C. P. Cavafy as an Egyptiote

Hala Halim

When the Cavafy Archive became available online in the spring of 2019, I began to browse the photograph section. Some pictures of the poet were long familiar. Suddenly, my attention was caught by an unknown photograph. This, as the catalog informs us, is a "Photograph depicting Cavafy arriving, among other guests, at the wedding of Konstantinos M. Salvagos (which took place on 27/2/1927 at the church of the Annunciation, in Alexandria). On the verso, a rubber stamp of the photographic newspaper *Elliniki* of A. S. Milionis" (Cavafy 1927) (Figure 1).

I am grateful to Stathis Gourgouris and Takis Kayalis for inviting me to lead one of the seminars at the International Cavafy Summer School (ICSS) that they organized at the Onassis Foundation in Athens in July 2019; the present article is a revised version of the lecture I gave there. Stathis's and Aamir Mufti's invitation to contribute to the "Cavafy Dossier" in *boundary 2* was a wonderful opportunity to develop the project further. The comments and questions I received at ICSS from the two organizers and the fellow-seminar leaders at ICSS—Peter Jeffreys, Alexander Kazamias, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Aamir Mufti, Yiannis Papatheodorou—as well as the graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and early-career scholars have informed my thinking in this iteration. The

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Figure 1. Photograph depicting Cavafy arriving, among other guests, at the wedding of Konstantinos M. Salvagos (which took place on 27/2/1927 at the church of the Annunciation, in Alexandria). *The archival item [GR-OF CA CA-SF02-S03-F26-SF001-0008 (2027)] is reproduced by kind permission of the Cavafy Archive, Onassis Foundation © 2016–2018 Cavafy Archive, Onassis Foundation*

consistent collegiality and support of my work on Cavafy that Dimitris Papanikolaou, associate professor of Modern Greek literature at Oxford University, has shown are an inspiration. Michalis Chryssanthopoulos, professor of general and comparative literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and Khalid Ra'uf, translator of Greek literature and deputy director of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture in Alexandria, graciously provided me with translations of extracts from Stratis Tsirkas's *O Politikos Kavafis* and responded to my queries. Eleni Tssagouri provided me with a translation of extracts from Cavafy's *Peza*. At the Cavafy Archive, Onassis Foundation, Athens, Marianna Christofi, coordinator of communication and initiatives, and Angeliki Mousiou, scholarly research assistant, have been invariably welcoming and helpful during the ICSS and later with accessing material. Maria Kokologianni, of the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, expediently arranged for me to access issues of *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir*. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Arabic and French are my own. This article is for you, Alexander Youssef Halim: the only way I know to grant you of my lifetime a moment.

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Unlike other photos of the poet, this is not a studio composition; nothing here of the studied posture, maintained during exposure time amid photographer's trappings, posed for posterity. I know of no other photo that captures Cavafy unawares, in action, in mid-stride, almost like a still from a motion picture. Other aspects captivate: the contrast between the two *mondaine* ladies in all their finery—one ahead of him, the other a few steps behind—and the older man; the vibrancy—those two children, what are they gazing at? Was the photographer aware of who he was photographing? We cannot be sure whether he was trying to snap Cavafy, the by then well-known poet, or the lady in the foreground—or both, or neither in particular. The image is also virtually unparalleled in the Cavafy album because it includes something of his broader environment, beyond his immediate familial milieu. The "*studium*" in this photograph—that "field of cultural interest," as Roland Barthes puts it, which constitutes "a kind of education (knowledge and civility, 'politeness')" (Barthes 1981: 94, 28)—is a Greek high society event writ large, an occasion for pageantry and assertion of convivial bonds among the Europeanized notables of Alexandria.

But then "an unexpected flash" arrested my attention: the portly man in a *tarbouche*, uniformed moreover—a low-ranking policeman, an attendant of some sort? He is most unlikely to be one of the invited guests. His headgear, amid all the European hats, marks him as Egyptian. This would be, as far as I know, another first: Cavafy not only in an Alexandrian outdoors but with an Egyptian in the same frame, captured by chance, whose presence anchors the poet in his Egyptian milieu. This initial "*punctum*" would be replaced by a more startling detail on closer inspection that would "disturb the *studium*," that would puncture and punctuate, as in the original signification of *punctum* according to Barthes (94, 27). What is "poignant" is the wrinkling of the coat, its out-of-placeness among all the impeccably dressed invitees—those creases, that unintended detail not meant to be detected. The wrinkled coat sits well on Cavafy, indexing the frailty of the sixty-four-year-old man, six years away from his own death—a bent figure, watching his step even in a well-lit space. The figure Cavafy cuts makes strikingly manifest "another *punctum*" that Barthes finds latent in photography, "(another 'stigmatum') than the detail. This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* ('*that-has-been*'), its pure representation." Even when reading a photograph of a handsome young boy, Barthes reflects "at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*"; he registers "with horror an anterior future of which death is at stake" (96). Cavafy's frailty and dishevelment, his eminent

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decay, laceratingly project the *that-has-been*, bespeak, that is, pathos; and yet, pathos meets grandeur between the creases. Granted, the paradoxical tonality of pathos-cum-grandeur suffuses the Cavafian imaginary, as in "Of Colored Glass," where the speaker finds dignity in the use of artificial stones in place of precious ones at the coronation of the Byzantine emperor in 1347, the empire now so impoverished. But the dovetailing of pathos and grandeur in this photograph is of a somewhat different order. For a Cavafy aged sixty-four, no longer is it a matter of the bruised pride of a once gilded family long fallen into straitened circumstance and struggling to save face; this is not the Cavafy we were told would let fall that he has received an invitation to an Alexandrian Greek upper-crust function (Liddell 1974: 23–25, 79, 186). At sixty-four, Cavafy is not so much letting himself go but rather seems not to be bothered by appearances now that he has accomplished a corpus on which his name will rest.

To speak of Cavafy as an Egyptiote, I like to think, is in line with the *punctum* of that first glance—locating the poet's anchorage in his "Egyptian environment," a phrase that is his own—as much as the *punctum* of closer inspection—here a reading that crumples and wrinkles and rumples, that zooms in on an off-kilter Cavafy, done with others' pieties and expectations, who relates to the Egyptian not merely as a background figure incidentally captured within the same frame but as an interlocutor. *This* off-kilter Cavafy allows me to puncture the *studium* of his canonical image. What I would crease and brush against the grain is Anglophone criticism's abiding image of Cavafy from which all things Egyptian and Arab have been airbrushed, to counter which I elicit Cavafy as an Egyptiote, and dwell on the generative aesthetic and ethical stakes in that orientation. A representative sample: "Cavafy . . . knew very little Arabic, and had not much contact with *les indigènes*" (Liddell 1974: 94); "Cavafy ignores the centuries between 1453 [the fall of Constantinople to the Turks] and his own, just as he all but ignores Egyptians in Egypt" (Pinchin 1977: 70).[1] That is, Cavafy has long since been pressed into service as the principal icon of a Eurocentric account of his native city, an account that promotes an Alexandrian cosmopolitanism I view as complicit with Egypt's quasi-colonial situation from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries (Halim 2013: 1–55). To muse on Cavafy as an Egyptiote, though, is by no means to appropriate his corpus for Egyptian affect and imaginaries. In addressing the rigid binary of

1. The present article revises and much expands portions of the arguments in Halim 2013: 56–119.

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Greek versus barbarian that critics have ascribed to his work, I had argued elsewhere that "there is some evidence—to a greater or lesser degree—of a binarism at work," and an element of Orientalism effective in some of his texts. Simultaneously, "the corpus of prose and poetry is also polyvalent in that it yields an antiessentialist permeability, a continuum of shifting identities and an empathy that bespeak a diasporic Greek's sensibility." This is because Cavafy was "heir to a catholicity of intellectual traditions," an "intercultural positionality [that] opened his texts to competing discourses from multiple cultures—Western European, Greek, and Egyptian" (Halim 2013: 60, 119). Here, I elaborate on a facet of Cavafy's complex diasporic positionality by extrapolating from his corpus a strand of empathic Egyptiote thematics and their imprint on his poetics, while guarding against promoting a teleological narrative about his texts.

What's in the name Egyptiote? Denoting a Greek from Egypt, Egyptiote can be described as a subset of *mutamassir* (pl. *mutamassirun*), an umbrella term that covered "resident 'Egyptianized' foreigners," as distinct from British occupiers, such as "Greeks, Italians, Armenians, Maltese, Jews, and other Levantines." An ambiguous moniker, the "term *mutamassirun* recognizes both an affinity and conformity with the Egyptian way of life and yet, at the same time, a certain detachment from it: they were not Egyptian, but *Egyptianized*," as Anthony Gorman puts it (2003: 174, 175). Ethnically, as he suggests, the term Levantine overlaps with *mutamassir*; earlier applied to European merchants living in the Levant, Levantine came to cover bourgeois Europeanized members of minorities, such as Sephardic Jews, Greeks, Cypriots, Maltese, Armenians, and Syro-Lebanese Christians involved in Ottoman trade with Europe (see Oppenheim 1996). In an imperial register, it would carry the negative connotations of "a shifty derivativeness" (Halim 2013: 3); thus Lord Cromer, who designated the Levantines as "more or less Orientalised Europeans," opined that they "do not generally bear a high character," a minority of them even "tainted with a remarkable degree of moral obliquity" (Cromer 1908: 246, 247, 249).[2]

In contrast to Levantine, and setting aside *khawaga* (which has a wide semantic range but is often applied to a local of European descent), one Egyptian colloquial expression, *wilad balad* (sing. *ibn/bint balad*)—literally "children of the land," meaning local, native—was, in the past, used to "authenticate" residents of European origin. A once common term was *rum* or *arwam* (plural of *rumi*), designating Greeks but also "members of a

2. See also Halim 2013: 200–202.

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Greek-speaking church" (Badawi and Hinds 1986: 360), occasionally qualified by *wilad balad*. In a monograph devoted to the largest foreign community in modern Egypt, the Greeks, from 1805 to 1956, Sayyid 'Ashmawi historicizes it in terms of class and politics. He emphasizes "the pioneering role of Greek merchants in commercial exchange between the Middle East and Western Europe" and demonstrates how, within "the development of capitalism in Egypt, one encounters the prominent role played by the Greek element in contributing to establishing . . . commercial, industrial and agricultural companies." The historian outlines negative roles of community members lodged "in Egyptian historical memory," such as the usurer, the trafficker, the gambler, and the counterfeiter; he also pores over different forms of Egyptian resistance thereto (1997: 49, 60, 6). However, 'Ashmawi's aim is to "return to the reader a balanced view of the Greek community's role in modern and contemporary Egyptian society through a variety of economic-political practices that appear to the historian to be sometimes in contradiction to a monolithic view" (8).

