This study explores the role played by freemasonry in Egypt during the period from Bonaparte’s expedition of 1798 to the demise of Idris Ragheb (Idrīs Rāghib) Pasha as Grand Master of the Grand Orient National d’Égypte (GONE) in 1922, the year when the Egyptian masonic movement fell into disrepute and chaos. Generally, the aim of this paper is to show how freemasonry served as one of the links between the Orient and the West. Hence, this study not only traces the impact of Western ideology on the rising Egyptian nationalist élite at the end of the nineteenth century—how ‘the spread of freemasonry was indeed a facet of European influence’—and the ensuing establishment of the local political parties, but also shows how the masonic lodges as a ‘common meeting-ground’ were a vehicle for the solidarity and cohesion of the Egyptian establishment and aristocracy.

Because most of the critical literature on this topic is scarce, and the archival documentation no longer extant owing to President Nasser’s violent abolition of freemasonry in 1961, I shall first introduce the reader to the essential historical background to Egyptian masonry from its beginnings, and then proceed to an analysis of the modern Egyptian masonic movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—specifically, the influence of Western masonic ideologies on the thinking and the mentality of Egypt’s nascent élite and aristocracy, of which I will provide a masonic membership profile.

Defining freemasonry has troubled many scholars; to define it here, however, is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, without an exhaustive exploration of its many definitional nuances I shall analyse Egyptian freemasonry from a sociological perspective and adopt the following topology of the movement: the historical background and structural organization of the masonic movement; the ideology of the movement; and the membership of the local lodges.

I have adopted the following artificial division to characterize the history of freemasonry: the first, or the ancient (‘operative’, or artisanal) freemasonry, which dates from the dawn of history; and the second, or modern (‘speculative’, or esoteric) freemasonry, which first saw light in England at the end of the seventeenth century.
(a) The Old Operative Freemasonry

Historians generally refer to freemasonry as ‘a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols’. But freemasonry involves also a fraternity of members bound by ties of solidarity and founded on a belief in a Supreme Being, referred to as the ‘Grand Architect of the Universe’, and of learning lessons from the past through its most profound source—symbolism.³

Operative freemasonry began as a guild system incorporating builders engaged in the construction of buildings, cathedrals, and various monuments. The masonic guilds travelled from Egypt and the Holy Land to Europe. Not belonging to any country in particular, they were thus called ‘free’ masons.⁴ These medieval guilds retained the rituals and oath of secrecy that the early masonic societies performed in the nineteenth century. Charles Dickens satirized many of them in Barnaby Rudge:

The novice [agreed] to take the vow [to join the secret society] which was administered with many circumstances, among which the lightening up of two skulls with a candle-end inside of each, . . . not to mention a variety of exercises with the blunderbuss and sabre, and some dismal groaning by the unseen ‘prentices without. All these dark and direful ceremonies being at length completed . . . the doors of communication of the three cellars thrown freely open . . . [they] resigned themselves to merriment.⁵

(b) Modern Speculative Freemasonry

By the end of the seventeenth century lack of demand led to a decrease in the number of operative masons, and, as a result, the remaining masons sought to enlarge the membership of their lodges by admitting non-builders. Men of different professions were invited to join ‘provided they were regularly approved and initiated in the fraternity’ until eventually so few members were actual builder-masons that the actual building of edifices was discontinued.⁶ As early as the 1640s members of the nobility, merchants, and the intellectual establishment joined the lodges. Elias Ashmole, for example, was initiated in the year 1641 into the oldest non-operative lodge in Warrington (Lancashire), England.⁷ Albert Lantoine writes that the key event which saw the birth of modern speculative freemasonry was the dissolution of the Lodge of St Paul in 1703, but other historians, like Robert Gould, trace its birth to as early as 1619.⁸ The year generally agreed on as marking the official birth of modern freemasonry, however, is 1717, when four London lodges fused together and thereby centralized masonic power in one mother lodge, the Grand Lodge. In this way, the structure of the old masonic order of the guilds was completely altered.

This change produced unexpected results. Rebold describes how this hiatus with the past gave a tremendous impetus to the movement and to freemasonry’s new state of mind. ‘If Freemasonry ceased to build temples, if it has ceased by the aid of architectural constructions to raise all hearts towards the deity, all eyes and all hopes to heaven, it has, nonetheless, continued the work of moral and spiritual edification’.⁹ Thus, the concept of freemasonry has changed through the centuries, from that of an art whose devotees were engaged in the construction of material edifices to that of a science in which
masons were engaged in the erection of a spiritual temple by means of symbolic instruction, whereby the ‘trade secrets of the operative masons became the esoteric secrets of the speculative masons’. With the era of empire-building reaching an unprecedented crescendo—the prépondérance anglaise of the British Empire and the French mission civilisatrice—modern freemasonry travelled well beyond, to the Americas, the Indian sub-continent, Australia, and to Africa. It reached Egypt in 1798, with the arrival of the French forces in Alexandria under Bonaparte. The latter, though never initiated as a freemason, was the guardian of this institution and its supreme protector.

When Bonaparte landed in Alexandria in 1798, he declared to the local inhabitants that the French Republic was based on liberty and equality. In the declaration of the French general there were many concepts that were new to his Egyptian audience—namely, republic, liberty, and equality. But as little as they knew about those three concepts, the Egyptians were attracted to them for natural reasons considering the prevalent circumstances of the time, when Egypt was still a province of the Ottoman Empire and was ruled by the foreign Mamlukes.

