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GERMAN EGYPTOLOGY (1882 – 1914)

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Susanne Voss and Thomas L. Gertzen

Deutsche Ägyptologie (1882 – 1914)
Égyptologie allemande (1882 – 1914)

The period from 1882 to 1914 has been termed the "Golden Age" of Egyptology. Under Adolf Erman, the successor of Carl Richard Lepsius, one of Egyptology's "founding fathers," who had died in 1884, Egyptology experienced the inauguration of the Ancient Egyptian Dictionary Project in 1897 and the founding of the German Oriental Society in 1898. Erman's successful effort to send Ludwig Borchardt to Egypt in 1895 was the prelude to a permanent presence of German Egyptology in Egypt. The implementation in 1898 of an international project to create the Catalogue Général (CG) *was followed by Borchardt's appointment as scholarly attaché at the German Consulate General in Cairo in 1899, the construction of "German House" in Western Thebes in 1904, the establishment of the Imperial German Institute in Cairo between 1906 and 1907, and the initiation of a program of excavations and research in Egypt. In 1912 the painted bust of Queen Nefertiti was discovered. During the same decades, the* Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde (ZÄS), *under Erman's editorship, remained the single most prestigious journal for matters Egyptological. The far-reaching and long-term influence of the "École de Berlin" (Berlin School), headed by Adolf Erman, is a hallmark of the era.*

أطلق على الفترة من 1882م إلى 1914م "العصر الذهبي لعلم المصريات." في عام 1884م ، توفي كارل ريتشارد ليبسيوس ، أحد "الآباء المؤسسين" لعلم المصريات. خلف ليبسيوس عالم الاثار المصرية أدولف إرمان ، الذي بدأ مشروع قاموس اللغة المصرية القديمة في عام 1897م ، وفي عام 1898م أسس إرمان الجمعية الشرقية الألمانية. أرسل إرمان عالم الاثار لودفيج بورخاردت إلى مصر في عام 1895م ، وبذلك أسس في مصر وجودًا دائمًا للمدرسة الألمانية لعلم المصريات. تنفيذ المشروع الدولي لإنشاء الكتالوج العام (السجل العام للآثار المصرية بالمتحف المصري) (*Catalogue Général* - CG) في عام 1898م تبعه تعيين بورخاردت ملحقًا علميًا في القنصلية العامة الألمانية في القاهرة عام 1899م ؛ بناء "البيت الألماني" في طيبة الغربية عام 1904م ؛ إنشاء المعهد الملكي الألماني في القاهرة بين عامي 1906 و 1907 ، أيضاً بدء برنامج البحوث والحفائر الأثرية في مصر. وفي عام 1912م تم اكتشاف التمثال النصفي الشهير للملكة نفرتيتي. خلال نفس العقود ، ظلت مجلة اللغة المصرية والآثار (*Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* - *ZÄS*)، تحت رئاسة تحرير إرمان ، أكثر المجلات المرموقة في علم المصريات. التأثير الدائم لـ "مدرسة برلين" برئاسة أدولف إرمان ، هو سمة مميزة للعصر.

With the foundation of the German *Reich* in 1871, a German nation-state had been established for the first time since the Holy Roman Empire. However, the new Reich was still a federal state, comprising various kingdoms, principalities, and free city-states, governed by monarchs, princes, and *Bürger*—each constituent keen to maintain its status, prestige, and, at the very least, cultural independence. Ever since the era of Prussian Reforms with their aim of "cultural power" (cf. in this publication *German Egyptology 1822 – 1882*), Oriental Studies and Egyptology had been perceived as a means to that end. After the defeat of France, French reparations flooded the treasuries of German federal states and caused an economic boom. Furthermore, the imperial government wanted to make amends—or, more accurately, to cause the wartime destruction of French cultural heritage to be forgotten by presenting itself as civilized, particularly in the annexed region of Alsace-Lorraine. When Wilhelm II became emperor in 1888, Near Eastern archaeology acquired a most influential supporter, thanks, in part, to imperialist agendas in the region of Mesopotamia (though not in Egypt), but also as a consequence of the monarch's enthusiasm for antiquity. Most importantly, the example of Kaiser Wilhelm's involvement led wealthy German industrialists—many of them Jewish (Gertzen 2017a; Voss 2020)—to support the arts and archaeological research.

