

Interdisciplinary Measures:

Gange, David

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Citation for published version (Harvard):

Gange, D 2014, Interdisciplinary Measures: Beyond Disciplinary Histories of Egyptology. in W Carruthers (ed.), *Histories of Egyptology: Disciplinary Measures*. Routledge. <<https://www.routledge.com/Histories-of-Egyptology-Interdisciplinary-Measures/Carruthers/p/book/9780415843690>>

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Publisher Rights Statement:

Published in *Histories of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures* on 21/07/2014

ISBN: 9780415843690

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INTERDISCIPLINARY MEASURES:
BEYOND DISCIPLINARY HISTORIES OF EGYPTOLOGY.

In studies of the history of Egyptology the discipline can often appear to have been created and developed in a hermetic compartment, separated cleanly from its surroundings and isolated in purely disciplinary space. Text without context, it seems to require theorising only in its own terms, amenable to explanation only through its internal dynamics irrespective of the complex relations between Egyptology and society. Any such appearances are obviously illusory: Egyptology (like so many things) is first and foremost a socially constructed enterprise. Its agendas, theories and practices are always historically specific and the range of historical themes and processes with which it intersects are far wider than any individual will ever be capable of grasping.

The myth of 'eternal Egypt' has, as Moreno Garcia ([this volume](#)) states, been strangely persistent; so too has what we might call the myth of 'eternal Egyptology'. In fact, the gulf between the scholar in the present and the Egyptologist of even fifty years ago is far wider than is commonly assumed and the reasons why students take up the discipline, or the public buy scholarship on ancient Egypt, are not the same today as they were in 1963 or 1913. Reconstructing these motivations is a fundamental task confronting anyone who wishes to make Egyptology an object of historical scholarship. They need to be followed when they lead into politics, aesthetics, theses of civilisational rise and fall, conceptions of the relationship between past and present, theories of language, death, time, the self, and, of course, discipline construction.

This point is particularly important since the public roles played by Egyptology have been much greater in the past, especially between the 1870s and 1950s, than they are today. Understanding what brought audiences to Egyptology (especially since all Egyptologists themselves begin as audience), and how it engaged with other disciplines, is far more than peripheral to histories of the discipline. To traditional skeletal histories (e.g. Wortham, 1971) all the anthropologist's techniques of thick description need to be added in order to comprehend Egyptology in and of its time. As a historian, I also consider it highly desirable that the growing urge to write histories of Egyptology should develop into something that is not internalist, but is outward-looking, seeking comparison with the histories of other disciplines and processes whenever possible. Analysis of the cultural and political roles played by the reception of ancient Egypt over millennia has a great deal to offer historians, literary scholars, classicists, theologians, art historians and historians of science; the goal of connecting up the diverse approaches practiced in each scholarly field is of great importance. This process means being familiar not just with the most thematically pertinent texts in neighbouring disciplines but knowing too the methodological assumptions from which each discipline begins and the foundational concepts that give form to its particular approaches.

Since many of these disciplines (including Classics, History and English literature) are as fragmented and incoherent as Egyptology itself, this task is a huge endeavour and means that writing the history of Egyptology is not a task to be taken lightly. The problems here can be elucidated by one of the most troubled of all disciplinary boundaries: that between Archaeology and History. Each of these disciplines tends to depict the other with thinly veiled hostility, using caricatures that are at least thirty years out of date, as several recent polemics have shown (e.g. Halsall, 2009a & b).¹ Attempts to write histories of archaeology from archaeological and historical perspectives have been bedevilled by this tension. There is no reason why Egyptology should fall into similar traps so long as conversation is not impeded by our carefully guarded disciplinary boundaries. The three papers [in the section](#) addressed here offer several strategies for this co-operation.

'A PROLIFIC BRANCH OF THE GREAT SCIENCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY'?

We begin, then, with one Egyptologist, Alice Stevenson, quoting the words of another, F. Ll. Griffith, penned in 1901. Stevenson opens with a quote from Griffith's inaugural address, a moment rich in meaning for British Egyptology as the discipline secured a firm footing in a second institutional home, the University of Oxford. This is a quote rich in meaning too, and one that has the potential to be unwound into rich analysis of the status and meanings of Egyptology at a key moment in its history. Having recently written the chapter on 'Egypt and Assyria' for David Hogarth's centennial assessment of the condition of archaeology, *Authority and Archaeology, Sacred and Profane* (1899), Griffith was well placed to provide authoritative statements on his discipline's role in the turn-of-the-century academy. And having found his own efforts at University College, London (UCL) subverted by personal and disciplinary jealousies (prevented, for instance, from teaching formal classes in the Egyptian language by R.S. Poole, Yates Professor of Archaeology) Griffith was uniquely positioned to assess the shifting disciplinary alignments of nascent university Egyptology.

