

L'adab, toujours recommencé

*“Origins”, Transmissions, and
Metamorphoses of Adab Literature*

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Ruins for a Renaissance: Decline, Rebirth and Cyclical History in the Arab Mediterranean

Elisabetta Benigni

The description of remnants (*āthār*) and ruins (*aṭlāl*) is a recurrent and distinct motif in Arab history writing and literature, one that evokes a variety of themes such as contemplation of loss, melancholy, and the flow of time. From the tradition of ruin-gazing known as *al-wūqūf ‘alā al-aṭlāl* (stopping at ruins) in poetry, to historical and geographical works describing the encounter with remnants of old cities, ruins figure prominently in the tradition of *adab*.¹ The *aṭlāl* motif shows itself as one of the core images of the *adab* tradition, due to its persistent and continuous usage over time. Its echoes and elaborations can be found in many forms of literature, from the *nasīb* of pre-Islamic poems to modern and contemporary novels. In the words of Hilary Kilpatrick: “the *aṭlāl* motif established itself as a fundamental part of the Arabic literary repertoire, to be developed by poets in subsequent periods in a variety of ways continuing or contrasting with the pre-Islamic convention”.²

One of the most famous literary examples of the contemplation of ruins can be found in the “Tale of the City of Brass”, attested in several versions of the *Thousand and one nights*.³ The tale draws inspiration from an anecdote reported by the eighth/fourteenth-century Egyptian historian Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) about the discovery of the tomb of the Queen of Sheba in the city of Palmyra, one among the many examples of an interest in the pre-Islamic past during the medieval period.⁴ The story contains a long description of the discovery of an abandoned city where the tomb of a queen

1 Cooperson, “Early Abbasid Antiquarianism”, 201–11; idem “The image of Pharaonic Egypt”, 11: 1109–1128; El-Daly, *Egyptology*, 9–29; Haarmann, “In quest of the Spectacular”, 57–67. On the theme of ruins in classical and post-classical Arabic literary works, in particular in al-Mas‘ūdī, Ibn Khaldūn and in the *Thousand and one nights* see also Irwin, *Ibn Khaldūn*, 1–19.

2 Kilpatrick, “Literary Creativity”, 29.

3 *The City of Brass* (trad. Lyons) 11: 566–78, 518–546; *La ville de cuivre* (trad. Bencheikh-Miquel), 11: 553–581; *The Extraordinary Tale of the City of Brass* (trad. Mathers-Mardrus) 111: 339–346, 206–228; *The City of Brass* (trad. Burton) vi: 74–103; *The Story of the City of Brass* (trad. Lane) 111: 1–37.

4 Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, xiv: 134–135; El-Daly, *Egyptology*, 47–48.

is kept. Stone epigraphs in ancient and unknown languages are spread across the city and warn the traveller to leave untouched the tomb's treasures, and to think about the transience of life.⁵ The protagonist of the story, Amīr Mūsā, has a sudden reaction of pain and uncomfortable sorrow every time he is confronted with an inscription engraved in the stones of the mysterious city. Faithful to the tradition of ruin-gazing, Amīr Mūsā cries in front of the ruins of the abandoned city. He does not dare to touch the stones and treasures kept inside the walls and leaves the city enriched from the moral lesson he takes from the ruins.

In describing his arrival at Thebes in 1815, the Italian collector of antiquities Giovanni Battista Belzoni (d. 1823) echoes the wonder of the traveller in the "Tale of City of Brass":

It seemed to me like entering a city of giants that had been destroyed after a long conflict, the ruins of their various temples as the only proof of their former existence (...). Remnants of temples, columns, Sphinxes, facades, countless architectural ruins and sculptures cover the soil (...) who can not fail to wonder how a nation, which was once so great as to erect these stupendous edifices, could fall so far into oblivion that even their language and writing are totally unknown to us.⁶

However, unlike Amīr Mūsā in the "Tale of the City of Brass", who meditates over the ruins and learns a moral lesson, Belzoni would go on to excavate the gigantic sculpture known as the 'Memnon head' and sell it to the British Museum. We do not know if Belzoni left Thebes morally enriched in the same way that Amīr Mūsā did when he left the City of Brass. Certainly, he did so materially.