Indeed, the first lodge to be established on Egyptian soil was founded by the French General Kléber in 1799: it was dubbed ‘Ihs’ and adopted the slogan of the French Revolution Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité as its motto. The lodge did not appeal to many Egyptians. At the time of its inception those who joined were either members of Bonaparte’s close entourage, soldiers in the French army, those Egyptians who were sympathetic to the French, or even those who wanted to show their zealous allegiance to the French army in return for its tolerance and protection. The Isis lodge did not last long, however, and was dissolved three years later after the departure of the French army from Egypt in 1801. Although the lodge was dissolved, the French had left behind something more important: the powerful ideology contained in their motto. Though dormant, for a few decades, this motto re-emerged at mid-century, when Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha sent a group of Egyptians on scholarships to Europe in order to learn the various sciences, languages, and letters, and came back to teach them to their compatriots at home. Among the most famous of these were Rifâ’â al-Tahtawi (Rifâ’â al-Ṭaḥṭāwî), and Salim Butrus (Salim Butrus). During their stay in the European capitals, these scholars were impressed by the multitude of private associations which had been established for different purposes. Those various associations included occupational guilds, museums, masonic lodges, and various other associations founded ostensibly ‘to achieve ends which individuals alone could never accomplish’. What impressed these scholars most was that these associations were established on individuals’ private initiatives to satisfy those ends and were completely free from government control. Some of these associations and secret groupings ‘were political in character;’ these were mainly imbued with revolutionary ideals, like those of Mazzini at the middle of the nineteenth century. The Egyptian scholars thus concluded that these associations were among the main catalysts of the success and development of the European cultures and that ‘if a similar pattern were to be followed in the Arab world, it
would permit the Arabs to achieve similar enviable results'.

On returning to Egypt, these scholars influenced many members of both the local aristocracy and the intelligentsia.

As early as 1845 the lodge of the 'Pyramides' was founded in Cairo and was directly under the patronage of the Grand Orient of France. For reasons that will become apparent later in this study, the lodge became en vogue, and members of the high society of the time frequented it. This lodge played a key role in spreading masonic teachings in Egypt as it was the first lodge to be established in the open with the public knowledge of the local authorities. Among its most notable members were the prince 'Abd al-Halim ('Abd al-Halîm) Pasha, and Amir 'Abd al-Qadir ('Abd al-Qâdir) of Algeria. From then on, and especially during the reign of the Khedive Isma'il (1863–79), Egypt witnessed a tremendous growth of masonic lodges, and the number of members grew accordingly. These lodges included members of not only the intelligentsia, the aristocracy, and the political and economic élite, but also the clergy (Muslim and Christian), and were hence regarded as eminently respectable.

In 1856 the Grand Orient de France sent a representative to Egypt, the Marquis Joseph de Beauregard, to establish a regional Grand Lodge in Alexandria. Similarly, in 1867 the United Grand Lodge of England established a branch in Cairo, calling it the District Grand Lodge of Egypt and the Sudan, and appointed a district Grand Master. In 1882 British forces landed in Egypt at a time of political turmoil, of great economic indebtedness, and of social instability. Indeed, the British Empire's omnipresence throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas fostered the opening of new lodges wherever British troops were stationed. At this time, more clearly than ever before, the Egyptian masonic movement underwent a clash between two ideologies, the French and the British. In the context of this Manichean clash I shall analyse the ideology of the Egyptian masonic movement.

iii

Structural Organization of Egyptian Freemasonry

For a discussion of the structural organization of Egyptian freemasonry, I shall use the topology of the sociologist William Cameron: visibility, formality, type(s) of meeting, and leadership determination.

Visibility

Visibility describes 'the extent to which a movement's composition and activities are open to the public inspection or hidden from the general view'. Egyptian freemasonry falls in the middle of a spectrum ranging from one extreme, high visibility, to the other extreme, clandestinity. Masonic lodges were not hidden from the public eye, and a large number of notables, such as Idris Ragheb (see below p.149) founded masonic lodges in their provinces or fiefs. Members were recruited by word of mouth. What was kept secret were the rituals and the other arcana performed and observed inside the lodges. Masonry in Egypt was basically another form of, for example, a Rotary Club,
whose members meet for discussions. It differed from such clubs, however, in its aim to preserve its mythical aspects from the non-members, and this explains its appeal and exclusiveness within the society at large. The masonic movement in Egypt also published newspapers to propagate the movement’s activities. Among the most renowned papers were the Italian lodges’ L’Egitto Massonico, published in 1869; La Ragione, in 1871; and the Arabic al-Latā‘īf, in 1875.24

Formality
From an organizational standpoint, freemasonry in Egypt was a formal movement, and this formality made it appealing to Egyptian society and especially to the political classes of the time (see subsequent discussion). Under the leadership of Idris Ragheb Pasha, the Grand Orient National d’Égypte witnessed the promulgation of its first written constitution in 1901. GONE had a legal-rational outlook à la Max Weber. A considerable division of labour was institutionalized, and each active member had a title and a set of roles and responsibilities he had to perform—from the orator to the secretary, from the expert to the treasurer, and from the librarian to the Grand Master. All members were required to know and respect the constitution, which regulated their behaviour inside the lodges and activities in general. The first article of the constitution defines freemasonry as an ‘institution, essentiellement philanthropique, philosophique et progressive, [qui] a pour objet la recherche de la vérité . . . Elle reçoit indistinctivement ses membres de quelques religions ils soient’.25

Type of Meeting
The organizational structure of Egyptian freemasonry was like the institution of a modern democratic government: a legislature comprised elected members from the different lodges throughout the country; an executive that included thirty-three members elected from the grand officers and dignitaries, chosen by the general assembly; a judicial board to handle legal matters. The meetings of GONE were largely modelled on the meetings of a parliament.26

Leadership
Leadership is perhaps the most tactile aspect in the anatomy of a social movement.27 The Grand Master of GONE was what Max Weber called a ‘bureaucratic leader’: he was elected by the members at large and had as his first duty the responsibility of ensuring the observation of the constitution.28 The office was usually held by a member of the royal family—in principle, the heir to the throne—or a member of the aristocracy. In the period discussed here the three most important figures in the Egyptian masonic movement were Prince ʿAbd al-Halim, Salvatore Avventore Zola, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī), and Idris Ragheb.