When Griffith discusses his discipline as a branch of anthropology he therefore commands our attention. As Stevenson points out, scholars have been far too eager to dismiss the strength and persistence of historical links between these disciplines, and real study of their interaction is a very significant goal. Stevenson, with her detailed knowledge of the Egyptological protagonists of the early twentieth century, provides a map for how that study might begin. However, the period covered, 1860-1960, is too long and diverse to allow that detailed analysis to be carried out here, especially since the new intensity of focus on Egyptian prehistory in the first decade of the twentieth century makes it a unique moment in the discipline's history. Old alliances, with the classics and theology, were slowly undermined, while newer ones – with anthropology in particular – developed and deepened.

This long view creates the temptation to read disciplinary perspectives of 1900 back into the 1880s, when there are distinct dangers in presenting the idiosyncratic work of Pitt Rivers as

representative of how disciplinary boundaries functioned. In fact, the epistemologies with which Egyptologists and anthropologists operated in the 1880s were remarkably dissonant: this period was before Egyptologists German, French or British (Petrie included) developed a burning interest in prehistory, and it was a period when Egypt was far more often a tool used by those arguing against a high 'antiquity of man' than those arguing for it. This argument was something for which major scientific, anthropological and social thinkers, from Richard Owen to Grant Allen, were quick to excoriate Egyptologists in the 1880s and 90s (e.g. Allen, 1890, p.51). To claim that Petrie in the 1880s was motivated by similar concerns to Pitt-Rivers is also to read far too much of the 'twentieth-century' Petrie into his younger self, and to elide the vast differences between these two scholars. This was a period of intense conflict over Egypt's meanings and ~~how~~ their use, something that Stevenson's time-scale serves to smooth over, creating the requirement to narrate this period in a few hundred words.

This need to trace ideas and disciplines through the conflicts and contingencies that gave them form is an instructive point to dwell on, especially since the history of anthropology, and writing on race more generally, has been a field in which this aspect of historical methodology has been particularly hotly contested in recent years. Here, the apparatus of the historical discipline have been tested, and frequently found wanting, meaning that statements about the social role of anthropological ideas are likely to be scrutinised particularly closely. One arena for this debate was a series of articles in the journal *Social and Cultural History* in 2004 (Mandler, 2004a; Hesse, 2004; Jones, 2004; Watts, 2004; Mandler, 2004b). In a thinkpiece entitled 'The Problem with Cultural History', the cultural historian Peter Mandler challenged his peers to find more rigorous ways of interpreting the social circulation of ideas. Texts must be located in networks of other texts, and, equally importantly, in relation to readers: who read these texts, when, why and with what result? How do we establish the significance, or otherwise, of any particular thinker and their ideas? Answering these questions, Mandler insisted,

must be a constant, recursive process, rather than an occasional tip of the hat. In short, a cultural historian must have a mental map of the whole field of representation in which their texts sit and have ways to communicate this to the reader (2004a, p.97).

Posing the question "whose discourse?" (p.96), Mandler tackled the frequently propounded idea that the emergence of the powerful culture of biological racism, so familiar to those who work on late Victorian Britain, occurred in the 1840s. He began by suggesting that historians and theorists who have 'racialised' the thought of canonical mid-century figures such as Mill and Carlyle have succeeded in demonstrating the racial content of some of their thought, but have failed to show that this racial thought was anything more than marginal to their reception. Even Carlyle's immense cultural authority in this period was not great enough to carry readers along with his biological ideas: the widespread criticism, even

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mockery, to which they were subjected demonstrates that the acculturation of biological racism was a considerably later occurrence. Mandler's main focus in this section of his article, however, is the figure of Robert Knox, author of *The Races of Man* (1850). The historian of anthropology, Robert Young, has treated Knox's views as a dominating feature of mid-Victorian life, and several recent historians have followed his lead. Mandler shows that Knox's readership was confined to a small group, socially very different from those to whom Young attaches its influence. 'Older' views on race which Young suggests Knox's ideas replaced, were in fact later, far more widely read and more favourably received, than the work of Knox who begins to look marginal, isolated and eccentric. Although Pitt Rivers' ideas are not a direct parallel to this situation – his views did not arouse the same degree of hostility – his work on Egypt was, in the 1880s, of similar marginality to the reception of ancient Egypt among Egyptologists and the public alike.