The two narratives illustrate different ways of dealing with traces of the past. What is the meaning of a ruin and its function in the present? What does it mean to observe, describe and collect the past as a social and cultural practice? Can we trace the recurrent motive of the ruins (*āthār/aṭlāl*) in Arabic literature as a manifestation of a form of *adab* which always reinvented itself in new forms? In order to respond to these questions, this article focuses on sources dealing with fictional and non-fictional representations of ruins in

5 The theme of the *aṭlāl* as a trace to contemplate the transience of life is also testified by the medieval Islamic legends that account the Pyramids as built by a certain Arab king Shaddād b. Ād to serve as a *memento mori*. See Cooperson, "Early Abbasid Antiquarianism", 206; Fodor "The Origins", 335–363 and Cook, "Pharaonic History", 67–103.

6 Belzoni, *Viaggi in Egitto*, 114–115. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

texts circulating between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century in the eastern and southern Mediterranean. The article argues that the theme of historical decline, typically attached to the depiction of ruins transformed into the theme of cultural revival, at a time when the undetermined and universal ruin was appropriated and defined as national heritage.⁷ The article focuses on sources in Arabic, but it also puts these sources into conversation with coeval works in French and Italian. Comparing visions of antiquities, which were part of a landscape of mutual influences and translations, reveals how a shared *régime d'historicité* took shape during the long nineteenth century from the encounter of eclectic traditions of conceiving the flow of time and its traces.⁸

1 Antoine Silvestre de Sacy's Cabinet of Curiosity: *Aṭlāl* and History

In 1815, the year in which Belzoni entered Thebes, the Mediterranean was the site of ruins in both real and imaginative terms. Texts describing antiquities in the Mediterranean increasingly circulated between France, England and Germany, inspiring a great number of imaginative and philosophical accounts.

The work by Volney, *Ruines, ou Méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (1791), to which we will come back later, was intensively read and discussed at the same time when Arabic texts on antiquities were also being translated into major European languages. In his Parisian cabinet, the Orientalist Antoine Silvestre Isaac de Sacy (1758–1838) was working on the first translation into French of the thirteenth-century *Kitāb al-īfāda wa-l-i'tibār* (Book of Useful Knowledge and Consideration) by 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231), a text that deals extensively with Egyptian antiquities from the Pharaonic and

7 The reflections in this article are inspired by the many works that, in the last decades, contributed to the critical rethinking of the field of archaeology and material heritage. See Shanapp, *La conquête du passé*; Cuno, *Who owns antiquity*. For the areas of the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and Egypt: Bahrani, Çelik, Eldem, *Scramble for the past*; Hamilakis, *The Nation and its ruins*; Oulebsi, *Les usages du patrimoine*; Ford, "The Inheritance of Empire", 57–77; Colla, *Conflicting antiquities*; Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*

8 The concept of *régimes d'historicité* has been theorised by Hartog, *Régimes*, 19–20: "Régime d'historicité (...) pouvait s'entendre de deux façons. Dans une acception restreinte, comment une société traite son passé et en traite. Dans une acception large, où régime d'historicité servirait à désigner 'la modalité de conscience de soi d'une communauté humaine'. Plus précisément, la notion devait pouvoir fournir un instrument pour comparer des types d'histoire différents, mais aussi et même d'abord, ajouterais-je maintenant, pour mettre en lumière des modes de rapport au temps: des formes de l'expérience du temps, ici et là-bas, aujourd'hui et hier. Des manières d'être au temps".

Hellenistic periods.⁹ The book was published in 1810 with the title *Relation de l'Égypte par Abd-Allatif médecin de Bagdad*. Descriptions of statues and columns in fragments, visits to cemeteries, and ancient funerary practices are combined in al-Baghdādī's book with descriptions of plants and animals. Antiquities are seen as elements of nature and the statues of idols are admired because of their enormous size but also for their harmony and beauty. The Sphinx, *Abū l-hawl*, mesmerises 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī: "It is a beautiful figure and its lips mark it with grace and beauty. It seems as if it is graciously smiling ... It is incredible how the sculptor was able to preserve the right proportions despite the fact that in nature there is nothing so colossal that can be compared and taken as a model".¹⁰ During his visit to Memphis, inscriptions in unknown languages and frescos attract his curiosity, but it is the statues that inspire his wonder (*ta'ajjub*) for "the beauty of the faces, and the harmony of proportions, reminding us of how skilful human art can be and what it grants to a material like stone. These figures only lack flesh and blood".¹¹ In Alexandria, the author sees the remnants of what he claims was Aristotele's school.¹² All these ruins, 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī reminds us, "are a sort of register of the centuries that passed ... and call our attention to what destiny awaits the things of the world".¹³