In order to promote a degree of national unity through worldwide recognition, German *Wissenschaft* (scholarship) was expected to contribute large-scale projects and undertake significant national endeavors. Since German universities were still very much independent entities, subject only to the cultural politics of the federal states, the responsibility for what has been termed "Big Science" (*Großbetrieb der Wissenschaften*; Harnack 1905) lay with the Academies of Sciences and the Humanities.

The Ancient Egyptian Dictionary (*Wörterbuch*) Project, inaugurated in 1897 by Adolf Erman, who would become a highly influential scholar in the history of Egyptology worldwide, was among the large-scale enterprises in ancient studies undertaken by German academies in Berlin, Göttingen, Leipzig, and Munich. It epitomizes the special character of the period from 1882 to 1914, termed the "Golden Age" of Egyptology (Kees 1959: 6-13; Gertzen 2013a). Being a German national endeavor, it nonetheless invited international collaborators and, by integrating students from around the world in the process, influenced the future development of the entire discipline, particularly in Britain and the United States (Gertzen 2010a; 2015). The desire to obtain hieroglyphic texts from all periods of ancient Egyptian history (albeit with a marked disregard for the later periods) led to the creation of a permanent institutional footing in Egypt. In 1895 the Prussian Academy sent the Egyptologist and civil engineer Ludwig Borchardt to Egypt primarily to participate in an international project to consolidate the Philae Temple, but above all to copy inscriptions for Erman's dictionary project. After the Egyptian Antiquities Service under French leadership had prevented Borchardt from recording Pyramid Texts at Saqqara, Erman arranged in 1899 for Borchardt's appointment as scholarly attaché at the German Consulate General in Cairo. In that role Borchardt was protected from such interference in the future (Voss 2013). The *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* (DOG, German Oriental Society), founded in 1898, became the foremost source of funding. The presentation of spectacular discoveries and objects of art to the general public was meant to raise the public's awareness of Germany's achievement and to boost German prestige internationally, thereby providing the incentive for German political as well as economic elites to further support Egyptological research. Acknowledging that no imperial gains were to be made in Egypt, while intending to maintain friction between the colonial powers of France and Britain over the particular domain of the Ottoman Empire along the Nile (Kröger 1991), the Germans focused on scholarly conquests in philology rather than on archaeological endeavors (Gertzen 2009).

Constructions of Ancient Egypt

Given the decidedly "national" setting of Egyptological research in Germany during the *Kaiserreich*, coupled with the concentration on philological research based on the positivist *philologisch-historische Methode*, it is no wonder that Egypt lost most of the romantic, exotic, and "oriental" allure it had previously enjoyed in German scholarship. It is no accident that Edward W. Said excluded Germany from his (not-so-seminal from the German perspective) study on Orientalism (Said 1978), which Suzanne Marchand later emended (Marchand 2009).

Interestingly, German scholars' low regard for those periods of ancient Egyptian history later dubbed "Intermediate" (*Zwischenzeit*), but already in 1884 termed *Übergangsepoche* ("Transitional Period") by Eduard Meyer (Meyer 1884: 102), probably resulted from a particularly German contemporaneous view of history that judged strong central monarchies and national unity preferable to periods of regional government and national disunity.

The impact of denominational conflicts within the newly founded Reich—between Protestants (dominant in Prussia and most of the northern states) and Catholics (in the southwest), but of course also between Christians and Jews (Gertzen 2017a)—may possibly have been another factor in the development of the discipline in Germany. In marked contrast to Britain and North America, Biblical or religiously motivated research was extremely limited within German Egyptology (Engel 1979: 58-59) and was largely relegated to theology and Assyriology (Assmann 2006; Schipper 2008).

Many of the most spectacular acquisitions made by German museums, like the Berlin "Green Head" (Matthes 2017: 40-41), obtained on the antiquities market in Egypt, or the diplomatic correspondence of Akhenaten, purchased by Isaac Simon (Gertzen 2012), or the famous statue of Hemiunu, today in Hildesheim, discovered at an excavation at Giza, were not attributable to a systematic acquisition strategy that focused on a particular period or category of objects. Carl Richard Lepsius had tried to establish a historical collection at Berlin's Egyptian Museum, concentrating on objects bearing royal names. His successor, Erman, realized the importance of public relations and the appeal generated by objects of ancient Egyptian art. However, his overall aim was to acquire—with public funding—as many texts as possible.