Stevenson is on much safer ground in the twentieth century, in part because Egyptology's new disciplinary identity makes tracing ideas (both through archives and culture) less problematic. The beginning of the century is skipped over rather quickly, given that this was a period when anthropologists as canonical as W.H.R. Rivers studied Egyptological workforces; when Egyptologists and anthropologists combined forces to salvage Nubian remains ahead of the 1912 extension of the first Aswan Dam; and when Margaret Murray both wrote her own ethnological interests into the first examinable UCL degree, and devoted great emotional effort to futile efforts to mollify the intense hatred between Petrie and the Professor of Anthropology at UCL, Grafton Elliot Smith. Contested though Elliot Smith's work was, the existence of a briefly-influential anthropology that did not just use ancient Egypt, but was formed around it and privileged it above all other societies, is important. This point is especially true when so many readers of major popular works, including H.G. Wells' *Outline of History* (1920, by far the bestselling history book of this period) received Elliot Smith's, not Petrie's, version of ancient Egypt.²

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Meanwhile, Stevenson's coverage of the Blackmans – siblings who embody Oxford Egyptology's combination of philology, archaeology and anthropology in Egypt – is really valuable. They help to differentiate Oxford scholarship from the general stew of interest in material anthropology at the height of its influence. They demonstrate one way (Margaret Murray would reveal another) in which shared interests were developed into a specific, practicable, approach.

Yet the most powerful material here is perhaps the lucid explanation Stevenson offers for the attenuated bonds between Egyptology and anthropology after 1930, featuring both Radcliffe-Brown's social anthropology and Peet's vision of a university Egyptology shorn of exactly those 'philosophical', moralising and popularising agendas that had given the Petrie of *Janus in Modern Life* (1907) his roles as public intellectual. Peet's insistence that "we are not very likely to learn very much more Egyptian history from excavation in Egypt itself" is elucidated beautifully as a product of post-Tutankhamun politics: the Egyptological flipside

to the exodus of archaeologists such as Petrie and Garstang to Palestine. This moment was (as Stevenson, quoting Stocking, notes) the twilight of the museum era for both disciplines, for reasons that were epistemological as well as ethical and practical. Mortimer Wheeler's focus on site formation becomes the archaeological parallel to social anthropology.

Philology, on the other hand, becomes in Alan Gardiner's hands the focal point of Egyptological authority (alongside the long-lived situation whereby knowledge of Middle Egyptian becomes an unlikely substitute for archaeological training). This is a compelling argument that places changing practice within disciplinary structures. As with the early twentieth-century material there is a powerful further study to be written on this development between the 1930s and 50s: demonstrating the contested developments of this period will be a valuable project that I hope Stevenson will take on. Since 1900 is roughly the point at which approaches and ideas resembling those of Pitt Rivers were widely taken up by Egyptologists this is a story that can be, more or less, self contained, telling the rise and fall of a potent bond between two disciplines, and demonstrating, authoritatively, the fallacy of all those texts that claim the perpetual distinction between anthropological and Egyptological practice.³

ANGLO-BERLINERS

Of equal potency to the prospect of a history of the relationship in Oxford between Egyptological and anthropological thought is a history of the relationships between German and British Egyptology in a similar period. This history is particularly significant since so little of any quality has been written in English about the profession in Germany. This is, of course, a history grounded in philology, and given the profound professionalism of German philology in contrast with persistent British dilettantism this was not a relationship built on equality. Even more "an amateur" than most of his British peers, yet far more cosmopolitan and integrated into the world of German philology, Gardiner makes a fine, and unique, object of study: on several counts the kind of exception that can be elucidated to prove rules.