He thus devotes substantial portions of the book to the Greek working class and that facet of the community which includes revolutionary militancy, internationalism, activism in trade unions and the labor movement, contributions to the development of the Egyptian communist movement, and anticolonial solidarity in multiple forms before and during the Suez War.

As for the term Egyptiotes, it is claimed to have been coined by Cavafy himself, along the lines of Italiotes in his "hidden" 1906 poem "Poseidonians" (Kolaitis 1980: 27). The term would have been given further currency through the publication in Alexandria, starting in 1932, of a bilingual Greek-Arabic newspaper, *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir*, which carried the slogan "Strengthening fraternal bonds between the two peoples." Its publication is symptomatic of "the changing political environment" with the rise of Egyptian nationalism, and hence the need for "articulating an Egyptian Greek discourse" (Gorman 2003: 187).[3] The newspaper employed an Egyptian editor for the Arabic section, which sometimes carried translated articles about Egypt first printed in Greek. *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir* extensively held forth on the long-standing ties between the two civilizations and extolled the Greek community's services to their host country, in medicine, agriculture, charity work, and the like, as historian Muhammad Rif'at al-Imam has shown in his monograph on it. In

3. On the transformations of *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir*, later *Ellin*, in the 1940s, see Gorman 2009: 65.

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his view, promoting contemporary Greek economic interests ranked high on the newspaper's agenda, to which end it carried publicity for Greek products, such as cigarettes, and promoted "a culture of tourism" in Greece, through advertisements and articles. Al-Imam takes issue with the newspaper's championing of things Greek, "despite admitting the value of Greek contributions" in a variety of fields, because the aim of the initiatives "was benefitting Greece and Greeks first and foremost," and they came to fruition "thanks to Egyptian laws, potentials and givens" (al-Imam 2012: 46, 64).

Perusing solely the Arabic section of *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir* in its first year of publication, overlapping with the last year of Cavafy's life, I find evidence that substantiates some of al-Imam's claims, although I would draw out attendant concessions to Egyptian culture. The historical narrative promoted in *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir* conforms to the historiographical account of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism that I take to be Eurocentric and quasi-colonial, all the more stark within the compactness of a newspaper. This account elevates all things European in a quasi-colonial Alexandria by constructing it as a reflection of the city's golden age in the Ptolemaic period and does so by dint of foregrounding the Greek community as a hinge between the modern and the Hellenistic, while placing other periods, particularly the Arabo-Islamic, under the sign of decline (Halim 2013: 20, 22).

The first issue sets the tone whereby the discourse of Greek civilizational contributions combines smoothly with an almost didactic staging of a Greek-Egyptian *longue durée*. A. Andreadis, in a "note on the history of the relationship between Egypt and Greece," dismisses geographical "neighborliness" as an explanation for the good rapport enjoyed by the two countries. Rather, Alexander the Great "did not enter Egypt as a vanquishing conqueror but as a savior," just like Muhammad 'Ali, "who did not fight Greece" of his own volition but at the command of the "Sultan of Turkey," evidence of which is the compassion that the so-called founder of modern Egypt showed the resident Greeks. If Egyptians "acknowledge the services" the Greeks render for the betterment of their country, it is because "Divine providence has willed that the *Nahda* [revival] which began in the era of the Ptolemies would be achieved and completed twenty centuries later at the hands of the dynasty of Muhammad 'Ali the Great who was born in Macedonia, the first homeland of the Ptolemies" (Andreadis 1932). Here is an adumbration of the overlap between the standard historiography of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism and "the *Nahda* narrative," according to which, in its traditional form once promoted by Egyptians and Orientalists alike, "Egypt

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awakens after centuries of Ottoman 'decline' at the hands of Napoleon, then Muhammad 'Ali—the Albanian whose closeness in geographic background to the Macedonian Alexander is highlighted—who effects modernization through contact with Europe," despite some differences between the two accounts (Halim 2013: 37). Hence, and in honor of Egypt's royal family, the newspaper, from the first issue, carried ongoing coverage of Greek efforts to erect a statue of Muhammad 'Ali in his native Kavala. *Nahda*, indeed, would become a recurrent term in the newspaper.

Andreadis's article is flanked on one side by an extract from Herodotus's *Histories* on Egypt, serialized over the next issues, and, on the other, by an article by Andrea Michalakopoulos, then foreign minister of Greece. Michalakopoulos reiterates that same historical account but also forcefully urges leaders of the Greek community "to concern themselves with the teaching of Arabic" at Greek schools, a recommendation that drew Egyptian and Greek responses in subsequent issues (1932). In later issues, Egyptians would reproachfully chart a generational shift between the indigenization of the Egyptiotes "of bygone times" and the latter-day ones who "cast off their Easternness and donned Western European garb" (Ibrahim 1932; al-Juhari 1932). The paper occasionally carried coverage of literary activities—for example, a report on a lecture at an Alexandrian Greek association on Arabic poetry and Egyptian customs, and a review article on books about Egyptian folklore.[4] But such articles seem to be space-fillers around the commercial/economic agenda paired with the narrative of Egyptiote contributions to Egypt. The latter theme would be increasingly harped on, as in an article titled "Agriculture in Egypt and Greek Endeavors," by A. Angeletos, an agronomist. Angeletos provides a table of cotton strains in the country, itemizing their "discoverers," and posits that "since 1885, all of the important strains of cotton are but Greek discoveries" and that whenever there was decline in cotton production, "the new kinds that Greeks discovered always saved Egyptian cotton" (1932).

Far from such instrumentalization of Greek-Egyptian relations, Cavafy's articulation of an Egyptiote orientation either subtly informs given poems thematically and structurally or is explicitly avowed in certain prose texts in the latter part of his life. Pursuing this line of inquiry leads to an off-kilter Cavafy, to unsuspected affinities and solidarities; it also adumbrates Greek-Egyptian intertextual resonances in his poetry, and in so

4. See Mikhailidis al-Maqdisi 1932. On the newspaper's cultural aspect, see al-Imam 2012: 65–75.

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doing entails probing the question of Cavafy's knowledge of Arabic. Let us recall the testimony by Ibrahim al-Kayyar, an Egyptian former colleague of Cavafy's. According to him, Cavafy could not read or write classical Arabic, "knew very little [colloquial] Arabic, just enough to talk to his servant Mirgani," and "liked to appear a foreigner." Al-Kayyar narrates that Cavafy had a short meeting with Ahmad Shawqi—one of the most eminent Arab poets of the first half of the twentieth century, of Kurdish-Turco-Circassian-Greek origin—and that whether Cavafy was interested in Arabic literature or not, he "certainly wished them [Arab writers] to know him." I would not cast aspersions on al-Kayyar's testimony, which is a useful reminder of what may have been Cavafy's outwardly ambivalent *mutamassir* demeanor as visible in the everyday reality of an office under British aegis where the poet "showed great reserve . . . to us his Egyptian colleagues" (Liddell 1974: 129, 130). And yet, Cavafy retired from the Irrigation Service in 1922, and al-Kayyar saw him only once, briefly, afterward: it is my view that Cavafy's approach to Egyptian literature, at least in later years when he and al-Kayyar had parted ways, was much more reciprocal, a vesting of the term Egyptiote with a potently intercultural signification that would create an Egyptiote-Egyptian continuum.

A year after the photo of Cavafy was taken at the wedding, the poet replied to a letter from Paul Vanderborght, the then Cairo-based Belgian poet and editor, in a correspondence that unfolds the intercultural tasks the Alexandrian assigns Egyptiote writers.[5] Vanderborght was the founder of the Lanterne sourde (1921–31), which started off as a Brussels-based literary collective, issued a short-lived journal, and collaborated with other periodicals and publications. Later, the Lanterne sourde's scope of literary and artistic activities would become quite international, with the aim of promoting pacifist intercultural dialogue, as Mélanie Alfano demonstrates. It was while working as a teacher in Cairo that Vanderborght established the Amitiés belgo-égyptiennes, followed by the Lanterne sourde d'Égypte, intended to be more broadly intercultural than its predecessor. The latter hosted literary lectures accompanied by translation undertakings "aiming at a . . . rapprochement between artists of the Orient and the Occident" (Alfano 2008: 19; see also 9–30). Cavafy's letter of December 13, 1928, acknowledges receipt of Vanderborght's dated the fourth of that month, but otherwise makes no remarks on its contents, fluidly transitions into cour-

5. In addition to Vanderborght's collection of poems, *Messageries d'Orient*, Cavafy's library contained a volume edited by him, *Poètes belges d'esprit nouveau*. See Cavafy 2003.