Prince ʿAbd al-Halim (1867–68)
The youngest son of Muhammad ʿAli, ʿAbd al-Halim, was in 1867 elected Grand Master of the French-influenced masonic Order of the Grand Orient of
Egypt and of the District Grand Lodge of Egypt. He originally joined the movement around 1845 on returning from his education at Saint-Cyr in France. He was then the legal heir of his father as ruler of Egypt. Be that as it may, Muhammad 'Ali's grandson Isma'il managed to persuade the Ottoman Sultan to change—by a decree issued on 8 June 1867—the law of succession to the vice-royalty so that he and his direct descendants would become rulers, or Khedives, of Egypt. This, of course, crushed 'Abd al-Halim's hopes of ever becoming Khedive himself. He therefore decided to use the masonic lodges' organization to lead a political campaign against his young nephew Isma'il in order to recover the throne. Historians often claim that 'Abd al-Halim went so far as to try to assassinate Isma'il, which may explain why the latter finally banished him from Egypt in 1868.

Salvatore Avventore Zola (1873–?)
Zola was an Italian who had been educated under the Salesians at the Don Bosco School in Turin. He arrived at Alexandria in the middle of the nineteenth century, where he was first initiated at the Pyramids lodge. He then became Master of this lodge shortly afterwards. In the early 1870s he was introduced to Khedive Isma'il by the French Consul in Cairo. With the banishment of 'Abd al-Halim, Khedive Isma'il appointed Zola to the newly-founded National Grand Orient of Egypt in September 1872. Upon assuming his new post, Salvatore Zola issued a decree on 21 August 1873 making GONE follow the masonic rite of Memphis, notwithstanding that Egyptian freemasonry had hitherto followed the Ancient Scottish Rite of Free and Accepted Masonry. This in turn gave rise to unrest within the masonic lodges under the patronage of GONE. On 1 August 1875 Salvatore Zola signed a treaty with the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, headed then by the mason Domenico Sciarrone. By 1875 Zola had succeeded in uniting the Memphis and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rites within the masonic ideology of GONE. He also succeeded in making GONE the official federal diet of all Egyptian lodges.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1878–79)
The third major figure to make a mark on the leadership of the masonic movement was al-Afghani, who arrived in Egypt in 1871. His self-proclaimed life mission was to combat what he perceived as the threat of European imperialism. He was convinced that the power of the Europeans 'was a function of science and technology, [and] methods of organization'. To achieve his aims, al-Afghani used a 'European-structured' organization. He first joined an Italian masonic lodge in Cairo, but was then attracted to the more famous British-influenced lodge Kawkab al-Sharq ('The Star of the East'; lodge no.1355) by the British Vice-Consul, Raphael Borg, and finally switched lodges in May 1875. He rapidly succeeded in becoming its chairman in 1878. At the time, this lodge was under the patronage of the United Grand Lodge of England, as it had been since its foundation in 1871; but because of al-Afghani's political activities and efforts towards Islamic reform, he thought it more appropriate to shift this lodge to French patronage, which was more
conducive to political discussion and political activity with his followers in the masonic movement, whom he addressed as *Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ wa-khullān al-wafā‘* (‘Sincere brethren and faithful companions’). Al-Afghani was active in political agitation ‘trying to awaken, reform, and strengthen the Muslims by any means and within the shortest time possible’. When al-Afghani was warned that the lodge was not a political platform, he is reported to have answered: ‘I have seen a lot of odd things in this country [Egypt], but I would never have thought that cowardice would infiltrate the ranks of masonry to such an extent’. For al-Afghani, freemasonry was a means of shattering ‘the towering edifices of injustice, tyranny, and oppression’ in Egypt. Free-masonry was the basis of the political group he later founded, *al-Hizb al-Waṭanī al-Hurr* (‘The Free National Party’) ‘which played a great part in removing Ismail Pasha from the throne and bringing Tawfiq Pasha as the Khedive’.

*Idris Ragheb Pasha (1889–1922)*

Idris Ragheb succeeded the Khedive Muhammad Tewfik (Muhammad Tawfiq) as Grand Master of GONE in 1889. Tewfik had held this post since his accession to the khedival throne in 1879, but had resigned a decade later due to ‘his concerns over matters of the state’. On 7 January 1892, when Muhammad Tewfik died, the National Grand Lodge of Egypt issued a special communique: ‘L’Ange de la mort a frappé à la porte de nos Temples, notre bien-aimé et très vénérable frère S. A. MEHEMED THEWFIK I a été appelé à la Grande Loge Céleste’. And it also imposed on all lodge members a mourning period of seven months.

Idris Ragheb, a member of the rich local establishment and the grandfather of the future Prime Minister Muhammad Mahmud (Muḥammad Mahmūd) Pasha, became governor of the province of Qalioubeyya (al-Qalyūbiyya) in May 1895. While governor, he had founded a lodge in this province. Many public figures of the time could thus have been involved in the establishment and founding of masonic lodges throughout the country, especially before the establishment of the centralized GONE in 1876.

