself as a benevolent Arab ruler convinced many Egyptians and Syrians that Egypt had the potential to create a new type of modernity in Arabic, independent of the Ottoman *Tanzimat*.

¹²⁸ A. Shafiq Basha, *Mudhakkirati fi Nisf Qarn*, 3 parts in 4 vols. (Cairo, 1934), pt 1, 57–8.

¹²⁹ Cf. Russian Grand Duke Nicholas, *L'Orient illustré*, 16 Dec. 1872, 279, and *Levant Herald*, 5 Dec. 1872, 226–7; grand duke of Oldenburg, *L'Orient illustré*, 23 Nov. 1870, 227; Prince Arthur of Britain, *Levant Herald*, 3 Feb. 1875, 37; or the uncle of the Persian shah, A. Butler, *Court life in Egypt* (London, 1887), 291–2.

¹³⁰ For instance, *al-Mahrusa*, 13 Feb. 1885, 4; *Le Bosphore Égyptien*, 3 Feb. 1885, 3.

The Egyptian ordinary public visited Rancy's circus in 1869 in large numbers, precisely because of its advertisements in Arabic. The Opera House's construction went more or less unnoticed in the Arabic press,¹³¹ yet when soon after the opening the khedive began offering free seats to Arab journalists, especially to Muhammad Unsi and his father, Abu'l-Su'ud Effendi (editors of *Wadi al-Nil* journal), they in turn began to engage extensively with the theatre and opera.¹³² In a similar way to that in which domestic culture shaped modernity in Beirut,¹³³ the public theatres in Cairo offered not only a musical taste but also an identification of this taste with a new, modernizing upper class. Yet the new ways of living did not necessarily give rise to imitation. Patriotic Egyptian individuals, in reaction to the khedivial urban pleasures and buildings, searching for an appropriate cultural expression, turned to the popular Egyptian traditions, be they street entertainments, folk songs or the Arab art music so characteristic of mid-nineteenth-century Azbakiyya.¹³⁴

Such attempts to reclaim Azbakiyya via familiar entertainment for ordinary people can be traced back to the theatre of an Egyptian Jew, James Sanua, established in around spring 1871. During this year, his 'operettas', staged in colloquial Egyptian Arabic and using popular tunes, brought Egyptians to the Azbakiyya Garden Theatre (Figure 6) and conferred upon him the blessing of the khedive. By the spring of 1872, Sanua's theatre (which was a young Egyptians' company) had been given a chance to be institutionalized through the staging of plays in the Comédie. But from this moment, due to its vulgar nature, Sanua's theatre did not receive more khedivial support, just as the classicist Muhammad Unsi of *Wadi al-Nil* was probably refused when he asked the khedive to support the establishment of an Arab state theatre in 1872.¹³⁵ For a time, only the guards represented ordinary Egyptians at the khedivial theatres.¹³⁶

The Opera House, as a new public space, despite its highly artificial sociability, still provided a link between earlier Egyptian traditions of entertainment, power and modernity in the 1880s. Ottoman Syrian theatre makers, many of them Christian, arrived in 1876 to offer a more suitable Arab culture to Khedive Ismail. Although he was already bankrupt, the

¹³¹ *Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya*, 10 Jun. 1869, 1; *Al-Jawa'ib*, 2 Dec. 1869, 2.

¹³² For instance, M. Unsi, 'Mal'ab al-Ubira bi-Misr al-Qahira', *Wadi al-Nil*, 28 Feb. 1870 (1869 is wrongly printed on the title-page), 1332–4, or *Wadi al-Nil*, 4 Mar. 1870 (1869 is wrongly printed on the title-page), 1348–52.

¹³³ T. Abou-Hodeib, 'Taste and class in late Ottoman Beirut', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2011), 475–95.

¹³⁴ Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 40–3.

¹³⁵ Unsi allied with Louis Farrugia. DWQ/AI Carton 80, from Draneht to Khairi, 20 Apr. 1872. To his letter he attached the (French) project of the Arab theatre, dated 15 Mar. 1872, which was published first by Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre*, Appendix 3, 186–96; cf. his analysis at 105–6.

¹³⁶ Six Egyptian guards (*farrāsh*) guarded the Opera and the Comédie in 1878. DWQ/Diwan al-Ashghal al-'Umumiyya 4003–037847, from Léopold Larose to unknown, 30 Dec. 1878.



Figure 6: Théâtre-Concert du Jardin de l'Esbekieh, around 1872, unknown photographer (perhaps E. Béchard?). Collection Max Karkégi, with permission.

version of Arab modernity offered by Syrians represented a potential khedivial Arab façade for his heir, Tevfik, in the colonial atmosphere of the 1880s. In order to mark themselves as 'patriotic', Syrians allied with Egyptian singers, thereby forging a particular type of interregional music theatre in Arabic. The most successful such alliance was the collaboration between the Syrian impresario Sulayman Qardahi and the Egyptian singer Salama Hijazi, first in the spring of 1882, performing at the Opera House for the patriotic 'Urabi Pasha. After the British suppressed the 'Urabi-revolt, in the second half of the 1880s, Qardahi and Hijazi achieved enormous success together with the support of Khedive Tevfik. During these years, symbolically embodying the continuity of old and new Azbakiyya, the singer 'Abduh al-Hamuli also returned from private khedivial service to the public, with regular concerts at the Opera House. By attending these patriotic (*waṭani*) occasions, ordinary Egyptians, Syrians and the self-nationalizing Ottoman Egyptian elite often expressed political opposition

to the British occupation in the symbolic presence of the Ottoman imperial representative, Ahmed Muhtar Pasha.¹³⁷