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teous praise for the Belgian's poetry collection *Messageries d'Orient*, and then discusses an enclosure in Greek that he is sending. Before taking up this important enclosure, Vanderborght's letter to which the Alexandrian was ostensibly replying calls for perusal.

Vanderborght proposes a reception in honor of Cavafy—music, speeches, and a multilingual poetry reading, together with a recording of ten poems set to music—and produces a long list of material for the program, which he solicits the Alexandrian's help with obtaining (1928).[6] This is what Cavafy tactfully brackets in reply; and we know from a later letter by Vanderborght, dated April 12, 1929, that Cavafy dithered and expressed his preference that the reception be postponed. What is significant is that Vanderborght reports that when he announced the plans for the reception at a Lanterne sourde meeting, "Khalil Bey Mutran"—the Lebanese poet resident in Egypt—"was the first to express his delight" (1928). The Lanterne sourde correspondence provides one key to Cavafy's contact, in various forms, with poetry written in classical Arabic. News would have reached him of the banquet that Amitiés belgo-égyptiennes held in honor of Mutran, and two other eminent poets, Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim (Alfano 2008: 56). Indeed, in his 1929 letter, Vanderborght announces a committee, which includes Khalil Mutran, for erecting a memorial for Rupert Brooke and expresses his hope that both Cavafy and Shawqi would join the committee. Not only were there interconnections, if loose, between Cavafy and these poets writing in Arabic but a source cited by Stratis Tsirkas informs us that the Alexandrian preferred Hafiz Ibrahim's poetry to Shawqi's yet ranked them both beneath Mutran (1971: 79). If so, how would Cavafy have reached such an assessment? How and where did Mutran read Cavafy, whom he so admired? In the continuing absence of evidence that Cavafy could read classical/Modern Standard Arabic, my strong sense is that he was unable to do so; and yet he was not insulated from the literary world of Egyptian Arabic literature. I would wager that the main conduit between Cavafy and that Arabophone world would have been Francophonie, French having been the lingua franca in Alexandria and widely used in Egypt at the time. The connection would have been writers who primarily produce in French, such as Ahmed Rassim and Gaston Zananiri—the latter being his personal friend (Halim 2013: 117)—but also ones who both write in Arabic and are highly proficient in French (Figure 2). It was al-Kayyar who put

6. Vanderborght refers here to the musician Dimitris Mitropoulos, whom John Chioles tells us "set ten of [Cavafy's] poems to music" in 1926 (2011: xiii).

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اليوناني المتمصر

٣١ مايو ١٩٣٣

صور كاريكاتورية للمصور سوفو انطونيادس: ١ احمد راسم ٢ احمد بك كامل ٣ اسماعيل صدقي باشا ٤ البمباشي ماركو ٥ حسن صبري باشا ٦ محمود صدقي باشا

Ἀπὸ τὴν γελοιογραφικὴν ἔκθεσιν τοῦ κ. Σοφ. Ἀντωνιάδη εἰς τὴν ΕΛΠΟΑ: 1. Ἀχμὲτ Ρασίμ. 2. Ἀχμὲτ Μπέϊ Κάμελ. 3. Ἰσμαὴλ Σίντκυ Πασᾶς. 4. Μπίμπασης Μάρκου. 5. Χουσεῖν Σάμπρυ Πασᾶς. 6. Μαχμοὺτ Σίντκυ Πασᾶς.

وشركة بواخر أنجلو اجبشين مايل لاين
تبحر الباخرة (كايرو سيتى) المعروفة باسم
(افيجنيا) سابقا في يوم الثلاثاء من كل
أسبوع
توكيل عام الخواجات كيخايلس وكيجوس
بالاسكندريه بشارع شريف نمرة ٤ تليفون ١٢٣٢

صندوق بوسته ٥٤٦
في القاهره بشارع كامل نمرة ١٥ تليفون ٥٠٢٤٧
في بور سعيد شارع ساحل السلطان حسين نمرة ٢٣
تليفون ٩٧٩

وللعودة من بيريه الى الاسكندريه
توجد ثلاث بواخر في كل أسبوع

Figure 2. A caricature by Sopho Antoniadis printed in *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir* on May 31, 1933, showing the Francophone Egyptian writer Ahmed Rassim, first to the left, among a number of public figures. Image courtesy of the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive in Athens (ELIA).

it on record that Shawqi and Cavafy conversed in French, and on the subject of Molière. Cavafy's poems were published in local Francophone "little magazines," such as *La Semaine égyptienne*, whose editor was the Greek Stavros Stavrinos. It would have been in such a forum that Mutran became acquainted with his poetry, since Vanderborght shares with Cavafy that, for the reception in his honor, "I will ask my friend Khalil Mutran—whose knowledge of our language [French] is admirable—to translate into Arabic three of your poems, particularly 'Ithaca'" (1928).

In his letter of December 13, 1928, Cavafy describes the enclosure as his opinion on the Lanterne sourde's activities, written in Greek, in response to "a letter addressed by [the collective] to its friends." I would make a strong case that the prose text, titled "On the Intellectual Affinity of Egypt and the West," which contains Cavafy's comments about the Lanterne sourde—undated and unpublished during his lifetime—is the draft of the enclosure, which we may thus date to 1928. Although he welcomes the Lanterne sourde's pursuit of literary affinities, Cavafy prefaces his recommendations with painstaking reservations. Despite the Lanterne sourde's

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Francophone international reach, and despite the role that he himself would go on to assign to local Francophone littérateurs, here is no scramble to join what Pascale Casanova has designated "the world republic of letters," in which "consecration" is obtained in Paris as "the center of the system of literary time" (2004: 89). Cavafy raises the specter of "obstacles . . . once the cultures come into contact," of "dissimilarities, oppositions," and hence "impediments." Apropos the Lanterne's Egyptian mandate, he emphasizes that the Western world and "the Eastern world represented in this case by Egypt . . . differ greatly from one another." Cavafy nevertheless lauds the ambition and goes on to outline an agenda that seems to follow an order of priorities. The group's primary "mission" is to be "to acquaint European countries (especially Western ones) with the contemporary Arab literature of Egypt." While the Lanterne sourde would refract the gaze of Arabophone writers on contemporary European artistic trends, it should bring out "whatever specific contribution Arab writers in Egypt have to offer to these trends." Cavafy thus suggests grounds for literary comparison while guarding against a narrative of derivativeness and assimilation. Even then, he underscores that "translation" must be "done most carefully," according to what "the conditions of adaptation demand" in order that Arabic texts cross their linguistic and cultural "borders" and "boundaries" (2010: 68).

Only then does Cavafy turn to Francophone writers, making clear that, in addition to Egyptian writers, this category includes "those who are racially non-Egyptian . . . Greeks, Syrians, and other ethnicities." The latter are precisely what we would describe as *mutamassirun* since they "are nevertheless children of Egypt," some of whose work, he asserts, would attest to the affinity between Egypt and the West, presumably by virtue of its hybridity. Finally, Cavafy turns to the local Greeks—the Egyptiotes, that is—but here he is specifically addressing those who write in their mother tongue, as distinct from Francophone *mutamassirun*. One senses that the fact of Greek being their language of literary production lends these Egyptiotes distinction over their Francophone compatriots. Stressing that their outreach is "limited," being neither in Arabic nor French, Cavafy makes two quasi-indigenizing gestures that almost serve as glosses on the Egyptiote positionality: the Greek language is not "entirely foreign to Egypt," since in the earlier form from which it derives it had been spoken in Alexandria for centuries; these "intellectuals, reared in the Egyptian environment, produce or will produce works that possess or will possess something of this environment." From there, he assigns the Egyptiote intellectuals a mediatory role: their rapport with their Arabophone counterparts and familiarity "with the

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Egyptian way of life, with the Egyptian way of thinking," make them "a well-suited constituency." His final recommendation, though, is that the Lanterne sourde become an instrument for acquainting "the Arabic-speaking public" with the "intellectual activities of the Greeks of Egypt." Fascinatingly, by the close of the text, Cavafy has left behind the pursuit of "the intellectual affinity of Egypt and the West": although pegging this on the Lanterne sourde's mention of conducting a "détaillée" exploration of contemporary Greek literature, he has gone on to gesture towards Hellenophone-Arabophone affinities, an Egyptiote-Egyptian continuum (2010: 69).

Nor were Cavafy's statements in that essay the function of a pro forma assignment undertaken out of collegiality toward a Belgian fellow littérateur. He would reiterate and elaborate specifically the Egyptiote-Egyptian continuum and do so in a "mass media" forum. In November 1930, an Alexandrian Greek publication carried an interview with Cavafy about "the philological production" of the "Egyptioton Ellinon," or the "Egyptiotes," that refers to his statements about the Lanterne sourde. Pronouncing that production satisfying, he makes a nod toward the need for intellectual contact with Athens. Cavafy then scripts a two-way transmission: of Egyptiote Greek-language intellectuals' production to their Egyptian Arabophone counterparts through abridged articles which it is his preference be written in Arabic; and by the same token, he recommends that Arabophone Egyptiote intellectuals undertake the same labor by acquainting the Greek public with the outlines of Egyptian Arabophone literature. Although Cavafy emphasizes that the community's cultural output is recent and that its intellectuals are small in number, the fact that he now refers to Arabophone Egyptiotes perhaps signals something of a generational sea change (a shift discussed in Gorman 2003: 186–89). His second recommendation is that philological inquiry into the literary output of Egyptiotes address the specificity of the formative imprint of its Egyptian environment, particularly of Alexandria's Hellenism, foregrounding its peculiarities and distinctive characteristics (155; see Halim 2013: 113–17).[7] In Cavafy's usage, then, "Egyptiote" as a qualifier of intellectual is no mere ethnic designation but is vested with an intercultural literary agency. Much earlier, that agency and an intertextual imprint of the Egyptian environment would manifest themselves in a poem that he himself wrote about the Dinshiwai Incident.