The national jealousies involved in Egyptology have been famously persistent, but were also unpredictable and paradoxical, never quite running through archives in the way they are assumed to have operated. Key 'nationalist' works have strangely 'internationalist' features, such as the dedication to Napoleon of Charles Piazzi Smyth's supposedly anti-French *Life and Work at the Great Pyramid* (1867): one of many examples where imperialist appropriations of ancient Egypt often seem to have appropriated the society to the 'wrong' empires. There is never any possibility that the all-too-regular claims that Egyptology was "a science remote from politics" might ring true (Egyptology has obviously always been a discipline mired in complex politics), but the precise nationalist nature of the enterprise needs always to be demonstrated rather than assumed.⁴ A study of how the First World War reshaped these jealousies, and how they were given unique forms in particular personal relationships, is therefore valuable.

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The War was a moment when all historical disciplines were divided along distinct national lines which were subject to new, intense scrutiny. In Britain, the historical discipline itself was floundering in a deep positivistic morass out of which it was not to escape for some time. J. B. Bury's excruciatingly simple-minded *Idea of Progress* (1920) stands as a monument of that tradition. The best of British history was amateurish and untrendy, G.M. Trevelyan being a rare shining example. In France and Belgium, however, the war gave birth to a new kind of history, one that began the process of removing the nation from the centre of the historical frame, or at least creating the possibility of visions of the past that were not created to valorise a supposed set of national characteristics or traditions. Henri Pirenne's rereading of the Fall of Rome as, almost, a historical non-event might be the first masterpiece in this tradition, but the career of Marc Bloch and the emergence of the *Annales* tradition are its most significant manifestations. Their insistence that History's focus on national leaders and political geography had accentuated the nationalist prejudices which led to war provided the impetus for a new kind of comparative, plebeian and anthropologically-influenced historiography. In America, this reorientation took place on a popular level, numerous history books for children pressing the dangers of nationalist sentiment and the importance of recognising the "essential unity of mankind" (Van Loon, 1921, p. 457). Many of these children's books (including the most famous and enduring, Hendrick van Loon's *The Story of Mankind*) began in ancient Egypt and found in Grafton Elliot Smith's hyperdiffusionism an easy way to frame their narrative. In so doing, they took a very idiosyncratic version of Egypt to (literally) millions of young readers and created a "horizon of expectation" (to use the terminology of reader-response theory) against which any subsequent reading about ancient Egypt would be measured.

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In the wake of the War, Egyptology itself developed under the same kind of social pressures, but with its own unique problems. Its national jealousies were fought out not just over abstractions but over physical things – antiquities, sites, institutions, people – in the contested space of Egypt itself. Few other disciplinary formations had localised ties of so inalienable a kind, and those that did (e.g. classical archaeology) faced conditions that were perhaps less complex, though equally fractious. In Egypt these conditions would be transformed repeatedly in the years following 1919 as Egyptian nationalism became a force that European administrators could not simply ignore or belittle. Yet all these events happened just at the moment when it appeared that British Egyptology would emerge with new confidence. The *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* finally meant that the excavators of Britain's Egypt Exploration Society could both communicate with the public and create a technical record of archaeological process (with excavation reports no longer attempting to fulfil both irreconcilable roles). Thanks to efforts at UCL, Oxford and Liverpool, the range of expertise on show was now on an entirely different scale from a generation earlier. To say all this is not, of course, to underestimate the scale of German dominance. The shadows of Ebers, Erman and Borchardt (perhaps, still, of Lepsius) were too long for Griffith, Gardiner or even a no-nonsense Liverpoolian papyrologist like T.E. Peet to evade.⁵

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The events surrounding the Amarna concession therefore raise important questions. How, for instance, did conceptions of expertise coexist with political contingencies in shaping Lacau's policies? When was the nature of concessions shaped by the identity of the persons intending to dig, when by the nations proposing to sponsor them? Were there pressures, as there were in almost all other historical pursuits at this moment, to attempt to subvert the national nature of disciplinary organisation? Letters between Erman and Gardiner traverse the whole range of attitudes from intense, politically-inspired suspicion to frustration at the way in which Egyptology continued to be (as it had been since 1798) tossed around, helpless, on angry political troughs and crests. There is one perspective beyond those raised by Gertzen that would help make sense of the forces at work here, [which is](#) that of Lacau himself: the person caught at the nexus of Egyptian nationalist claims to the past, the traditional, pre-war archaeological settlement, and the claims of a post-war world in which it became expedient for the new international political order to see its mirror image reflected back in arrangements on the ground in Egypt. Gardiner's statement that "Egyptians themselves would certainly interpret concessions made to Germany at the present moment as a sign of weakness on the part of the *Entente*" is underlain with multiple power relationships working themselves out at one of the most tense moments in recent Egyptian history.