The French Orientalist de Sacy was translating 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī at the same time as he was contributing to the first volumes of the monumental *Description de l'Égypte*, the vast repertoire of the nature, architecture, and customs of Egypt, a project which ran through the first decades of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, de Sacy's interest in Egyptian antiquities is also attested by his article written in 1801 on Greek and Arabic names of the Pyramids for the journal *Magasin encyclopédique*.¹⁴ In other words, there was a certain moment in history in which European erudition, medieval Arab antiquarianism, and the birth of archaeology met in the same room, on the same desk of Silvestre de Sacy.

The antiquarian interests of de Sacy, however, were not exceptional for his time. If ruins are displayed as isolated elements in the empty vastness of the countryside or deserts in European engravings and paintings, they certainly do not appear in a vacuum in written texts. By the turn of the nineteenth century,

9 The manuscript was edited in 1680 by Edward Pococke. Edward Pococke Younger partially translated it into Latin. The translation was published by Joseph White in 1800.

10 *Relation de l'Égypte*, 179–180.

11 *Relation de l'Égypte*, 189–190.

12 *Relation de l'Égypte*, 183.

13 *Relation de l'Égypte*, 183.

14 Silvestre de Sacy, "Observations", 446–503.

the theme of the description of ruins had to be contextualised into a more general discourse about the course of history and the idea of cyclical decadence. The desk of de Sacy's stands, once more, as a good representation of the spirit of the time. On the same desk, along with the *Relation de l'Égypte* of al-Baghdādī and tomes of the *Description de l'Égypte*, one would have likely noticed the presence of another Arabic text that the French Orientalist was translating during the same years: the fourteenth-century *Kitāb al-ībar* (Book of Examples) by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406). The medieval Arab philosopher and historian was so close to the spirit of the time that de Sacy defined the *Muqaddima*, the famous programmatic introduction to the book, with these words: "No historical book written in Arabic deserves the honour of publication more than this one".¹⁵ This judgement was repeated by his students in the following years. In 1822, Joseph de Hammer insisted on the importance of translating Ibn Khaldūn and presented a summary of his work in the *Journal Asiatique*.¹⁶ A few years later, in the same journal, Garcin de Tassy and F.E. Schulz returned to the topic, reviewing and presenting the historical work of Ibn Khaldūn.¹⁷

It would be a mistake, however, to reduce the reading and translation of Ibn Khaldūn into European languages only as the product of French Orientalism. In the same years, or shortly thereafter, translations of Ibn Khaldūn appeared also in Italian. In the Italian peninsula, intellectuals interested in rewriting Italian history were looking with increasing interest both to the legacy of the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico (d. 1744) and to the ideas of cyclical history expressed by Ibn Khaldūn. Michele Amari, the Sicilian historian, Arabist, and nationalist, introduced his readers to the work of Ibn Zafar al-Ṣiqillī (d. 565/1170) and, more generally, the medieval history of the Arabs in Sicily, by extensively referring to cyclical patterns of the rise and fall of civilisations, following the historical model expressed by Ibn Khaldūn in his famous *Muqaddima*.¹⁸ Michele Amari's interest in Ibn Khaldūn was connected to his studies of Arabic in Paris with William Mac Guckin de Slane, one of the first and most important translators of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*. Amari's own use of Ibn Khaldūn, however, specifically aimed to express his own conception of Italian history as a cyclical pattern of past glories, declines, and renaissances, in light of Vico's vision of history.¹⁹

15 De Sacy, "Ibn Khaldūn", 111: 154.

16 de Hammer, "Sur l'introduction", 267–278.

17 de Tassy, "Supplément", 158–161; Schulz, "Sur le grand ouvrage", 213–300.