Idris Ragheb retained the post of Grand Master for over thirty years and is considered the real propagator of freemasonry in Egyptian society. Under his leadership, masonry in Egypt both witnessed the promulgation of its first constitution in 1902 and gained tremendously in popularity and respectability vis-à-vis Egyptian society at large.

Idris Ragheb is rumoured to have been one of the founders of the crypto-fascist party *Miṣr al-fatāt* (‘Young Egypt’) —probably an adaptation of the name of a more famous patriotic society ‘Young Italy’. Little is known of the founding of this political group, but it seems not unreasonable to assume that most of the protagonists were lodge members along with Idris, among the most prominent of whom was the editor of the ‘party’s’ mouthpiece, the periodical *Miṣr al-fatāt*, James Sanu (Ya’qūb Ṣannū), who published it under the pen-name of Abu Naddara (Abū Naḍḍāra). Thus, because of their structured organization, masonic lodges could have been used often as a platform for political gatherings or party formation.

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On 28 September 1922 general elections were held at the Grand Lodge of Egypt. During the general session a bill was proposed by some masons to the effect that an explicit clause be included in the constitution which would specifically define the qualities that a Grand Master should have to be eligible for the post. This bill was aimed at the rule of Idris Ragheb, who had been, according to the masons concerned, too long in power. Refusing to accept this bill, or even discuss the issue, Idris Ragheb resigned along with his deputy and seventeen other masons.47 On the following 8 October Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, the Prince Regent, was elected Grand Master. He ruled GONE until his retirement in 1927. This year, Mahmoud Fahmy Kutry (Mahmūd Fahmī Qūṭī) Pasha was elected Grand Master to succeed to Prince Muhammad 'Ali.48

iv

The Ideology of the Egyptian Movement

For any given social or political movement an immanent ideology is a pre-requisite because it gives such a movement a meaning, a certain coherence among its members, and some legitimacy.49 The ideology of a secret social movement, however, is difficult to discern and is therefore open to widely differing views depending on the interpreters’ opinion of the movement.

Ideology played a major role in fostering the appeal of freemasonry to Egyptians adhering to different trends of thought. The Egyptian masonic movement of the late nineteenth century was influenced by two major trends of thought: the French revolutionary tradition of the Enlightenment and the British tradition of the public spirit of cooperation. The ideologies of the various Egyptian masonic lodges were centralized into one constitution, that of GONE, when most of the lodges in Egypt assembled into a federal diet in May 1876;50 but actually these two major trends of thought prevailed over the various different ideologies, as previously noted. In this part of my paper I now examine how the French and the British trends of thought competed with one another in the formulation of the thinking of Egyptian freemasons.

The French Trend

The French trend in Egyptian freemasonry is represented by the establishment of the Grand Orient National d’Égypte—as opposed to the British-established Grande Loge Nationale d’Égypte—by Idris Ragheb in 1897, when he wrote to the Grand Orient de France on 15 April 1897 as follows:

La Grande Loge National d’Égypte suit le rite des Maçons Libres Anciens et Acceptés (Le Rite Anglais) qui est un peu clérical . . . j’ai cru dans l’interêt de notre Institution d’introduire et d’étendre Le Rite Français [my emphasis] dans la vallée du Nil, étant plus philosophique et libéral en principe et point du tout sacerdotal dans ses cérémonies et serait plus agréé: par ces motifs je viens de fonder et constituer un Grand Orient pour les hauts degrés travaillant du 4e grade et sous le titre distinctif du ‘Grand Orient National d’Égypte’ en base du dit Rite Français.51

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The French Rite—or the French-influenced form of freemasonry, one of the three principal rites or traditions of freemasonry (along with the Scottish and Free and Accepted Masons rites)—represents a more liberal, philosophical and anti-clerical tradition of thought founded in France in 1786. It draws most of its ideas from the French Enlightenment, whose main protagonists were the *Encyclopédistes*. These philosophers, led mainly by Mirabeau, wanted to emulate the Society of Jesus and establish ‘intimate association’ in order to spread the Enlightenment ideas and to ‘serve freedom’; a century later, in fact, they came to be known as *Les Jésuites Rouges* (‘The Red Jesuits’).

This trend of thought exerted an important influence on those Egyptian liberal intellectuals and political leaders who had either studied in France or in the École de Droit in Cairo in the late nineteenth century, when Egypt had been in a state of political fermentation over the new British occupation of 1882. Those who fought in the revolution of 1919, following Sa‘d Zaghlul (Sa‘d Zaghlul; Fr. Saad Zaghloul)—a freemason himself—fought in support of these secular, liberal, and nationalist ideas. Their eventual victory was crowned by the promulgation of Egypt’s first constitution in 1923.52

Political inquiry and rebellion thus became the hallmarks of French, speculative freemasonry, together with the anti-British occupation campaign which the French championed both in and outside Egypt. Such members as Mustafa Kamil (Muṣṭafā Kamīl; Fr. Moustapha Kamel) and, later, Sa‘d Zaghlul, influenced by the principles of the earlier French revolutionaries of 1789 (chiefly Diderot, Voltaire, and Montesquieu), were the backbone of this French-influenced group of Egyptian freemasons. They were impressed, as the Europeans had been a century earlier, by this freemasonry, which ‘embodied elements of that Enlightenment attitude which was about to establish itself as an outstanding cultural fact of the age’.53 The revolutionaries of 1789, most of whom had been freemasons, had been the ones to formulate the famous revolutionary slogan ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ and propagated it through the *Encyclopédie*. For them liberty came to mean both individual and collective freedom of speech, opinion, expression, and association. This liberal interpretation formed a clear break with the more traditional Jansenist or even existentialist meanings of freedom and liberty. Equality, however, was for them the struggle against social privilege and prejudice, as opposed to a greater demand for more economic equality. Lastly, fraternity represented the kind of solidarity à la Malraux needed to find a meaning, a human meaning, to life. The French freemasons, following the humanist tradition of thought, sought to improve their world through human solidarity and fraternity.