What we have, then, in Gertzen's chapter is one facet of an intensely complex struggle for power and influence in a new world order that no Egyptologist nor administrator had yet developed the perspective to comprehend with clarity. This is a theme that could be analysed in fruitful conversation with Timothy Mitchell's powerful work collected in *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (2002). As with Stevenson's chapter, there is not the space to elucidate these threads in Gertzen's piece, but his book is to be anticipated as a major contribution to the field and an important intervention in the international, comparative understanding of discipline formation.

EGYPTOLOGICAL INVERSIONS

The final contribution to this section of the volume is different in tone and purpose from the others. It emulates the grand tradition of disciplinary polemics that has helped shape many historical, archaeological and anthropological fields over the last century. It resembles, in some essentials, the famous mid-twentieth-century debates over the proper objects of archaeology itself. These often fell back on the divisive hierarchy of Hawkes' Ladder, but in good Herodotean tradition, Egypt and its study continue to invert the world: religion, far from the archaeologist's inaccessible abstraction, remains, as always, the centre of gravity for perceptions of Egyptology. My perspective on Moreno Garcia's paper is that of an outsider to the discipline, but his statements on the discipline's tendencies towards insularity do ring true. The conferences I usually attend are in eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth-century History or Literary Studies. At these, a host of scholars who work (or worked) in distant fields are common currency. At the last event I attended the Musicologist Richard Taruskin,

the Art Historian Michael Baxandall, the Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins and the Philosopher Michael Allen Gillespie were all made part of debates they could never have expected their work to contribute to. History is, after all, the ultimate magpie of achievements in other disciplines: possessing no agreed methodology of its own, it borrows, begs, and steals relentlessly from elsewhere. I have never, however, heard historians or literary scholars make use of any Egyptologist except one: that figure is someone who has made statements about the nature of the past, and human engagement with history and memory, that have become truly interdisciplinary in appeal. Predictably enough, that Egyptologist is Jan Assmann. It is a sad observation on the reading habits of Historians (and historians' own tendencies to insularity) that many of those who quote Assmann when talking about, say, war and memory, have no idea that he is an Egyptologist. He is quoted second-hand by historians who will, at best, read only *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis*.⁶

This is a disciplinary rupture that does not exist with many past-oriented disciplines. Writers on the ancient world from Paul Veyne to Jas Elsner form part of the methodological background for historians of modernity. It is often the huge difference in source material between modern historians and scholars of the ancient world that makes conversation concerning method so fruitful. Large, lavishly funded projects in the humanities (whether conducting traditional reception studies or more theoretical pursuits) now bring classicists and historians of the modern world together; History of Science departments incorporate Assyriologists and historians working on preclassical Greece. All too rarely is an Egyptologist, in Britain or America, involved in any of these activities.

It is worth pondering why this might be the case. Why, for instance, did a group such as Subaltern Studies – which brought together scholars of the disempowered in the modern world (most notably of the population of India after Independence) and scholars of the disempowered of the past, such as Spartan helots, medieval peasants and early industrial workers – never consider the disempowered of ancient Egypt? Even on the most popular and superficial level, those who toiled over pyramids, palaces, tombs and temples surely epitomise the social groups subjected to “the enormous condescension of posterity” as much as those who constructed the Bombay to Calcutta railway; yet there was little or no communication, in either direction, between Egyptologists and the exponents of Subaltern Studies.⁷

This relative isolation is obviously rather new: it did not exist a century ago. In the mid nineteenth century, for instance, the ideas of Lepsius can be traced through a huge range of disciplinary constructions from geology and astronomy to theology. They were transported through European cultures by international, genre-defying intellectuals such as Christian Carl Josias von Bunsen (e.g. Bunsen, 1848). It is difficult to find major figures from the late nineteenth century, whether scientists or statesmen, who did not make statements on Egyptology, whereas it is difficult to find equivalents today who have done so. Even in the early twentieth century, when a cultural authority such as H.G. Wells wanted to