18 Amari *Storia dei musulmani*, 1: 68.

19 See also Tessitore, *Schizzi e schegge di storiografia arabo-islamica*. Amari was not alone in his interest in Ibn Khaldūn. On more than one occasion, he refers to other Italian translators of Ibn Khaldūn, such as the Abbot Gian Antonio Arri da Asti (d. 1841) and the

To be sure, nineteenth-century “Khalidunism” was a phenomena that involved the Mediterranean at large and can perhaps be read in continuity with the profound interest with Ibn Khaldūn that characterised Ottoman writings on history and politics starting from the eighteenth century.²⁰ Between the 1830s and 1850s in Egypt, the translation and edition of three different, interesting, and comparable books on the topic of historical cycles and decline and the rise of civilisations attest to a very similar awareness: The *Muqaddima* by Ibn Khaldūn, edited and printed in 1857; the translation of Montesquieu (d. 1755)’s *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, printed in Arabic in 1842; and Machiavelli’s *Il Principe*, translated into Arabic in 1832. The translations and editions of these books demonstrate the growing interest in cyclical history from a comparative perspective.

Given this widespread interest in the theme of circularity and decline, I suggest that the reading of Ibn Khaldūn between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, along with the recurrence of the theme of ruins as a metaphor for rebirth and the translation of French and Latin and Greek historical works, reveals the rise of a *régime d’historicité* that put at its very heart the discourse of renaissances and cyclical time in human history.²¹

2 In Antique Lands: A Mediterranean Cyclical History

Interrogating ruins, speaking with ghosts, and melancholically contemplating the passage of time and the decline of civilisations is the prelude to the famous account *Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empire*, written by Constantin-François Chassebœuf de La Giraudais, Comte Volney.²² As one of the leading exponents of the *Société des observateurs de l’homme* and a member of the *Ideologues*, Volney was sent to Syria and Egypt in 1783 with the task of writing a report on the possibility of a French colonial enterprise in the area. Coming back from this expedition, he wrote his *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785*. It was only in 1791, however, that he wrote *Les ruines*, after having taken part in the revolutionary events in France

excommunicated Vatican scholar Michelangelo Lanci (d. 1867). Amari, *Storia dei musulmani*, 1: 69.

20 See Fleisher, “Royal Authority”, 199–200.

21 Benigni, “Renaissances”, 21. The concept of temporality and the use of ancient sources in nineteenth-century Arab historiography had been analysed by Soler, “Une autre histoire”, 285–288, and Hill, *Utopia and civilization*, 171–175.

22 For the English translation I used the edition of 1820 *Ruins of Empires*, edited by Bossange Frères in Paris.

as a representative of the Tiers-État and being appointed secretary of the National Assembly.

In the work, which had a great resonance at the time and afterwards, Volney presents a materialistic conception of history centered on the idea of the revolution as the impetus for universal renewal. This claim originates from a melancholic meditation on the ruins, specifically the solitary ruins (*ruines solitaires*) of an abandoned Palmyra:

(Palmyra has) the most stupendous ruins: a countless multitude of superb columns, stretching in avenues beyond the line of sight. Among them were magnificent edifices, some entire, others in ruins. The ground was covered on all sides with fragments of cornices, capitals (...) of the most exquisite workmanship. After a walk (...) I entered the enclosure of a vast edifice, formerly a temple dedicated to the sun – and accepting the hospitality of some poor Arab peasants, who had built their house on the area of the temple, I resolved to stay some days to contemplate, at leisure, the beauty of so many stupendous works.²³

The house of the poor Arab peasants among the ruins indicates the state of present decline that Volney will describe further in the text:

I visited cities and studied the manners of their inhabitants; entered palaces and observed the conduct of those who govern; wandered over the fields, and examined the condition of those who cultivated them; and nowhere perceiving but robbery and devastation, tyranny and wretchedness, my heart was oppressed with sorrow and indignation.²⁴

Palmyra's decline is the destiny of the Orient. Resurrection from ruins is possible only through the inspiration of the muse of revolution and progress, who visits Volney during his profound reverie at the ruins: "The aspect of a great city deserted, the memory of times past, compared with its present state, all elevated my mind to high contemplation. I sat on the shaft of a column; and there, my elbow reposing on my knee, and head reclining on my hand, my eyes fixed, sometimes on the desert, sometimes on the ruins, I fell into a profound reverie."²⁵ The gaze toward both the ruins and the desert, two spaces of presence/absence, brings Volney into a dream state outside time, what Paul

²³ *Ruins of Empires*, 6–7.