This aspect of French thought seemed appropriate to the Egyptian nationalists who were fighting the British occupation.54 They had awakened the latent motto left behind by Bonaparte and found in the masonic lodges an expression of nationalism as the French masons had found earlier an ‘expression of a new humanitarianism and rationalism’.55 But, perhaps more importantly, they found in the masonic lodges an organized body which enabled these nationalists to crystallize into proper political parties, notably *al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī* (‘The National Party’).
The French masonic trend is also known for its anti-clericalism. In Egypt this is most obvious from the correspondence of the masons to the Grand Orient de France, the mother lodge in the late nineteenth century. In one of his yearly reports to the Grand Orient de France, Louis Deleschamps, Master of the lodge Le Nil, condemned the rising influence of the Jesuits and their schools in Egypt. He accused them of infiltrating all strata of society, of buying land at very low prices through bribery, and of building religious schools throughout the country. In a letter dated 10 January 1897 he writes: ‘il est donc temps de lutter sérieusement contre les agissements du parti jésuite en Egypte, et je crois que nous y arriverions à un premier résultat en obtenant du gouvernement français ... la fondation d’une école laïque sous la dépendance du Ministère de l’Instruction Publique à Paris’.  

In the middle of the nineteenth century a number of Christian missionaries had landed in Egypt. Most prominent of all had been the Jesuit contingent, which had founded schools all over the country and taught the humanities, thus shaping the outlook of their students, who were among the established élite. This angered the freemasons, who accused them of religiously indoctrinating the people and of being too permissive towards the weaknesses of the local population and hence encouraged the establishment of more secular lycées.

Consequently, Egyptians and the French-influenced freemasons, in particular, regarded the missionaries as mere vehicles of imperialism and contended that ‘the forces of Christianity were synonymous with the forces of imperialism’ and hence fought for a more secularized system of education.

The English Trend

The English masons have always accused their French counterparts of having deviated from the tradition and landmarks of speculative freemasonry: ‘The French Fraternity never did possess a distinct idea of the true purposes of the Craft, or of its history and origin, [and] gradually effaced every landmark till it arrived at its present pitiful condition’. The British masons thus resented the Grand Orient de France’s preaching of secularism and its belief that the individual’s way of thinking should be above any religion, creed or dogma.

The English masonic tradition is linked to the trends of religious and political thought that existed in eighteenth-century England. Freemasonry flourished in England at a time when the principles of the revolution of 1688 prevailed: ‘England, the country of Newton and Locke, [is] also a citadel of religious toleration [and] after a half-century of turmoil, [Englishmen] learnt to live in harmony ... without the devices of despotism ... [This] admiration for England [had] a new word to describe it: anglomania’. This anglomania, which prevailed over the British-influenced masonic movement throughout the Empire, aimed at social cooperation and solidarity, equality, and ideological latitudinarianism among its members. The British ideology was thus more conservative than its French counterpart, and Egyptian freemasonry following the British rite was regarded by its members as an institution for mutual aid and benevolence, not without religious overtones, as opposed to the more revolutionary ideals of French masonry.
At the end of the eighteenth century, during the British occupation, there was a marked intensification of the links integrating Egypt as a supplier of agricultural raw materials for the world economy. From this new cash-crop export-oriented economy emerged an indigenous merchant class, which has never stopped growing ever since. In the nineteenth century this class was involved in the cotton trade, and the Egyptian market was more than ever tied to the world spot-market of primary commodities. By the twentieth century this commercial class had attained a status of wealth and prosperity and gradually formed a cohesive elite. Many would argue that Egypt never witnessed the rise of a proper aristocracy, i.e. similar to the French or the British varieties; but the elite group that arose in the nineteenth century formed ‘an aristocracy, a continuous elite, a generation fighting to keep up their position in society’.63

By the end of the 1860s there was a clear indication that the crescendo of cotton prosperity had reached its first halt because of the lower cotton prices prompted by the end of the American Civil War.64 Fearing the fluctuations of the cotton market and the depression of other world commodity prices on which they were speculating, the new class of merchants and landowners joined the masonic lodges in increasing numbers. If ever a catastrophe should happen, they reasoned—as it did in the 1920s, when the cotton market collapsed—they would face it together. Each member would come to the rescue of the other and hence attenuate the tremendous risks borne by all. English-influenced lodges thus became a kind of an unofficial guild for cotton merchants ‘if only because it require[d] mutual aid . . . among its members’.65

Some landowning families, mainly in Upper Egypt, had been educated in Britain or in British-run schools, where they had learnt that the spirit of social co-operation and solidarity should be the *fons et origo* of education. Members of these families later joined the British-influenced masonic lodges and used their structured framework as a vehicle for their charity and benevolent works. These works included the building of schools, hospitals, and orphanages. On the other hand, those men who joined the masonic lodges but were not particularly well-off—in relation to other members, given the high membership fee—could enjoy the protection and, at times, the help, of the rich landowners during harsh times when the cotton market collapsed or the agricultural crops failed and would not sell.