The traditional rivalry between France and Germany (Gady 2012; Voss 2012a), the Napoleonic Wars being constitutive for both French and German Egyptology (cf. in this publication *German Egyptology 1822 – 1882*), also led most German Egyptologists to disdain French publications—French editions of Egyptian texts in particular—while French Egyptologists countered that their German colleagues had deduced an Egyptian grammar too complex to be accurate for a language at such an early stage in human development. In response, Erman and his pupils (very) publicly exposed the shortcomings of the "French" methods (Gertzen 2010b; Voss 2013: 150-154).

In those years, most German Egyptologists considered their task to be the classification, ordering, editing, and publication of ancient Egyptian texts. A corollary of this attitude was their active engagement in the international *Catalogue Général* (*CG*) project of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Borchardt 1937; Voss 2013: 46-52).

German Egyptologists intended to provide Egyptology with the necessary reference works—particularly dictionaries and grammars of the ancient Egyptian language—but also museum catalogs and institutional platforms, such as scientific journals and periodicals. The goal was two-fold: to achieve international standing with a leading role in the discipline and to establish Egyptology permanently within the framework of German academia, with its specific concept of *Wissenschaftlichkeit*.

Scholarship on Ancient Egypt

In contrast to an assumption widely held even today, Carl Richard Lepsius did not have a lasting influence on the further development of Egyptology in Germany (Schenkel 2006).

Nonetheless, he served as a role model for adherents of the Berlin School (dubbed the *école de Berlin* by its adversaries), representing the "German" method (Marchand 2000). Adolf Erman, his student and successor as professor in Berlin, inaugurated a new phase of philological research in Egyptology. Following the example of Classical Studies, Erman realized that Egyptology could only be permanently established within German academia through the construction of a distinctive paradigm. Given the limited influence of German diplomacy in Egypt, he opted for close collaboration with Prussian cultural/internal politics. Developing an Egyptological paradigm for philology, Erman was able to set a standard for the entire discipline on an international scale. Though this did not prevent him or his colleagues from taking a more holistic approach to ancient Egypt, his main focus always remained on accommodating scholarship and politics (*Wissenschaftspolitik*).

While still a student, Erman demonstrated the existence of a dual-form in Egyptian grammar and, as a result, the close relationship of Egyptian to the Semitic languages. His dissertation on the Egyptian plural (1878) and his grammar of Papyrus Westcar (1889) laid the foundations for his Egyptian grammar (published in 1894, with a second edition in 1902 and a third edition in 1928), which was later adopted by Alan Gardiner. Erman also defined—for the first time—different stages in the development of the language, coining the term *Neuägyptisch* (Late Egyptian). As head of the dictionary project and editor-in-chief of the *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* (*ZÄS*), which remained the single most prestigious Egyptological journal throughout the decades 1882 to 1914 (Gertzen 2013b), he set a new standard for the transcription of Egyptian texts—tacitly adopting the system employed in the seven-volume *Hieroglyphisch-Demotisches Wörterbuch* (1867 – 1882) of Heinrich Brugsch, whose social (non-*bürgerlich*) background, Catholicism, and close ties to French colleagues had made him an outcast in the field of Egyptology in Germany. Erman was also crucial to the creation, in 1898, of the German Oriental Society (DOG) and to the aforementioned appointment as scholarly attaché in 1899 of Ludwig Borchardt, who subsequently established priorities of archaeological research in Egypt in which German colonial interests played no role (Voss 2012b, 2013). Conversely, using the continuous disputes between the United Kingdom and France as security, Germany furthered its colonial interests in Namibia and China. In contrast to widespread assumptions, Borchardt's post as scholarly attaché at the German Consulate General in Cairo was not politically motivated, nor did it convey diplomatic status; moreover, it had to be renewed annually. The groundwork for it had been laid in 1898, with the aim of procuring texts for Erman's dictionary project (Voss 2013: 53-68). On a secondary level, Borchardt's posting was the result of the Franco-German academic rivalry that defined the history of the discipline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Furthermore, inasmuch as the specifically German concept of *Wissenschaftlichkeit* applied to archaeological projects, Borchardt's excavation of the Sun Temple of Niuserra at Abu Ghurab (1898 – 1901, funded by Friedrich Wilhelm von Bissing) was not conducted with the aim of uncovering spectacular finds. Rather, Borchardt had laid out a plan to investigate the entire site methodically—an approach that had already proven successful for German archaeology in Asia Minor (Voss 2013: 71-74). The German excavations at Abusir (1901 – 1908, financed by the DOG and James Simon) were also conceived as systematic investigations, with an emphasis on architectural research (Voss 2010). While the results shed new light on the construction and function of the pyramid districts of the Old Kingdom, the primacy of written sources prevailed. The interest of Berlin scholars was not so aroused by the recovery of Old Kingdom reliefs as by the coincidental discovery of the Greek papyrus of Timothy in a Late Period tomb near the pyramid of Niuserra (Voss 2013: 74-89).