However, banal coincidences, competition between theatre makers and the reassertion of British rule in the 1890s brought about a more rigid division between colonial policy and Arab patriotism: theatre in Arabic was excluded from the Opera House for many years. The new entertainment in Arabic, be it colloquial or classical, was confined to private/semi-private theatres or coffeehouses in Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta, Port Said, etc., where individuals who would today be considered middle class (writers, lawyers, doctors, bureaucrats, soldiers) and even the urban poor could participate. This mixing between Arab and Italian/French music resulted in hybrid musical art forms that became the basis for twentieth-century entertainment, such as al-Rihani's or Sayyid Darwish's song-theatres.¹³⁸

The proliferation of perceptions

There is a further connection between urbanism and sociability in Azbakiyya or 'Izbikiyya'. Some of the new public spaces became associated with moral corruption. The café chantants in the neighbourhood offered roulette games where Egyptians spent, and too often lost, their money.¹³⁹ An Egyptian popular song, recorded in 1893, told an erotic tale about meeting a girl in Izbikiyya.¹⁴⁰ From 'A. Mubarak's novel *'Alam al-Din* (1882) to Z. Fawwaz, T. al-Hakim or A. Amin, we may find numerous, often contradictory, perceptions of the theatres and the garden itself as beautiful but dangerous places of immorality, not so much against Muslim principles (that was a later development), but rather dangerous for the poor who lost money and face hunting for women. Musicians cursed Azbakiyya's early twentieth-century music halls as 'caves of demons' and the territory itself as a 'square of debauchery and immorality'.¹⁴¹ In this way, the garden and its neighbourhood also preserved their mid-nineteenth-century bad reputation.

On the other hand, the neighbouring Opera House symbolized a new conception of Egyptian sovereignty, closely connected to the staging of the dynasty as benevolent Arab rulers, as A. Shawqi's poems indicate.¹⁴² Performing in Azbakiyya's music halls and the new mass music industry helped the rise of national stars, such as Umm Kulthum, repeating the

¹³⁷ Information in this paragraph is based on my dissertation: A. Mestyan, "'A garden with mellow fruits of refinement': music theatres and politics in Cairo and Istanbul, 1867–1892", CEU Ph.D. thesis, 2011.

¹³⁸ Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 115–17, 128.

¹³⁹ J. Zádori, *Éjszakafrikai úti-vázlatok: I. Egyiptom* (Budapest, 1874), 95.

¹⁴⁰ P. Cachia, *Popular Narrative Ballads of Modern Egypt* (Oxford, 1989), 103–19.

¹⁴¹ Al-Khula'i, *Al-Musiqa al-Sharqi*, 172 n. 1.

¹⁴² A. Shawqi, 'Fi dar al-Ubira', in his *Al-A'mal al-Shi'riyya al-Kamila*, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1988), vol. II, pt 4, 52–4.

pattern of al-Hamuli in a twentieth-century frame. In the 1930s, the pan-Muslim journal *al-Fath* alerted the public: 'these halls are not for singing and dancing in fact, as they say, but these are special places that are shelters for prostitutes and trouble-making girls'.¹⁴³ Thus, the word 'Azbakiyya'/'Izbikiyya' denoted several different locations (garden, theatres, music halls, casinos) and perceptions (foreigner, sublime national, morally corrupt). The Nasir-regime after 1952 would make extensive use of the Opera House as an elite Arab socialist locus, exactly in the way this spot had been used in previous centuries, until the Opera burned down in 1971.

Conclusion

This article has shown that elite ceremonials and popular entertainment were intertwined in Azbakiyya. From the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century, it was simultaneously the site of entertainments that were perceived as morally inferior and the site of symbolic celebrations of the elite. The ruling dynasty's continuous transformation of the city and specifically of Azbakiyya is central to my argument. In the modern era, this neighbourhood was first a pre-colonial cosmopolitan square, and later Khedive Ismail's experimental ground for a new state representation, comprising contested political spaces that were inhabited, lost, reclaimed, fought for and finally reused by Egyptians. During this process, taste became crucial in establishing a new class hierarchy and in articulating new moral conceptions in relation to urban spaces. Such a complex process involving various types of institutions for entertainment (Opera House, café chantants, casinos) within the same neighbourhood resulted in the proliferation of perceptions about Azbakiyya. This analysis sheds new light on the origins of modern Cairo, replacing bifurcated ruptures with more refined mechanisms of power. The intertwined history of sociability and urbanity as a method of studying the emergence of the modern metropolis to replace empty planning histories needs further research.

¹⁴³ Anon., 'Dawr al-ghina' wa-l-raqs', *al-Fath*, 8 Dhu'l-Qa'da 1355 (20 Jan. 1937), 15.