This fact was also coupled with the rising influence of the British in Egypt at this time. Under Khedive Isma’il and under La Caisse de la Dette Publique (the dual Franco-British control of Egyptian finances in the 1870s), the British influence was incontestably rising as opposed to that of its French rival counterpart. Ahmad Shafiq (Ahmad Shafiq; Fr. Ahmed Chafik) Pasha, then chief minister, writes the following in his memoirs: ‘La crise financière sous Ismail, nous montre les deux influences marchand de pair, mais dans certaines occasions nous pouvons constater l’empressement des Anglais à se mettre en avant’.66 The British encouraged the formation of an Egyptian propertied class in the provinces. This class of notables (*al-*ā’yān) benefited the most from the stability which the economy enjoyed during Cromer’s time. To counterbalance the rival French influence Lord Cromer sought to create a new party,
the People’s, or Umma, Party for this new more moderate élite. The latter welcomed the new opportunity and used the party’s mouthpiece, al-Jarida, to undermine the power of the old establishment. There was a clear shift of local political power ‘from the older Turco-Egyptian aristocracy, and religious leaders to the new group of professionals, rich cultivators and administrators ... the class of A’yân.67

These English-influenced lodges, however, continued to attract the aristocracy and the upper social spheres of Egyptian society. They began to consider the various lodges essentially as constituting a social club; and such lodges as the Gezira Sporting Club soon became a meeting-ground for the country’s élite.

v

Membership of the Local Lodges

Freemasonry, conceived as a secret science, obviously has many characteristics of a secret society, such as oaths, secret passwords, rituals, and a wide range of other arcana. While this secrecy tends to arouse the curiosity of the outsider called ‘the profane’ by the members, its rigorously ritualistic method of recruitment is likely to deter those who are merely idly inquisitive. Yet masons are bound by oath neither to reveal their membership to outsiders nor to try to persuade anyone to become a mason.68

As indicated previously, in nineteenth-century Egypt there occurred a remarkable increase in the number of masonic lodges, and the number of members mushroomed accordingly: in 1901, there were seventy lodges belonging to GONE alone, which were spread geographically from Assiout in upper Egypt to Alexandria in the north. Members were usually drawn from the aristocracy, the intelligentsia, the commercial and financial establishment, and the large foreign communities existing in Egypt at the time, i.e. the Italian, French, British, Greek, and Armenian.

It is difficult to study the membership of freemasonry in general, and in Egypt in particular, because, as a rule, members’ names are kept secret. However, both archival sources and the fact that an extravagant fee was levied annually, indicate that the lodges became common meeting-grounds for most of the upper-middle-class establishment. During his Mastership of the Grand Orient, Idris Ragheb drew up an annual list of the elected dignitaries of the National Grand Lodge of Egypt, which was considered to be the federal diet of all lodges existing in Egypt and an extension of the Grand Orient National d’Égypte. The author has located these lists in the archives of the Grand Orient de France (which date back to the nineteenth century) and through them the membership profile of the masonic lodges will be analysed.

Most Egyptian members came, as already mentioned, from the upper-middle stratum of society. For the year 1897,69 for example, from among the rich landowners there were Amin Fikri (Amīn Fikrī; Fr. Amin Fikry) Pasha; George Khayyat (Jurj Khayyāt; Fr. Georges Khayat) Bey; ‘Ali Sha’rāwi (‘Alī Sha‘rāwī; Fr. Ali Chaaraoui) Bey; Muhammad Ismail Abaza (Muhammad Ismā‘īl Abāza; Fr. Mohammed Ismail Abaza) Pasha—later adviser to Khedive
'Abbās II. Then we find Muhammad Ratib (Muhammad Rātib; Fr. Mohammed Rateb), Dr Muhammad Farid (Muhammad Farid; Fr. Mohammed Farid) Bey—the Egyptian National Party leader—and Yusuf al-Shidyaq (Yūsuf al-Shidyāq; Fr. Youssef Chidiac) Bey, lawyer, from the professional classes, and, next, 'Abd al-Salam al-Muwaylihi ('Abd al-Salām al-Muwaylihi; Fr. Abdel Salam El-Mouelihī)—later deputy in the Egyptian Chamber—and Sharīf (Sharīf; Fr. Chérif) Pasha, both from the political classes. Different religions were also represented by men such as the following: Shahin Maqariyus (see n.24) Bey, Ghubriyal Nasif (Ghubriyāl Nāṣif; Fr. Gobrial Nassif) Bey, and Shakir Khuri (Shākir al-Khūrī; Fr. Chaker Khouri) Bey, who were Christian notables; Shaykh Hasan Yusuf (Ḥasan Yūsuf; Fr. Hassan Youssef), proprietor of al-Mu'ayyad, one of the main organs of the National Party, and Mahmud Rustam (Fr. Mahmoud Rostom) Bey, who were Muslims; Maurice Goldenberg and James Sanu', who were Jews. Foreigners, either diplomats or merchants on or in business in Egypt, were also members of GONE. Thus we find, for example, Lord Kitchener, British High Commissioner and First Inspector of GONE; General John Smith; Raphael Borg Pasha, British Consul and honorary Grand Master; H. Kruickshank Pasha, textiles businessman and also a First Inspector.

Two years later, in 1899, little had changed, except that several of the members who, in 1897, had been labelled 'effective members' had been promoted to 'grand officers'. Also, we find more names indicating that more men from different religions, professional backgrounds and nationalities were beginning to join the lodges: Surscek (Sarsük); Sayyid Ahmad Bey, Shaykh al-Azhari (Fr. Cheikh El-Azhary), Padovani, Bishop Macarius, and so on.