Regardless, the Egyptian Museum in Berlin benefited from the excavations, receiving the German half at the division of finds. Borchardt was therefore able to "lure" the DOG with the

prospect of spectacular discoveries. When, in the spring of 1906, the increasing appearance of artifacts from Amarna on the Egyptian market attracted his attention, he was able to convince the DOG and James Simon to excavate at the city of Akhenaten (Voss and Gertzen 2013). Since this undertaking was planned as a long-term project, an expedition house was built there in 1908 and a survey grid was laid out for the site to enable its exploration, section by section. The excavation, which lasted from 1911 to 1914, was the first systematic settlement excavation in Egypt. The subsequent discovery of a large number of reliefs and statuary depicting the family of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten, the foremost of which was the painted bust of Queen Nefertiti in 1912, made headlines worldwide (Seyfried et al. 2012), although stylistically comparable likenesses of the royal family had been discovered and taken to Paris earlier, during nineteenth-century French excavations at Amarna (Voss 2013: 87-88, 94-95).

In these last years before World War I, German archaeology in Egypt was at its peak. Since 1904, permanent quarters had existed in Egypt—the "German House" at Western Thebes, which continued to serve primarily as a guest-house for the scholars involved in the dictionary project. In 1906 – 1907 Borchardt's attaché post, the German House, and the attaché's library and photo collection were consolidated to form the *Kaiserlich Deutsches Institut für ägyptische Altertumskunde in Kairo* (the Imperial German Institute in Cairo; Voss 2013), which became the Cairo Department of the German Archaeological Institute in 1929 (Voss 2017). In addition to the German archaeological efforts sponsored by the DOG, new insights and finds resulted from, for example, Georg Steindorff's work at Giza and in Nubia (Raue 2016), and Otto Rubensohn's excavations in Middle and Upper Egypt on behalf of the *Papyruskartell* (Kuckertz 2013). Beginning in 1903, Wilhelm Pelizäus sponsored Steindorff's Giza excavations, setting a precedent for the engagement of private collectors in archaeological activity in Egypt, which museums in Germany later adopted.

Germany's industrious fieldwork notwithstanding, archaeological methodology played a minor role in the study of Egyptology at German universities. Until Erman's retirement and the completion of the dictionary project, philology enjoyed absolute priority in Berlin Egyptology. Indeed one of Erman's closest collaborators, Kurt Sethe, published the seminal edition of the Pyramid Texts (1908 – 1910) and inaugurated the *Urkunden des Ägyptischen Altertums* (1903 – 1961). Concurrently Heinrich Schäfer, known as Sethe's "Egyptological twin," laid down *The Principles of Egyptian Art* in 1919.

Special provisions for public funding and administration applied in the new *Reichsland* following the annexation in 1871 of Alsace-Lorraine, allowing Wilhelm Spiegelberg to establish there his own branch of German Egyptology, concentrating on the Late Period, along with Demotic and Coptic language studies. Spiegelberg successfully maintained his independence from Berlin within the *Papyruskartell*, created in 1906 for coordinated acquisition of papyri on the Egyptian antiquities market by German institutions in order to reduce internecine competition (Primavesi 1996). Spiegelberg's work on a Demotic dictionary, carried on by William Edgerton, provided the basis for the Chicago Demotic Dictionary project (Gertzen 2018).