The incident began on June 13, 1906, when a group of British officers went hunting pigeons belonging to peasants in the Delta village of

7. Quotations from this text are drawn from a translation made by Eleni Tsagouri.

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Dinshiwai, without obtaining proper permission and despite having been warned by a villager. An officer, firing a shot, inadvertently set fire to the threshing floor of peasants. This resulted in a clash between the officers and the peasants, which escalated into mutual violence: a peasant woman was wounded and temporarily thought dead, the villagers therefore attacking the officers with sticks, both parties sustaining injuries in the process. A British officer who had been hit and was fleeing the scene died of sunstroke; and one of the peasants who was trying to help him was killed by the British on the assumption that he was the murderer (al-Masadi 1974: 73–83). A special tribunal was set up by the British, including the Egyptians Butrus Pasha Ghali, the chief justice, and Ibrahim al-Hilbawi, the counsel for the prosecution. Although "Mr. Nolan, a medicolegal expert, testified before the tribunal that the officer had died of sunstroke, yet the villagers were convicted of killing him on the grounds that the attack had been premeditated. No appeal was allowed" (Esmeir 2012: 255). The tribunal passed death sentences on four men, who were executed in public, in sight of the villagers, and a variety of sentences on others, including life imprisonment with hard labor for two villagers, sentences of hard labor of varying lengths for several men, and flogging of several villagers (al-Masadi 1974: 87–88). The Dinshiwai Incident had widespread repercussions locally and internationally. As Muhammad Jamal al-Din al-Masadi sums it up, it was "a turning point" that connected the "nationalist movement to the popular broad base of peasants," and effected a change in British policy (1974: 36). The incident became the cause célèbre at the center of a media campaign against the British in Egypt and by the nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil in France, which eventually led to the resignation of Lord Cromer, the British agent and consul-general in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was the subject of poems by several well-known Egyptian poets in classical Arabic, including Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim, whose work we have established Cavafy was aware of to some degree. Likewise, Dinshiwai became the subject of folk ballads, dirges, popular songs, and a novel.

Cavafy's poem "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." also carried as an additional title in manuscript form "Yussef Hussein Selim" (Yusuf Husayn Silim), the name of the youngest of the four men hanged (1908). My interpretation foregrounds two interrelated points: diegetic and extradiegetic temporalities, and Greek-Egyptian folkloric intertextual reverberations. The poem reads:

> And when the Christians brought to hang
> that boy of seventeen, so innocent,

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his mother, who, quite near the gallows tree,
kept creeping through the dust, and tearing at her breast,
beneath the fiercely burning midday sun,
now bawling, howling, like a wolf, a beast,
and then, exhausted, the poor martyress, cried out:
"My son, for seventeen years only did you live!"
And while they dragged him up the ladder of the tree
and passed the noose around his neck and throttled dead
that boy of seventeen, so innocent,
and now so pitifully swinging in the void
amid the spasms of black agony
that ripped apart his beautiful ephebic form,
his mother, that poor martyress, rolled on the ground
and kept lamenting, thinking of his years as days:
"For seventeen days only, son," she throbbed and sobbed,
"For seventeen days only, son, did I have the joy of your presence,
my all!"
(1988: 70, trans. mod.; see also 1997: 91)[8]

The twenty-seventh was the day when the sentences were passed, the executions having taken place the following day: it is open to speculation why Cavafy gave the twenty-seventh as the date, and whether it might have been meant to secure a modicum of poetic license. The time 2 P.M. was approximately when the incident itself took place and also the time of the execution of the sentences, the gallows being pitched overlooking the site where it had occurred.[9] The pivot of the poem's complex play on time, 2 P.M. indexes the extradiegetic "empirical" temporality of medical and legal discourse, and the "hard facts" of the newspaper report; simultaneously, it indexes the poem's contrastive diegetic modulation of the temporality of mourning and affective truth.

Extradiegetically, the legal proceedings, as such, involved a colonial abridgement of time: the passing of sentences was on the twenty-

8. Memas Kolaitis's translation reproduced above gives the title of the poem as "June 27, 1906, 2 p.m." I selected this translation of the poem as it is the only one I know of that uses "martyress," as in the Greek original, "martyssa." The modification to the last verse, where it now reads "did I have the joy of your presence," is how Dimitris Papanikolaou proposed translating it; email communication, July 26, 2018.
9. For the 2 P.M. timing, see al-Masadi 1974: 77, 91, 171; *Egyptian Gazette* 1906a. Al-Masadi (91) also comments on the site chosen for the gallows.

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seventh and their execution on the twenty-eighth. As Samera Esmeir observes, although native courts were "perfectly capable of delivering harsh responses, including capital punishment," the decision was made "to try the villagers in a special tribunal." She writes that "fewer than four years after the occupation of Egypt, Cromer complained about 'the delay, which constantly occurs, in the national courts, in dealing with cases in which a native [was] charged with [an] offence against English soldiers.'" Hence the decision to establish "a special tribunal to try such offenses, which was sanctioned by a khedival decree of 1895." In the Dinshiwai Incident, "summary trial and execution circumscribed the trial in time," with "the declared purposes of the summary nature of the trial [being] effectiveness and immediate deterrence." A request received from the Foreign Office in London "for an interval before the sentences were carried out"—which would have allowed for reviewing and reconsidering them—"was rejected. . . . The British authorities in Egypt responded that delaying the execution would create excitement among Egyptians. Such a delay was also illegal, as the 1895 decree dictated that the execution be immediate" (2012: 254, 255).

My contention is that the workings of time and temporality in "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." respond antithetically to the summary colonial legal proceedings. The 2 P.M. in the title cues us to an altogether different temporal condensation and abridgement of time, here in a subjective key. Past the title, we have two temporal signifiers—"And when"; "And while"—of the ballad-like *unfolding* narrative of the hanging performed within minutes. Withholding Yussef Hussein Selim's name allows Cavafy to commute his age to seventeen—seventeen being repeated twice in the speaker's discourse and three times in the mother's speech—to heighten the pathos, with the collocation of the polyvalent "innocent."[10] This motivated abridgement of the young man's age to seventeen years is in perfect keeping with the anguished condensation of time in the mother's own dirge. In contrast to the surgical precision of 2 P.M., it is *when* her son is brought out to the gallows that she laments his seventeen years; and *while* he is being hanged that she laments those years as now a mere seventeen days. In his thoroughly insightful and early reading of this poem, Tsirkas persuasively makes the case that classical Arabic poems about Dinshiwai, such as Hafiz

10. According to al-Masadi (1974: 91), Yussef Hussein Selim was twenty-two years old, and yet the *Journal du Caire*, as cited by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, describes him as a "quite young man of eighteen years" (1907: 61).

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Ibrahim's, would not have been Cavafy's inspiration but rather the *mawwal* (folk ballad) genre composed in colloquial Arabic (1971: 78–79). To Tsirkas, the condensation of time in the mother's dirge bespeaks the "subjective time" of psychological strain. Noting the resonance between the *mawwal* and Greek folklore, he points out that such condensation/expansion of time also materializes in Egyptian folklore and cites a work song he heard in the country (86–87). In terms of Greek lament, Margaret Alexiou's study of the genre has "illustrate[d] that antithetical style remains a dynamic feature of the folk lament," where, as with ancient and Byzantine laments, "it is not external to, but dependent upon, the structure and thought." We may ascribe the mother's condensation of time to the "common technique of the modern laments" in the Greek tradition of "emphasis by contrast" (Alexiou 2002: 159). But I would add that the condensation has resonances in Egyptian *'adid* (lament/dirge). A chapter devoted to laments about a male youth in a study of the *'adid* genre in Upper Egypt by Darwish al-Asyuti quotes a dirge recited by a mother in the voice of her young dead son, who pleads, "O Mother, grant me of your lifetime a night / . . . . O Mother, grant me of your lifetime a moment" (2006: 209).

Before elaborating the folkloric connection further, I wish to dwell on the question of Cavafy's knowledge of Egyptian colloquial Arabic. Concrete evidence that lends credence to his having had some degree of proficiency in the vernacular comes, as it happens, from a poem that, to my mind, thematically and structurally appeals to popular Egyptian song. This is "Sham El-Nessim," steeped in localism about ordinary Egyptians celebrating the spring festival of the title; the poem not only describes Egyptian folk songs but also uses a refrain, like a folk ballad. It invokes the god Ptah, thus indexing the ancient Egyptian origin of the festival, and names modern Alexandrian neighborhoods. What is arresting is that Cavafy transliterates into Greek the Arabic word for *singer*, "mughanni"; he also refers to the country as "Misiri"—rather than using the Greek name "Aigyptos"—adapting the Arabic name for Egypt, "Misr," according to an older generation of Egyptiotes' usage,[11] this possibly hybridized with a hint of Ottoman Turkish (1983: 23–24). This poem, rejected by Cavafy possibly on aesthetic grounds, was written in 1892, by which time he had returned to settle in Egypt after sojourns in England and Ottoman Turkey. Having lived in Egypt for much longer by 1908 when he wrote "27 June 1906, 2 P.M.," Cavafy is

11. Personal communication, Persa Koumoutsi, Athens-resident Egyptiote literary translator from Arabic into Greek, December 12, 2019.