By the year 1901, however, the lists include even more prominent names, e.g. Husayn Fakhri (Ḥusayn Fāhkṛī; Fr. Hussein Fakhrī) Pasha, Minister of Public Works—in the office of honorary Grand Master; 'Adlī Yakan (otherwise, Adley Yeghen) Pasha, Prime Minister and Governor of Sharqiyya (Fr. Charkieh) Province—in the office of Grand Garde des Sceaux; Butrus Ghali (Buṭrus Ghālī; Fr. Boutrous Ghaly) Pasha, Prime Minister; Ibrahim Najib (Ibrāhīm Najīb; Fr. Ibrahim Neguib) Pasha, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of the Interior—in the office of Grand Premier Surveillant; Isma'il Sabri (Isma'īl Ṣabrī; Fr. Sabry), Under Secretary, Ministry of Justice—in the office of Premier Grand Diacre; Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, mufti of al-Azhar. By 1913 still more names of prominent men appear, such as those of Fahmi Wisa (Fahmi Wīṣā; otherwise, Wissa) Pasha, a rich landowner—in the office of Garde de Sceaux; Yusuf Wahba (Yūsuf Wahba) Pasha, Prime Minister; Sa'd Zaghlu Pasha, leader of the 1919 Revolution and founder of the Wafd Party; Muhammad Farid Pasha, the Egyptian nationalist leader (see above). Such were the men among the grand dignitaries of the order and members of the different lodges under the aegis of the Grand Orient National d'Égypte.

Why did the masonic lodges have such an appeal among the Egyptian upper-classes? There are several reasons, the most important being the following:

(1) The Masonic lodges were regarded as yet another social club—but with the added and tremendously appealing dimension of secrecy.
(2) In nineteenth-century Egypt the mass media were still in their infancy. The masonic lodges provided their members with a meeting-ground and an unofficial political platform where politicians from opposing ends of the political spectrum could exchange their ideas and views of the current economic and political situation prevailing in the country: ‘... la loge maçonnique favorisait l’échange d’idées entre les hommes qui étaient au courant des dessous politiques et des secrets du gouvernement, et créait entre eux un lien de solidarité’.\(^{73}\) Interestingly, one of the words from which ‘mason’ is alleged to derive—is a Latin term denoting a club where gentlemen associated.\(^{74}\)

(3) Politicians were attracted by ‘the ready-made structure’\(^ {75}\) of the masonic lodges and, with their political career in mind, saw in them a means to the end of political organization. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, for instance, used his lodge as a political instrument in order to further his political teachings: ‘Afghani came to the fore as a political figure, by trying to make an Egyptian Freemasonic lodge a vehicle for political intrigue and change, and by his influence as a popular orator’.\(^ {76}\)

(4) Because the lodges were filled with foreigners, the Egyptian members sought to join these lodges in order to gain the favour and protection of such foreigners.\(^ {77}\) In fact, just as during the regime of the Capitulations members of the Egyptian aristocracy became consul honoraires of different foreign countries so as to enjoy foreign protection (or diplomatic immunity), so also for the same reason they sought representation of foreign lodges: Idris Ragheb represented the Grand Orient of Greece, Italy, Mexico, and New Zealand; Michael Saleh (Ṣāliḥ) Bey represented the Grand Orient of Belgium, Portugal, and Hungary; Ahmed Zaki (Ahmad Zakī) Bey represented the Grand Orient of Albania; and Mohammed Farid Pasha was a delegate of the Constantinople Grand Orient in Tantah (Ṭanṭā).\(^ {78}\) Thus members of the intelligentsia made these lodges their common meeting-ground, where they could talk freely and, being under foreign protection, enjoy immunity from the local authorities.\(^ {79}\) Some of the members, in order to be inducted into freemasonry, were told that in joining the masonic lodges they were actually joining a British or a French institution, thus enjoying complete foreign protection.

(5) Egyptians joined the lodges as a demonstration of their allegiance in exchange for the political and financial patronage of the Khedive or the King, as he was usually the honorary—or at times the actual—Grand Master.

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\textit{Conclusion}

The French expedition of 1798 came at a time when Egypt was enjoying a period of relative isolation from the West; Bonaparte’s arrival, however, inaugurated a period of ‘bittersweet interaction’\(^ {80}\) between Egypt and the Western world. As Egypt’s links with the outside world were intensified, it became more exposed to the cultural and political developments of the West. Western cultural and political influences began to penetrate and mould the intellectual orientation of a large portion of the newly emerging social forces.
and educated élites. This study has attempted to show how the institution of freemasonry played a role in the evolution of Egyptian society in general and the Egyptian élite in particular during the nineteenth century and the degree to which it adopted Western ideology.

Having discussed the masonic movement in Egypt and shown how it alternated between two trends of thought, I now turn to the question of the role played by freemasonry in Egypt during this period. Had freemasonry a political role concealing the inner workings of political organizations such as the Young Egypt association? Or was it merely a social club where those politicians met once in a while or on a regular basis to keep up with the news circulating in the corridors of power?