German Egyptology during this era could always rely on public support and was firmly integrated into academia. The *Großbetrieb der Wissenschaften*, however, had become closely linked to the state and dependent upon it. Thus, Germany's defeat in World War I and the ensuing demise of the Hohenzollern monarchy put an end to the "Golden Age" of German Egyptology. Without financial support from America, the *Wörterbuch* might not have been published. Because most German professors had close ties to the monarchy and indeed considered themselves members of the old elite of the *Kaiserreich*, Egyptological research in Germany came under pressure. Germany's international isolation rendered the continuation of archaeological engagement in Egypt impossible. Many of the pre-war German

concessions ended up as spoils of war, or served as "reparations" for what now became perceived in Germany as "*entente*-Egyptology," with continued adherence to the national concept of Egyptological research.

Legacy in Modern Egyptology

Undoubtedly the *Altägyptisches Wörterbuch* constitutes the most essential contribution to Egyptian linguistics, for it not only established a paradigm for later dictionaries of Egyptian (including those of the later stages of the language) but also constituted the Egyptological context in which were trained many non-Germans scholars who would later become leading representatives of the discipline (e.g., James Breasted, Alan Gardiner, Francis Llewellyn Griffith, George Reisner, Hans O. Lange, and Wolja Erichsen, to name a few). Publications on Egyptian grammar similarly sprang from the Berlin School (innovations and further developments notwithstanding), rendered first and foremost by Hans J. Polotsky, yet another pupil of the Berlin School. As for Egyptian archaeology, the works of Ludwig Borchardt inaugurated a new research paradigm incorporating architectural history and firmly establishing those methods in the discipline. Heinrich Schäfer provided the basis for art history in Egyptology, carried on by leading scholars such as Bernhard V. Bothmer and Hans Wolfgang Müller (Eaton-Krauss 2019).

Between 1882 and 1914 Egyptology became permanently established at German universities in Bonn (1897) and Munich (1905), in addition to the already existing chairs in Berlin (1845), Göttingen (1854), Leipzig (1870), Heidelberg (1872), and Straßburg (1872). With the inclusion of Vienna (1872), this resulted in the eight Egyptological professorships in the German language area, by far outnumbering those in Britain, France, and Italy. Egyptological research was also established at the Academies of Sciences and the Humanities in Berlin, Göttingen, Leipzig, and Munich. Four major Egyptological collections thrived and were expanded in museums in Berlin, Hannover, Hildesheim, and Munich. The Imperial German Institute for Egyptian Archaeology in Cairo was sequestrated at the outbreak of World War I, the German House at Western Thebes blown up by the British in 1915, and the German excavation concessions annulled, but the Institute was ultimately re-established to form the nucleus for what is now the Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research of Ancient Egypt in Cairo (Von Pilgrim 2013) and the Cairo Department of the German Archaeological Institute (Voss 2017); the German House was rebuilt after the war as well (Polz 2007).

It is probably due to the lasting influence of the systematic and "orderly" approach of the Berlin School—a hallmark of the era (Gertzen 2013a)—that further standard reference works for Egyptology were initiated in Germany, e.g., Hermann Ranke's "Lexikon of Egyptian Personal Names," and the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. The concentration of Erman and his pupils on philological research, combined with a typically German penchant for academic professionalization and the decidedly "national" framework of Egyptological research in Germany, linked the fate of the discipline to political developments, probably more than in any other country (Gertzen 2020).

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Disciplinary history was established comparatively late in Egyptology, although in Germany first attempts had been made during the 1970s and 1980s on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In recent years, however, research has thrived and resulted in a number of groundbreaking publications, beginning with Schipper (2006) and Bickel et al. (2013). For a general account within an international context, see the chapter on Prussia/Germany by Gertzen, Voss, and

Georg (2020) in *World History of Egyptology* and cf. Gertzen (2020). For the "Golden Age" between 1882 and 1914 in particular (and for those who can read German), see Voss (2013) for German Egyptology in Egypt, and Gertzen (2013a) for the Berlin School. A general introduction to disciplinary-history research in Germany, with numerous additional bibliographical references to specialized studies, is provided by Gertzen (2017b).

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