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quite likely to have acquired more Egyptian colloquial Arabic as to allow him a degree of access to Egyptian orality. At the office, for example, his superiors praised his "usefulness in teaching English to junior members of the staff," an activity one imagines involved a measure of code-switching (Liddell 1974: 127).

That Cavafy was drawn to the folk literature of Egypt is attested in his interest in Egyptian proverbs.[12] Probing the evidence in itself adumbrates channels of transmission of Egyptian orality to him. Cavafy had expressed his admiration for the Alexandrian Egyptian Francophone poet Ahmed Rassim in a May 1928 special issue of *La Semaine égyptienne* devoted to him (al-Siba'i 1991: 133). As part of his literary output, Rassim collected Arabic proverbs and translated them into French, including the volume *Le collier de la vieille zoumboul (proverbes populaires arabes)*, a copy of which is in Cavafy's personal library.[13] Rassim's own eulogy to Cavafy in a commemorative issue of the same magazine records that a mutual friend, Petrides, recounted reading to Cavafy an Arabic proverb that he had come across in a literary journal which the poet warmly identified with ([1933] 1983: 9). Indeed, a proverb in classical Arabic furnishes the premise of Cavafy's "Word and Silence" (written in 1892): it is both transliterated and translated into Greek as the epigraph and glossed "Arab proverb." The fact that it is slightly faulty indicates that the poet is likely to have transcribed it as relayed in speech rather than text (2009: 205; [1933] 1983: 22).[14] I would postulate that it was in like manner that Cavafy came into contact with vernacular poetry and laments about Dinshiwai, more so when we recall that he lived in a polyglot city in which off-the-cuff translation and ad hoc code-switching renditions of speech in a variety of languages were standard practice. Cavafy was himself a confirmed eavesdropper at the Bourse and in cafés, where, he averred, he "picked up the phraseology of the people and the petite bourgeoisie" (Liddell: 1974: 126). He also moved in spaces in which snatches of folk literature on Dinshiwai may have been either (re) cited in the original or translated—cafés, taverns, editors' offices, and so on. Such spaces, together with the additional fact of having an Egyptian

12. I thank Yiannis Papatheodorou for prompting me to elaborate this point during the discussion that followed my seminar "C. P. Cavafy the Egyptiote."
13. See Cavafy 2003, under "Books in French." The edition of Rassim's *Le collier de la vieille zoumboul* is undated but was first published in 1932, according to Daniel Lançon 2007: 534.
14. Cavafy's transliteration of the proverb is missing "then," inserted here between square brackets: "If word / speech is of silver, [then] silence is of gold" (1983: 22).

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friend, would explain how E. M. Forster—merely resident in Alexandria during World War I and unlike Cavafy not a child of the city—would quote a vernacular political lyric of the time. In an article critical of British colonialism in Egypt and its compulsory conscription and maltreatment of peasants, he cites a "plaintive little popular song . . . sung to a minor tune about the streets . . . 'My native town, oh my native town! / The military authorities have taken my boy'" (1919).[15]

Cavafy's texts register a variety of folkloric traditions. Peter Jeffreys has described Cavafy's "early essays [as] utterly awash in folkloric content," which he ascribes to "the excessive omnipresence of the discourse of *laographia* (folklore) in Greek literary circles" at the end of the nineteenth century, speculating that the poet eventually found that this specific discourse "ran counter to his own literary taste" in view of its "problematic ethnocentrism" (Jeffreys 2010: xvi). It is my sense that, in the case of the Dinshiwai poem, Cavafy performed an *Egyptiote* intercultural labor of drawing out resonances of two folkloric traditions. Already in his essays, there is a hint of comparatism in his reflections on folklore: tracing the etymology of "masks" to Arabic in the essay by that title, he goes on to compile examples of their use in cultures as diverse as ancient Arabia, sub-Saharan Africa, ancient Egypt and classical Greece (Cavafy 1963: 167–69). As for Greek folklore per se, the evidence of Cavafy's grip on it bestrides his output across genres. In his essay speculated to have been written in 1920 or 1921, "For a Student Anthology of Demotic Songs," he lauds the Educational Association of Egypt for compiling the volume for Greek secondary school pupils, probing the principle of selection in relation to scholarly editions of the subject and the criterion of the target age group. Cavafy endorses the pedagogical value of "old customs and character sketches of our race," of learning "from where the present language derives," and the acquisition of a taste for poetry that exposure to "the popular Greek line" affords (2010: 141, 142). Cavafy's own poetic corpus includes a hidden poem that dates from 1921, written around the time of that essay—"'S took"—which opens in customary quasi-scholarly Cavafian fashion with the speaker declaring that,

> I have been reading, just these days, our folkish songs;
> deeds of the klefts and of their wars, extolling
> the things that are endearing—Greek, our own.

15. Forster quotes "Ya 'Aziz 'Ayni," a vernacular lyric made popular during World War I as set to music and sung by Sayyid Darwish, the Alexandrian musician and singer, a celebrated icon of the 1919 Revolution.

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> The mournful chants that tell the loss of Poli, I have read,
> "They took the Poli, ay they took; took Salonike too"

before going on to confide "the song that touched me most / was one of Trebizond that, in its dialect / the grief expressed so well of its own Greek residents" (Cavafy 1988: 86). The closing stanza reproduces verses from one such song, in the archaic dialect of that region overlooking the Black Sea.[16] The poem self-reflexively highlights that it is in a line of descent from a subset genre of the Byzantine lament to which Alexiou devotes a discussion under the rubric of "the historical lament for the fall or destruction of cities." She maintains that there is "an unbroken tradition of such historical laments in Greek, both learned and vernacular," which survived and was extended primarily through the trope of the fall of Constantinople (Alexiou 2002: 83).

Interpretations of the poem "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." that attenuate its anticolonial solidarity are unpersuasive, even if their claims hold a grain of validity. Granted, a homoerotic element might be detected in "the spasms of black agony / that ripped apart his beautiful ephebic form." Liddell overemphasizes the erotic component, while his commentary on the aesthetic dimension is equally misleading. His opening salvo is that "there is no reason to draw a political conclusion from Cavafy's humane reaction to one scene of horror," all the more so because he "had . . . a particular abhorrence for political punishment." He then reminds us "that the lamentations for the dead, 'moirologia,' were the Greek ballads that Cavafy liked best" and adds that "the *mater dolorosa* occurs again in his work," citing "Aristobulos," in which "poem also the victim was a beautiful boy" (Liddell 1974: 91, 92). Granted, Cavafy's corpus does evince fondness for the Greek lamentations for the dead, as in his prose text "A Night Out in Kalinderi." The narrator in this text, written in the 1880s, is enjoying a mellow evening on the Bosporus when he hears a group of people singing on a large boat. He initially is "expecting a cheerful song about youthful exploits, full of happiness and life," but soon enough the drift of the lyric is borne upon him:

> Don't take him so quickly to the grave,
> Let him enjoy the sun a little bit longer!
> Don't take him so quickly, it's a shame—
> He barely knew what it meant to live . . .

The narrator muses that he "heard in these simple and unpolished verses—the invention of some rural poet's Muse—a bitter lament about the

16. Daniel Mendelsohn renders the title as "It Was Taken" (Cavafy 2009: 335).

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vanity of all things, that most ancient complaint of suffering man" (Cavafy 2010: 75). And granted, the *mater dolorosa* trope resounds in the Cavafy poetic corpus, a more representative example being the poem "Supplication," or "Suppliance," in which a mother, unaware that her sailor son is dead, supplicates "Our Lady's icon—for his return in good time" (2011: 155), as Tsirkas noted in relation to the Dinshiwai poem (1971: 89–90). Indeed, I would back the presence of that trope in "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." by eliciting the twice-repeated epithet for the mother of the hanged young man, "martyress" ("martyssa" in the original [Cavafy 1997: 91]).

That said, I read the figuration of a lamenting kinswoman and the Christian imagery as intertwined, and as such reinforcing an intercultural poetics underwritten by solidarity. It is the case that the dirges by kinswomen of the men hanged in Dinshiwai are a loaded trope of that event in both literary and extraliterary discourses. Whether Cavafy read it, and it is not unlikely, the British *Egyptian Gazette*'s coverage on June 29, 1906, observed that during the passing of sentences in Dinshiwai, "every now and then a loud wail from the women came from the village, but save for this all was strangely quiet" (1906c). By July 5, the *Gazette* was to report on the outcry in England against the sentences, in the weary tones of what used to be referred to as "an old Egypt hand," thus: "Those who are best able to judge Egypt's needs as a result of many years' experiences of the country strongly deprecate the remarks that have been made by certain irresponsible individuals in the House of Commons." Headlined "Denishwai. M.P's Sentimentalism," the report continues: "As an instance of how little the customs of the country are understood here, the wailing of the women at the time of the execution has been made much of and has produced a great effect on the feelings of individuals who are unaware that it is the custom for this to occur in all cases of death, and had no other significance at Denishwai" (1906b).