The growing educated élite class was ascending the political hierarchy and beginning to occupy high positions in the administration. They believed that they represented the real interests of their nation and thus looked for a greater amount of participation in politics. Even while they were fighting each other in the political arena—a fight that usually took the form of landowners against nationalists, pashas against ulema—most of them were members of the masonic lodges. The paradox lies in the fact that their political battles were essentially an elaborate game of musical chairs whose rules the politicians made up as they went along and whose spoils they hoarded for themselves, letting no one else interfere. The parties alternated in holding power in the country, but in the end most of their members were freemasons and all drawn 'from the same cloth', as the Egyptian saying goes. Membership of a masonic lodge thus strengthened class ties among the aristocracy in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The masonic lodges were a means for the élite to seclude themselves politically, financially, and socially—thus indicating that the institution was more of a political freemasonry and a social lodge than one devoted to the spiritual and esoteric masonry ideals of symbolic instruction. Concerning the role of masonic ideology, not only did it play a role in shaping the ideology of the nascent political and economic élite of the country; more importantly, it heralded a division within the élite class itself. Most of the members of the French-influenced lodges were more inclined to be liberal-secular and politically active as opposed to the more religious-conservative and wealthy cotton merchants and the propertied class, which tended to join the British-influenced lodges. The archival lists of members points to this difference, where names such as Sa’d Zaghlu, Mustafa Kamil, Butrus Ghali, and Yusuf Wahba, who made up the political establishment of the country were all members of the prominent British, and then French-influenced Kawkab al-Sharq lodge. Men like Fahmi Wisa, George Khayyat, and Isma’il Abaza, who were among the most prominent names within the propertied class, were members of the British-influenced lodges. In the last resort, however, this division was more of an artificial division, and what actually counted was that they were all freemasons.

Freemasonry’s role in Egypt during the period in question was therefore strong, since it had much to offer to its various members. For most members, the masonic lodges were an efficient and well-structured social club, with the
'added attraction of secrecy'. Thus, the secret society was more of a political institution, where the term 'political' rather than 'esoteric' freemasonry is more appropriate to describe the society's status in Egypt in the period under discussion. For others, the lodges were an efficient businesslike kind of guild system where material benefits and benevolence could be found. For yet others—especially the French-influenced ones—masonry was a political tool and an expression of the rising fervent nationalism that was sweeping the country at that period. Ultimately, however, those members, wherever their allegiance lay, were all members of one social sphere, using the Western ideology of freemasonry to perpetuate their status and solidarity as the élite of an indigenous society.

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Notes
5. Dickens, Barnaby Rudge, p.66.

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13. One of the freemasons of the Isis lodge, Samuel Hennes, who had returned to France after the Expédition Française, gathered some masonic colleagues and founded a lodge in France in 1815. He called the lodge, 'The Disciples of Memphis'. This lodge was then headed by the mason Marconi, and it was based on the rules of the Isis lodge. Hennes returned to Cairo in 1838, where he founded another lodge and called it 'Minas'. See Grande Loge Nationale d'Egypte, *Bulletin des Travaux 1928* (Cairo, 1928).
15. Ibid., p.109.
17. Abu Lughod, *Arab Discovery of Europe*, p.112.
19. Ibid., p.214.
20. Actually, as early as July 1862, the United Grand Lodge of England granted a warrant to establish the St John's Lodge in Alexandria (no.919). This lodge lasted fifteen years and was dissolved in 1877 to be replaced by another lodge, the St Paul's Lodge, in the same city. See District Grand Lodge of Egypt and the Sudan, *Memorial of the Dedication of the Masonic Temple*, p.55.
22. Cameron, *Modern Social Movements*, p.82.
23. Ibid., p.82.
24. *Al-Latā'if* was published by Shāhīn Maqāriyyūs (variants: Chahin Macarius/Shaheen Makarius).
26. Ibid., Arts.21–27 are all related to the workings of the General Assembly.
31. This lodge was then called 'La Loge de St Jean'.
33. Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community*, p.44.
34. The warrant for the Star of the East Lodge is dated 1871. There are no records of a date previous to 1907; they are supposed to have been burnt or lost. The Lodge had some distinguished members and Masters, among the most important of which were Idris Ragheb Bey, and Omar Sami ('Umar Sāmī) Bey. It was a very opulent lodge. It refused for many years to accept any foreign candidate as a member. Mr Delanoy was the first European to be accepted, followed by Mr Garofalo in 1907. Indeed, until this date the working language of the lodge was Arabic; it was changed in 1908 to English. Because the lodge was heavily indebted, Delanoy seized the occasion to admit several English members in it. See District Grand Lodge of Egypt and the Sudan, *Memorial of the Dedication*, p.67.
36. Etienne, 'L'égypтомanie'. The lodge was never actually transferred to French patronage.
40. Ibid., pp.41–2; quoted in Kudsi-Zadeh, p.28.
43. Thābit and Anṭāqī, *Aj-Nujūm*, p.11.
45. Thābit and Anṭāqī, op. cit., p.42.
48. Ibid., p.6.
51. GODF, Letter n*.1667/1897.
52. Safran, op. cit., pp.104f.
54. Kedourie quotes a letter in which, notably, the Young Turks influenced by Italian freemasons adopted the motto ‘Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité’. See idem, ‘Young Turks, Freemasons, and Jews’, pp.89–100.
55. Safran, op. cit., p.104.
57. One of the most famous écoles laïques founded at the end of the nineteenth century was the Lycée Cour Morin in Cairo.
60. Safwat, Freemasonry, p.10.
61. Roberts, Mythology, p.28.
62. Davis, pp.15f.
64. Landes, Bankers and Pashas, p.234.
69. GODF, Letter n*.8607/1898.
70. Ibid., Letter n*.9064/1899.
71. Ibid., Letter n*.12112/1901.
72. Ibid., Letter n*.14897/1913.
73. Sabry, Genèse de l'esprit national égyptien, p.143.
74. Mackey, ‘Etymology of the Word “Mason”’, in Lexicon. The Encyclopaedia Britannica traces the origin of the word to the Latin sculptor lapidum liberorum (or the French mestre mason de franche peer), which meant a craftsman working with a chisel, and a mallet in freestone.
75. Keddie, Sayyid Jamal Ad-Din, p.92.
77. Ibid., p.92.
78. GODF archives, Minutes of a Plenary Session of the Grand Orient National d’Egypte, Thursday, 3 April 1902.