demonstrate the cyclical nature of social change he did not necessarily look to Spengler, as might be expected, but drew on Petrie: Petrie's ideas often acted as the kind of universal, cross-disciplinary currency that those of a Sahlins or Deleuze have now become. In 1913, Europe still looked to classical and biblical 'heartlands' to generate originary stories and teleological schemes, and thus Egyptologists like Petrie or Margaret Murray could rove far beyond ancient history in driving home their discipline's claims to public attention. Even in the interwar decades, as Richard Overy has hinted, the Egyptology of Petrie, Breasted and Pendlebury (among others) continued to hold great prestige with its claim to link modern Europe to its primeval origins (Overy, 2009, pp.25-6). Today, after vigorous attacks on eurocentrism by scholars from Dipesh Chakrabarty to J.M. Blaut, universalising narratives beginning in the Eastern Mediterranean are deeply suspect and Egyptology has long lost this claim to general pertinence.⁸ The question that arises from this situation, though, concerns the grounds from which a new relevance can emerge. If Egyptologists are serious about increasing engagement with other disciplines (and other disciplines are serious about increasing their engagement with Egyptology) what ways forward can be identified?

To answer this question, it is useful to turn again to the interactions of other disciplines. It is telling that here theory has been key. In some circles, theory has a bad reputation for creating cultural enclaves capable only of internal communication; yet it is far more often the cause of interdisciplinary interaction. Debate during the 1990s between Classicists, Literary Scholars and Art Historians over the potential, and the failings, of Foucault's writing on sexuality is a superb instance of this [point](#).⁹ And this debate did not mean embracing Foucauldian perspectives with all their flaws. In fact, Foucault's faults were the most significant impulse towards this communication. His work provided a superb arena for discussion, a less compelling dogmatic framework for research. Fears that engaging with theory means rejecting the empirical are also misconceived: the most useful theory is grounded in empirical treatment of anthropological, linguistic and behavioural evidence, and theory is, for most scholars anyway, a catalyst, not a self-contained project. Even if ancient Egypt maintains some of its aura of exceptionalism, that does not preclude it from these conversations: establishing the limits to the usefulness of any theoretical approach is as important as elucidating its operation in fields it fits neatly.

Not just Egyptology, but the history of Egyptology, has a great deal to offer here. One of the obvious (although hardly one of the most interesting) instances relates to Orientalism. Several recent works, including the most sophisticated recent study to deal with the history of Egyptology, Suzanne Marchand's *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire* (2010), have sought to complicate assumptions about the relationship between historical scholarship and Orientalism. The scholars drawn on by Moreno Garcia in his (2009) article on the disciplinary identity of Egyptology – Meyer, Weber, Petrie – provide telling case studies in the Egyptological culture of Orientalism. Said is a profoundly important thinker (far more important than all his detractors combined) but the history of Egyptology demonstrates the care with which his ideas need to be approached and applied. Said criticises nineteenth-century scholars such as Edward William Lane for approaching Egypt with literature such

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as the Arabian Nights as a form of “conceptual baggage” that prevented them from seeing Egypt “as it really was”; yet Said’s ideas can themselves become conceptual baggage that leads us to assume, rather than reconstruct with care, the agendas of early Egyptologists.¹⁰ The texts cited in Moreno Garcia’s 2009 article demonstrate that the diversity of roles that Egypt played relative to Orientalist cliché is surprisingly large. Petrie’s *Revolutions of Civilisation* (1911), for instance, is a deeply Orientalist work which draws stark distinctions between East and West in the ancient and modern worlds, yet superficial assumptions concerning this Orientalism are subverted at every turn. *Revolutions* subverts, for instance the persistent assumption that early Egyptologists considered Egypt to be ‘western’ until the Arab conquests when it was annexed by ‘the east’. For Petrie, Islamic Egypt remains part of Western civilisation, as the strange parallels he draws between the architecture of Cambridge and Cairo demonstrate. Mesopotamia, on the other hand, is emphatically Eastern, grouped with India and China. Petrie’s stark boundary between East and West runs not around, but through, the Arab world. His scheme can help to elaborate and problematise the assumptions made by diverse scholars who study the period in which he worked. And because so much more recent (and more sophisticated) theory has been formed around anthropological and linguistic observations, Egyptologists are particularly well placed to contribute to its elucidation.