In reducing the response by the women—who witnessed the executions—to mere ritualized (read: static) wailing, the report depletes it of the protest "significance" that the fragments of accompanying dirges adumbrate. The mourning kinswomen of Dinshiwai were to become a longstanding trope of the incident, so much so that, together with pigeons and dovecots, they are made iconic in the façade of Dinshiwai Museum, established by the postindependence state, and in some of the artwork it contains (Figures 3 and 4).[17]

17. The Dinshiwai Museum was constructed on the same site on which the gallows was pitched. See al-Masadi (1974: 91, 108).

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Figure 3. Mural on the facade of the Dinshiwai Museum, photograph by the author. Reproduced courtesy of the Sector of Fine Arts, Ministry of Culture, Egypt.

At the time of the incident itself, quotations from the dirges of the kinswomen of the Dinshiwai victims, as well as the village children, appeared in *Le Phare d'Alexandrie*, another newspaper Cavafy might have read (1906; Tsirkas 1971: 75–76). Mahmud Tahir Haqqi's novel *'Adhra' Dinshiwai* (*The Maiden of Dinshiwai*), first serialized in a newspaper soon after the event and later published in book form, re-creates the dirges uttered by the womenfolk of the first man to be hanged, Hasan Mahfuz. While he is being led to the gallows, his wife cries, "O my husband. O my camel—oh the ruin that has befallen your home, O Mahfuz"; and his daughter's lamentation is, "O my Father, oh the ruin that has befallen your home, Father, O oppressed one, Father" (1964: 76). I read in Cavafy's and Haqqi's inclusion of folk dirges a desire to heed the voice of the subaltern, which colonial discourse, as evinced, for instance, in the *Egyptian Gazette*, would muffle.

The two writers creatively rework other folk material, whether accessed orally or through the print media of the time, in seeking to represent a subaltern point of view on Dinshiwai. "O my camel," in the dirge that Haqqi's novel includes, is part of a repertoire of metaphors in Egyptian

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Figure 4. Statue in Dinshiwai Museum depicting the wife and son of one of the men sentenced to death. Artist: Muhammad al-Sayyid. Photograph by the author. Reproduced courtesy of the Sector of Fine Arts, Ministry of Culture, Egypt.

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Figure 5. Still from ʻAtiyyat al-Abnudi's 1988 documentary *Iqaʻ al-Haya* (*The Rhythm of Life*) showing a funeral rite in Upper Egypt. Reproduced courtesy of Asmaa Yehia El-Taher.

laments comparing a dead man to an animal traditionally seen as strong and valiant, including "sabʻi" (my lion) (Mursi 1999: 72–73). I am put in mind of the dirges by Upper Egyptian women describing the deceased as "sabʻ al-rijal" (a lion amongst men) filmed in ʻAtiyyat al-Abnudi's 1988 documentary *Iqaʻ al-Haya* (*The Rhythm of Life*) (Figures 5 and 6; for a screening and discussion of the relevant clip, see Halim 2019). In both writers, though, the animal imagery is polyvalent, and in both cases motifs likely drawn from press coverage are creatively reworked.[18] In *Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt*, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, the British anti-imperialist, pieces together "the principal points of evidence denied by the Foreign Office" concerning Dinshiwai; he turns, among others, to the local press for docu-

18. I thank Vassiliki Kolocotroni for prompting me to elaborate on the animal imagery in Cavafy's poem during the discussion that followed my seminar "C. P. Cavafy the Egyptiote."

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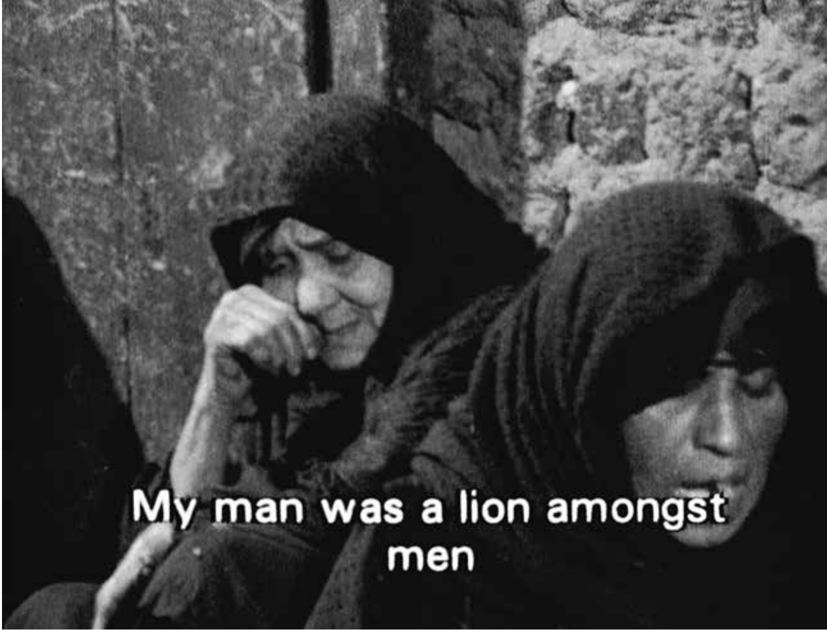

Figure 6. Still from ʻAtiyyat al-Abnudi's 1988 documentary *Iqa‘ al-Haya* (*The Rhythm of Life*) showing women reciting dirges at a funeral in Upper Egypt. Reproduced courtesy of Asmaa Yehia El-Taher.

mentation (1907: 37). Blunt abridges and translates a report in the *Journal du Caire* that describes the executions thus: "the trap opens, the gallows creak, the body twirls round and round; *dogs and men howl at the death*." The end of the passing of sentences is described thus: "The hangman sighs with satisfaction. Soon afterward the crowd disperses slowly and in silence. . . . *Only the women, like hunted wolves, howl with rage and anguish*" (61, 62; emphasis added). Alongside the animal imagery in the kinswomen's laments, Haqqi's novel has Mahfuz, after the death sentence is read out, hear "a mighty howl" and turn to "see his dog . . . running and smashing his head into" the scaffold; "the animal's eyes well up with tears, but mercy has not overtaken the human heart" (1964: 76).

If the subversion of colonialism's projected "humanism" in Cavafy's poem, as with Haqqi's novel, appeals to animal figuration, it is in a somewhat different vein. The poem elaborates the trope of the lamenting kinswoman of Dinshiwai in the figure of the mother of the hanged young man as

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herself a “martyress.” Cavafy lends her the same simile used by the *Journal du Caire* where the poem describes the mother as “howling, like a wolf [*lykos*], a beast [*thirio*]” (1997: 91). It is an image that distills anguish and subjugation, even while her rounded depiction and quoted speech restore her agency and subjecthood. Dimitris Papanikolaou has pointed out that in the three times the figure seventeen occurs in the mother’s dirge, it is spelled in an unconventional manner, “dekafta,” as distinct from the standard spelling used in the two instances “in the narrator’s voice,” “dekaefta” (1997: 91). To me, the elision is reminiscent of the Egyptian colloquial “saba‘tashar,” as distinct from the figure in classical Arabic “sab‘at ‘ashr”; “dekafta” seems to work almost like a calque translation from Egyptian vernacular. To Khalid Ra’uf, translator of Greek literature into Arabic, it sounds more like the Greek spoken by Egyptiotes. Michalis Chryssanthopoulos describes the contracted seventeen as “colloquial and oral . . . not at all common,” and offers the cogent “explanation, notwithstanding the meter requirements . . . that we have another case of ‘cutting,’ from years to days but also of vowels (vowels are voice).” Aside from the provenance of the contracted form, it has the effect of a neologistic nodal point between (Egyptiote) Greek and Egyptian colloquialisms in which vernacular usage places a marker on the intertextual folkloric resonances in the poem.[19]

As for the Christian imagery in “27 June 1906, 2 P.M.,” this leads precisely to a generative paradox that makes the poem’s empathy all the more potent. If the mother “martyress” aligns the lamenting kinswoman of Dinshiwai with the *mater dolorosa*, then what to make of the first verses in which “the Christians brought to hang / that boy of seventeen”? In a draft of the poem, Cavafy had used “English” (1908). Its replacement by “Christians,” far from an Orientalizing projection onto the largely Muslim peasants of a monolithic view of Europeans, carries a threefold significance. First, the usage bears a marked assertion of empathy, of a deliberate adoption of the villagers’ vantage point to gaze from the inside out. And yet, we have no sense of the persona as we would in a dramatic monologue, nor does the speaker purport to be a mouthpiece of the collective voice of Dinshiwai. Compare this to “Shanq Zahran” (“The Hanging of Zahran”), by the Egyptian poet Salah ‘Abd al-Sabur. It portrays Muhammad Darwish Zahran—the most frequently depicted of the four hanged men—his attainment of peace-

19. Dimitris Papanikolaou, in an email dated July 26, 2018, was replying to a query I put to him while revising a translation into Arabic of the poem “27 June 1906, 2 P.M.,” quoted in my *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism*; Khalid Ra’uf, personal communication, June 28, 2019; and Michalis Chryssanthopoulos, email dated October 18, 2019.