²⁴ *Ruins of Empires*, 6.

²⁵ *Ruins of Empires*, 9.

Ricoeur would have called a state of intra-temporality.²⁶ It is this state of “intra-temporality” among ruins that makes possible his meeting with a white ghost (*fantôme blanchâtre*) who invites him to learn from the *leçon* offered by the traces of the past.²⁷ What follows is a long exposition on the causes of civilisational decay and the possibilities to amend human failures.

As scholars have noted, the work of Volney has to be situated in the philosophical and historical theories that dealt with the analytical description of how the Orient compared to the West.²⁸ European authors who devoted their work to this topic inherited a vision of universal history exemplified by Condorcet's *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795): the Oriental lands are doomed to decline due to the despotism and the religious obscurantism that dominated these territories.²⁹ Yet, because they were cradles of civilisation at a time when the West was in a state of decline, the Oriental lands are also fertile grounds for a rebirth.³⁰ In other words, ruins stand as a silent but eloquent witness of a universal history that conceives the Oriental past as the time of splendour and progress. The Arabs temporarily preserved the “spirit of civilisation” that, shortly thereafter, went back to Europe and opened the age of Renaissance and Modernity. In the words of Henry Laurens, “dans le même moment où on reconnaît la valeur de la culture arabo-islamique, on transforme cette dernière en simple étape dans le grand plan de la Providence à travers l'histoire: le rôle des Arabes et des Musulmans est d'avoir recueilli les sciences et les arts pour ensuite les transmettre à l'Occident”.³¹

This picture offered by French authors of a sharp division between a modern civilised Europe and an Orient lost in its ruins becomes less Manichean when we look at the works of authors writing from the southern Mediterranean. In the same years during which Volney, following his predecessors Voltaire and Condorcet, was describing the ruins of Palmyra as the manifesto of a decline waiting for a regeneration to be brought by French expansion, voices from southern Mediterranean lands were also describing their own ruins but in a different way. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Italian artists and literati, for instance, looked at Roman and Greek ruins in the Italian territory as a great source of inspiration for the reconstruction of their own history. The famous

26 Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, see Tagliapietra, “Le lezione”, 12.

27 *Ruins of Empires*, 17.

28 Laurens, *Les Origines*, 38.

29 Laurens, *Les Origines*, 38.

30 This rebirth, conceived as possible with the help of Europe, becomes, especially from 1750 onward, the dominant ideology of European interventionism in the Eastern Mediterranean. See Laurens, *Les Origines*, 191–192.

31 Laurens, *Les Origines*, 38.

artist and engraver Piranesi eloquently expresses this sentiment in regard to Rome:

Whoever believes that these (antique monuments) have nothing to teach us is sorely misled. This vein has not yet been exhausted. Every day new pieces are unearthed beneath the ruins, and we are presented with new things able to inspire well the ideas of a reflexive thinking creator. Rome is undoubtedly the most productive mine of this kind and despite the fact that many nations are vying over competing with each other to enrich themselves with our remains, the arts will find such support here that they will scarcely find elsewhere.³²

The programmatic ideas expressed by Piranesi echo those of Giambattista Vico in his *De origine* about the importance of “excavating” the etymological origins of languages as a means to historically reconstruct the Italian mind.³³

In Italy, over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mediterranean ruins inspired the production of many philosophical, historical and fictional works. Moved by the ineffable beauty of the ruins of Rome, its “Egyptian Obelisks” (gli Egiziani Obelisch), its Coliseum which “lies as a mauled giant” (giace come un gigante sbranato), and all “those remnants of the Roman splendour that fill the soul with sweet enchantment” (quanti avanzi della romana splendidezza empiono l’animo di soave meraviglia) and also inspired by the recent archaeological discovery in 1780 of the Tomb of the Scipioni family, the Milanese count Alessandro Verri (d. 1816) wrote in 1792 *Notti Romane: Al sepolcro degli Scipioni (Roman nights: to the tomb of the Scipionis)*.³⁴ The work opens with the author walking at night in the area of the recently discovered tomb. Here he sets his dialogue with ghosts of Roman heroes, mixing the Ossian sensibility for funerary poetry with the Mediterranean’s glorious past. The evocation of ruins and of the ghosts who inhabit them is also the