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Moving on several decades from Said, the current debates that split the historical profession engage Moreno Garcia’s themes even more closely, because they relate to the roles of the social and the economic in a disciplinary environment where the ‘linguistic turn’ now seems like last decade’s story. Mandler’s article cited above was a plea to historians to re-engage the social sciences: to look at the ideas historians borrowed from sociologists and psychologists a generation ago, and to ascertain how their conceptual development in our field compares with that in the disciplines from which they originated. This is an agenda that has been argued over in a swathe of recent ‘position pieces’ including Patrick Joyce’s 2010 *Past & Present* article ‘What is the Social in Social History?’ and Frank Trentmann’s ‘Materiality in the Future of History’ both of which perpetuate the current trendiness of Bruno Latour. This has even been labelled the ‘material turn’ in volumes such as *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (2011), co-edited by Joyce and Tony Bennett.

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This is a ‘turn’ felt in a host of disciplines, perhaps most notably in literary studies where ‘things’ have been increasingly fashionable since Bill Brown’s *The Sense of Things: the Object Matter of American Literature* (2003). The so-called ‘material turn’ has engaged scholars from several disciplines with issues that Egyptologists have been interested in for decades (the practice, for instance, of writing object biographies). The multi-disciplinary field of Material Culture Studies, founded by archaeologists and anthropologists but also contributed to by Egyptologists, is now burgeoning on an unprecedented scale. Lynn Meskell, treating Egyptian archaeology as “an anthropology of the past” (Meskell, 2004), has already asked pertinent questions about the social worlds and object worlds of ancient Egypt that might usefully become grounds for conceptual debate between Egyptologists, anthropologists,

historians, classicists and literary scholars. This moment – when other disciplines are professing interest in Egyptology’s established specialisms – is surely an opportunity for the sustained interdisciplinary engagement that the discipline has sometimes lacked.

The first priority in capitalising on this situation is that scholars in each discipline look ‘outwards’ when they write. Studies of the history of Egyptology that ignore such things as politics, gender, social analysis and religion will always fail to engage historians, just as those that ignore the intricacies of meaning making will be found wanting by literary scholars or sociologists, and those that do not engage a substantive conceptual frame of one kind or another are likely to find their disciplinary reach limited. Of course, nobody, ever, can satisfy all these claims on their attention; but everybody, always, should be aware that writing a reception history is not an easy option to kill time in gaps between periods of empirical research, but is a demanding, long-term project that requires immersion in a wide-range of scholarly literatures. The three articles in this section of *Histories of Egypt* show three scholars with the skills to further this agenda and contribute to a world in which a future version of this volume can feature a section entitled ‘The Creation of a Discipline’ with no need to append the question of its ‘isolation’.

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¹ 2009b is essentially an extension of 2009a which was first published as a standalone piece in Michael Bentley, *The Routledge Companion to Historiography* (2007); much of the most interesting material is in the 2009 additions, however.

² For references in this paragraph see Gange, 2013, esp. pp.1-52, 271-326.

³ Many instances could be found of texts that, in passing, dismiss this link. One example is Bard & Shubert, 1999.

⁴ Perhaps the most famous instance of this sentiment, and the one this wording is taken from, is Petrie's inaugural address at UCL, reprinted in Janssen, 1992, pp. 98-103.

⁵ [For examples of this see these Egyptologists' own statements on Erman's dominance, e.g. Griffith, 1899.](#)

⁶ It is also an indictment of disciplinary disjunctions, however, that so much of the work on memory in the late 1980s and early 1990s produced duplicative ideas simply with different terminology. Compare, for instance, Assmann, 1992 with *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford, 1992) by the anthropologist James Fentress and the historian Chris Wickham.

⁷ This phrase originates in E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), but has taken on a life of its own as the rallying cry of several movements that aim to extend the project of History from Below including, most recently, histories of animal agency such as Hribal, 2007.

⁸ For more recent exposition of efforts to undermine traditional eurocentric perspectives, see Drayton, 2010.

⁹ [Classic examples of texts on gender and sexuality inspired or responding to Foucault which resulted in extensive interdisciplinary debate are Brown, 1988, Laqueur, 1992 & Stoler, 1995.](#)

¹⁰ For this usage of "conceptual baggage" and discursive construction, see Gregory, 1999 and Gregory, 2005. Derek Gregory conducted extensive research into travellers and early excavators in Egypt. Although has not published that research in fully developed form, some of the theoretical sensitivity he would have brought to the field can be gleaned from his forceful critique of American warfare in the Middle East, e.g. in Gregory, 2008.