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ful, life-affirming, valiant manhood, his good looks, and his rootedness in his village, the name of which is tattooed on his forearm. The poem was written in Modern Standard Arabic—albeit with folklore-like elements, as in "once upon a time"—shortly before the Suez War and given far-reaching circulation by that event (see ʻAsfur 2002). It ends thus:

> Since that day does my village feed only on tears;
> Since that day does my village live in desolate despair,
> Since that morn does my village fear the treasure of life
> Yet Zahran had been a true friend of life;
> He had died with his eyes full of life;
> Why then does my village fear the brightness of life!
> (Abdel Sabour 1971: 74; see ʻAbd al-Sabur 1972: 22)

One may read "my village" as a synecdoche of Egypt and the speaker as a "national subject," indeed the same subject presumed in the voice of the narrator who apostrophizes Dinshiwai as Haqqi's novel draws to a close: "Dinshiwai! Dinshiwai! Your name now bespeaks terror. . . . Dinshiwai. Dinshiwai, woeful village, never think the Egyptian could forget your calamity" (1964: 79).[20]

On the other hand, the use of "Christians" in the opening verse of "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." may be elucidated through Mikhail Bakhtin's designation of "heteroglossia" as "*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way." Granted, while Bakhtin allows that "such discourse is also possible in the purely poetic genres," he maintains that poetry, in contradistinction to the novel, affords "no soil to nourish the development of such discourse" (1998: 324, 325). Contra Bakhtin, Jahan Ramazani advances an argument about "a dialogic poetics," which presumes that poetry is "shaped by its dialogic interactions with other discourses" (2014: 8; see 1–62). This is corroborated by "27 June 1906, 2 P.M.," and not solely in the poem's dialogism with extraliterary discourses surrounding Dinshiwai. I would offer that "Christians," sans quotation marks in its unidentified narrator's speech, can be interpreted as bearing "*double-voiced discourse*," which may materialize as "the refracting discourse of a narrator" (Bakhtin 1998: 324).

20. See Selim 2004 on the "national subject" in relation to figurations of the peasant in Egyptian literature as well as on Haqqi's *ʻAdhra' Dinshiwai*, esp. 4, 92–102. For a discussion focusing on language politics and translation in *ʻAdhra' Dinshiwai* in relation to British government archival material, see Hannah Scott Deuchar's forthcoming PhD diss., provisionally titled "Policing Language: Capital, Law, and Literature in the Arabic Nahda."

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Second, the manuscript of an anonymous *mawwal*, which Pierre Cachia obtained in 1943, refers to "al-nasara" (the Nazarenes, meaning Christians) with reference to the British powers (Cachia 1989: 250–53). A *mawwal* translated and reproduced by Tsirkas, who disputes any fanaticism in the use of the term Christian, does likewise; its verses very much overlap with the one Cachia reproduces (1971: 78–79, 82). All this strongly supports the speculation that the diction here is drawn from a folk source. Third, and as both Tsirkas and the Egyptian critic Raja' al-Naqqash rightly point out, the irony targets the "un-Christian" behavior of the British, their actions that fly in the face of Christian forgiveness and mercy (Tsirkas 1971: 83; al-Naqqash 1992: 265). It thus exposes the vacuity of the "civilizing mission" claimed by colonialism in order to secure economic gain (see Halim 2013: 102). This irony, despite the different historical context, is even more conspicuous in Cavafy's 1893 hidden poem "Before Jerusalem." Taking as its subject the First Crusade, the poem derides "the Crusaders, so daring and invincible," who "as they behold the walls of Jerusalem" have expunged "[p]assions, avarice, and ambition" from their souls and "forgotten their quarrels with the Greeks; / . . . forgotten their hatred of the Turks"—before going on a plunder and killing spree (2009: 274). It is the case that the colonial allegation of Egyptian fanaticism was, in the immediate wake of the Dinshiwai Incident, drummed up further, not least back in Britain to silence the backlash against the "atrocities of justice" of the British occupation (see Blunt 1907: 55). The secretary of state for foreign affairs, Sir Edward Grey, "made a statement in the House saying that throughout the year fanatical feelings had been increasing in Egypt, and that further measures to protect Europeans in Egypt might have to be taken" (al-Sayyid 1968: 174). To silence the backlash further, he had gone so far as to claim that the fanaticism "was not confined to Egypt alone, but was spreading throughout North Africa," as cited on July 7, in the *Egyptian Gazette* (1906d). The allegation aroused a furor in the Egyptian press and was also part of nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil's retort in his European media campaign; in the July 11, 1906, issue of the *Figaro*, he condemned the "use [of] extraordinary measures and barbarous procedures to govern Egypt and teach the Egyptians human dignity" (qtd. in al-Sayyid 1968: 174). In a comparable vein, the poem's usage of "Christians" performs a chiasmus on the fanaticism charge.

The empathy in the usage of "Christians" in the Dinshiwai poem manifests itself again in Cavafy's poem "For Ammones, Who Died at 29, in A.D. 610" (1917), albeit set in another era altogether and through different diction. The poem reads:

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Raphael, a few verses they ask of you, an
epitaph for the poet Ammones; do compose them:
something of refined taste and polish. You can
do it, you are the most suited to write what's just
for the poet Ammones, one of our own.

You will of course speak of his poems—
but you must speak too of his beauty,
of his delicate beauty that we so loved.

Your Greek is always graceful and musical.
Now it's your superb craftsmanship we need.
Our sorrow and our love pass into the foreign tongue.
Pour all your Egyptian feeling into the foreign tongue you use.

And, Raphael, let your verses be written just
so they may have, you know, something of our life
within them, where every rhythm and every phrase
may show an Alexandrian writing of an Alexandrian.
(2011: 119, trans. mod.; see 1991: 83)

As with "27 June 1906, 2 P.M.," the temporal maker in the title of this poem is overdetermined. While the poem is set during the last stretch of Byzantine rule, the year AD 610 is specifically the date when the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, who was to make a failed attempt at doctrinal conciliation with Eastern Christians, ascended the throne; it is furthermore quite roughly around the time when the Prophet Muhammad had his first revelation. Analeptically, the date looks back from the Alexandrian space onto a millennium of Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine rule; proleptically, it looks forward toward the Arab conquest of Egypt, about three decades later, and the transfer of the capital inland (Fustat and then Cairo) (Halim 2013: 88).

In this sense, the date is a key to the empathic mediation at work in the poem's coded ethnolinguistic markers. The dead poet Ammones—by virtue of his name being a version of Amun, the ancient Egyptian god—is clearly a Copt; collocated with him, the living poet Raphael would also be a Copt, as corroborated by the assertion about his "Greek [as] always graceful and musical," hence likely an acquired language, more so given the reference to his "Egyptian feeling." The speakers addressing Raphael, the Hellenophone, represent the altogether un-Hellenized Egyptian indigene: they are Copts, hence non-Chalcedonian and doctrinally in opposition to Byzantium, again, the church that Cavafy was born into. From a Greek

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vantage point and on linguistic grounds, the speakers are what might have been thought of as "barbarians": a millennium after Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt, they stand outside the orbit of the dominant language (Greek), not to mention its canonical literary genres (here the epitaph). It is most astonishing, then, that in this poem written by a Greek in Greek, the Greek language should be referred to twice as "the foreign tongue" ("kseni glossa" [1991: 83]). Cavafy the Egyptiote is thus placing himself in a continuum with the figure of the "barbarian," via the figure of the Hellenophone: in adopting the gaze of the un-Hellenized speakers onto his own language as a "foreign tongue," he is performing the same empathic labor as in the Dinshiwai poem, where he deploys "Christians" in a politically ironic vein. Despite the validity of drawing out the connection between Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing, and an Amun alluded to here "who metaphorically 'died' at the time of the Arab invasions," it is unpersuasive to claim that, "for Cavafy the *writing* of *Greek* poetry can bring back and immortalize the 'eternal youthfulness' of Ammonis, who died in Alexandria some thirteen centuries earlier" (Alexiou 1985: 188).

Looming behind a suggested homoerotic grief is an anxiety about cultural attrition: in this sense, I posit that "For Ammones" is about the capacity for witnessing that a "transculturated" textuality, rather than Greek poetry, represents. The poem attests to "a multilayered cultural violence that is perpetrated by the hegemony of Hellenism—in Alexandria, where [Greek] was the literary language—followed by Christianity in the tension between its indigenous and imperial Byzantine forms, as much as it presages the gradual loss of the Coptic language and the death of ancient Egyptian religious beliefs in Arabo-Islamic times" (Halim 2013: 87–88). Before proceeding, a caveat is called for to militate against such misleading assertions, as Cavafy "never seemed to recognize the Arab conquest of Egypt" (Liddell 1974: 90). The 1914 hidden poem "Exiles" (the title is sometimes rendered as "Refugees"), thought to be set around AD 867–86, has Byzantine intellectuals, political exiles from Constantinople, sheltering in post–Arab conquest Alexandria, visiting the city's landmarks and pursuing Hellenic literary discussions.[21] To return to "For Ammones," which I read as a metapoetic poem, here is no passing in the direction of Hellenization. The coda "an Alexandrian writing of an Alexandrian," in upholding literature's capacity for memorialization beyond cultural transformations, does so neither in the name of Greek nor Egyptian poetry but in the name of a third, transculturated element, here ciphered "Alexandrian." In transculturation, according

21. See Keeley 1976: 3. My discussion of "For Ammones" abridges Halim 2013: 84–93.

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to the Cuban poet Nancy Morejón, "*reciprocal* influence is the determining factor . . . no single element superimposes itself on another; on the contrary, each one changes into the other so that both can be transformed into a third" (qtd. in Lionnet 1995: 11–12). If "For Ammones" is indeed *prescriptive* of transculturated textuality—"Pour all your Egyptian feeling into the foreign tongue"—this speaks to the intertextual resonances between Greek and Egyptian folklore in "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." Both poems witness specifically indigenous Egyptian mourning: the Copts in "For Ammones" and the predominantly Muslim *fellahin* in "27 June 1906, 2 P.M."

The timing of writing "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." and its publication status are significant. When Cavafy wrote "27 June 1906, 2 P.M."—never published during his lifetime—he was still a government functionary in the Irrigation Service under the British administration, and I would speculate that he considered it risky to put out such a poem. It is likely, too, that at the office he had heard that a British irrigation inspector had been physically attacked by peasants in an area close to Dinshiwai shortly after the executions (al-Masadi 1974: 104, 173–74). Circumstantial evidence corroborates what I speculate was Cavafy's circumspection here: apart from an opera about the event having been banned (al-Masadi 1974: 101), the author of *'Adhra' Dinshiwai*, Haqqi, likewise a government functionary, was repeatedly summoned and intimidated by the British authorities during the novel's serialization in *al-Minbar* newspaper, and he resigned from his post on account of governmental disfavor (Y. Haqqi 1964). If "For Ammones," set as it is in the seventh century AD, was disseminated and is part of the Cavafy "canon," "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." was not. However, Cavafy did preserve the latter poem in his hidden category rather than relegate it to the "rejected" one. That this poem was written in 1908 indicates that, rather than the outcome of an immediate and passing reaction, it is evidence of a sustained preoccupation with the Dinshiwai Incident and an abiding sense of its injustice. In January of that year, too, the prisoners of the Dinshiwai Incident, who had been petitioning for pardon, were discharged by the khedive (Esmeir 2012: 258–59); this would have assuaged misgivings Cavafy may have had about putting pen to paper about the subject. Despite being unpublished, the poem, in memorializing one of the victims of the Dinshiwai Incident, may have been Cavafy's behind-the-scenes contribution to the plethora of Egyptian poetic testimonies to the event.[22]

Only two years after writing "27 June 1906, 2 P.M.," Cavafy would privately demonstrate his sustained attention to Egyptian political affairs con-

22. My discussion here summarizes and revises Halim 2013: 103–4.

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nected to the British occupation, in this case a political execution intimately related to the Dinshiwai Incident. This was the 1910 cause célèbre of the pharmacist Ibrahim al-Wardani, who attempted to assassinate the Anglophile Butrus Pasha Ghali. Cavafy kept several issues of the Alexandria-based *La Réforme* newspaper's coverage of the trial, sentence, and execution. He would have read the reason for the act that an unrepentant Wardani gave in court, quoted on the front page of *La Réforme*, being Ghali's treachery to the country, the examples including his role as chief justice in the Dinshiwai trial, his sanctioning of press censorship, and his prolongation of the Suez Canal convention (1910d: 14 May; see also al-Sayyid 1968: 173). At al-Wardani's trial, al-Hilbawi—it was presumed in atonement for his role in the Dinshiwai trial—was a member of the counsel for the defense. In a note, Cavafy wrote,

> The Egyptian people showed sympathy for Wardani: out of pity for the individual, not . . . out of approval for the act. An organ of the Italian press in Egypt wrote recommending him to mercy. . . . After the execution of the unfortunate young man, Egyptian demonstrations of sympathy were numerous. Poems in his praise were written, pupils of various schools of higher studies wore black ties for mourning; there were gatherings around his grave and there emotional speeches were made, and the hands of friends brought beautiful flowers. (qtd. Liddell 1974: 92)

Cavafy's comments about Egyptian reactions with which the quotation opens echo a portion of *La Réforme*'s editorial after the passing of the sentence (1910e: 14 May).

Cavafy's painstaking depiction of Egyptian manifestations of mourning is reminiscent of his attunement to the grief to which the Dinshiwai Incident had given rise, even as the reference to "poems" cues us to his heedfulness of laments occasioned by the political as they resonate in his "27 June 1906, 2 P.M." One of *La Réforme*'s articles on the execution, dated June 29, 1910, offers "supplementary details": "At 6 o'clock minus a minute, the execution took place in perfect order . . . the execution of Ibrahim Nassef El Wardani which, by a mere coincidence, took place on the day of the anniversary of the Dinshiwai executions" (1910c). Setting aside that *La Réforme* was not unsympathetic in its coverage of the case of al-Wardani, such indices as "6 o'clock minus a minute"—standard in an "empirical," medical, legalistic, *procès-verbal*-like temporality, over and above the calendrical nod toward Dinshiwai—are impossible to have escaped the attention of the

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author of "27 June 1906, 2 P.M."[23] To us as readers of that poem, such indices activate the contrastive temporality of indigenous affect under colonial duress that the Egyptiote thematizes. It is therefore reductive to speculate that "it is not impossible that [al-Wardani's] fate appealed to the Cavafy of the letter 'T' [the homosexual Cavafy] quite as much as to the 'other' [the political] Cavafy," and that "the connection between sex and hanging is only too well known" (Liddell 1974: 92).

At the close of these reflections on Cavafy as an Egyptiote, let me touch on one of the issues of *La Réforme* that he preserved. On the second page of the issue of May 12, 1910, is an article about the resumption of al-Wardani's trial, including testimonies by physicians pertaining to the question whether Ghali's death had been caused by the wounds or by a surgery performed to save him. Meanwhile, the front page of the issue carries, across almost three columns, an article entitled "La commission du coton. Réponses de Mr. E. A. Benachi" (1910a). This is a detailed report by Benachi—the Alexandrian-Greek notable—replying to a questionnaire by "Prince Omar Pasha Toussoum," in the latter's capacity as a "president of one of the sub-committees established by the Khedival Society of Agriculture for researching the causes of the degeneration of Egyptian cotton." That Benachi's answer to the first of the questions notes, in passing, Greek discoverers and cultivators of a few of the cotton strains may be interpreted as par for the course in view of the history of Greek involvement in Egyptian cotton cultivation. Or, it might be read as carrying a more subtle—perhaps in the context of the crop's degeneration even implicitly self-justificatory—version of the discourse of Greek contributions to Egypt conjoined with the promotion of economic interests that *Egyptiotes Ellin/al-Yunani al-Mutamassir* would espouse. Cavafy, himself the son of a cotton and grain merchant, had "declined a post with the 'cotton kings,' Choremi and Benachi" (Liddell 1974: 55); and yet the post he finally obtained was not, perhaps could not, lie beyond the ambit of the colonial economy. Are we then to interpret Cavafy's "27 June 1906, 2 P.M.," as well as the note on al-Wardani, as underwritten by guilt over complicity?[24]

The question of political guilt on Cavafy's part would necessarily need to remain mere speculation. I detect an adjacent, perhaps overlap-

23. See, for example, the rebuttal in *La Réforme*'s editorial of May 19, 1910 (1910b), to the *Egyptian Gazette*'s criticisms of the mufti's ruling on the case.

24. I thank Peter Jeffreys for putting this question to me during the discussion that followed my seminar "C. P. Cavafy the Egyptiote"; I adapt my answers.

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ping, guilt, namely social guilt—which would cue other determinants of his positionality reinforcing his privilege—in some of his prose texts, whereby speculation about political guilt may not seem wide off the mark. Two of Cavafy's "Twenty-Seven Notes on Poetics and Ethics" come to mind. In note 10, written in 1905, a "very poor" young poet who witnesses Cavafy's comfortable household and complains of his own lot is consoled by the older man with the words "how dearly I pay for my small luxuries," the price being undivided dedication to art. More telling is note 20 of 1908—the same year in which the Dinshiwai poem was written—which opens with, "I am pleased and moved by the beauty of the masses, of poor young men. . . . It is the compensation, one imagines, for their deprivations" (2010: 132, 136). Such notes, while they may speak to the thematization of oppression and subalternity evidenced in "27 June 1906, 2 P.M.," only partially account for Cavafy's orientation as an Egyptiote. It is an orientation whose contours justify perhaps the shifting usages in this essay between the registers of "solidarity" and "empathy." While these shifts speak to Yiannis Papatheodorou's compelling argument in the present issue of *boundary 2* about interpretations that would retroactively inscribe "Cavafy in the class struggles of colonial Alexandria," they do so without ceding the solidaristic testimony of a poem such as "27 June."

The principal primary texts discussed in this article as articulating Cavafy's orientation as an Egyptiote come from the last three decades of his life. They are in different genres—poems (published and hidden), and prose (letter, essay, and interview)—and occupy different levels. At the level of production, the poems' distinct Egyptiote empathy with Egyptian indigeneity is expressed not only thematically but aesthetically—whether in Greek-Egyptian folkloric resonances ("27 June") or in a prescription of a transculturated poetics ("For Ammones"). Taken in toto, the two prose statements are prescriptive at the level of circulation and reception in two modes: first, a two-way intercultural mediatory role for Egyptiote intellectuals, something of whose work is to become known in Arabic even as they themselves would transmit something of Arabophone Egyptian literature to the Greek-speaking world; second, philological inquiry into the literary output of Egyptiotes to elicit the formative imprint of the country on their texts (the two poems discussed here would be cases in point). While they differ in scale, the Egyptiote articulations in the poems and prose texts are by no means incompatible. A long apprenticeship in reading and writing Alexandria, its literary and cultural heritage, its historical ties to Hellenism, was undoubtedly Cavafy's starting point, and the city would remain his *point*

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de repère; and yet the compass of his Egyptiote orientation was broader. Turning here to Egyptian subalternity and turning there to Hellenophone-Arabophone intercultural and intertextual mediation, those of Cavafy's texts I have mused on variously project, past his native city, a more embracing Egyptiote-Egyptian continuum.

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