32 Chi crede che questi sono esausti, e nulla più siavi da scoprire in essi, s’inganna a gran partito. Nò, che questa vena, non è per anche inesterilita. Nuovi pezzi escano di giorno in giorno di sotto le rovine, e nuove cose ci presentano ben capaci di secondare, e imbizzarrir l’idee d’un artefice riflessivo e pensante. Roma è certamente la miniera più fertile in questo genere, e non ostante che più nazioni sembrano fare a gara, a chi più possa arricchirsi delle nostre spoglie, le arti avranno qui un soccorso che difficilmente troveranno altrove. Piranesi, *Diverse maniere*, 33.

33 Consoli, “Architecture and history”, 198.

34 Verri, *Notti romane*, 3.

main theme of *Dei sepolcri* by the Greek-Italian poet Ugo Foscolo, published in 1807, in which the author evokes Homer who interrogates the ruins of Troy.³⁵

Despite being undoubtedly indebted to the Northern European gothic and Ossian tradition, as well being inspired by accounts of the Grand Tour, the use of ruins in nineteenth-century Italian literature also has a separate aim in a time of a “resurgent” patriotic spirit (*Risorgimento*): revitalising the past rather than melancholically contemplating it. In the words of Carolyn Springer, the recovery of Italy’s history through its “shards and scattered fragments” made them symbols of endurance rather than decay, “implicitly revers[ing] the valence of romantic *Ruinenstimmung*”.³⁶ Bearing in mind the case of the Italian literati, in the next section I will look at the way in which two renowned Egyptian authors of the nineteenth century read and described Egyptian ruins and were thus inspired to reinvent their relationship with their past and so, inevitably, with their patriotic future.³⁷

3 From Volney to al-Ṭaḥṭāwī

There exist a remarkable number of nineteenth-century Arabic translations of works in European languages devoted to cyclical history, decline, Antiquity, and its traces, namely, ruins. This florescence of translations demonstrates that *Nahḍa* intellectuals were fascinated by the European idea of antique Mediterranean civilisations as the cradle of modernity.³⁸ As discussed above, the view that Mediterranean antiquity was the source of an Enlightened modernity was one of the central concepts in Volney’s *Ruins*, which left a deep

35 Foscolo, *Dei Sepolcri*.

36 Springer, *The Marble*, 3.

37 On the feeling of attachment to the Egyptian land in the context of the Ottoman empire and the consequent patriotism (*waṭaniyya*) in nineteenth-century see Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*.

38 Among the translations produced in Būlāq devoted to antique history: *Mukhtaṣar tarjamat mashārīr qudamā’ al-falāsifa* (Summary of the life of famous ancient philosophers) translated by ‘Abdallāh Ḥusayn Effendi al-Maṣrī from Fénelon’s *Abrégé de la vie des plus illustres philosophes de l’antiquité* (1252/1836–7) and the collective work on the ancient world *Bidāyat al-qudamā’ wa-hidayat al-ḥukamā’* (The Beginning of the ancients and guide for the wise 1254/1838). The *Aperçu de l’histoire d’Égypte depuis les temps les plus reculés jusq’à la conquête musulmane* by the Egyptologist Mariette was translated in Arabic by ‘Abdallāh al-Su‘ūd (Alexandria, 1864). In Syria, Salīm Shahāda translated the letters to Lucilis by Seneca (1868) and Jirjī Dimītrī Sursuq translated a history of the Greeks in 1876. In 1860 was published the book with the title *Kharābāt Sūriyya* (The ruins of Syria) derived by a lecture given at the Literary Club in Beirut by Khalil al-Khūrī (Beirut, al-Maṭba’ al-Sūriyya). See al-Shayyāl, *Ta’rikh al-tarjama*, Appendix 1 n. 42 and 48; Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 175–179, and Choueiri, *Modern Arab historiography*, 6.

mark on the ideological program of Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt and was crucial to the French colonial project.³⁹ Yet, the same idea that the movement toward "civilisation" (*tamaddun*) was a return to the Ancients was crucial for many Arab intellectuals, who saw in it a possibility of progress rooted in the antique cultures of the Egyptians, the ancient Arabs, the Romans, and the Greeks.⁴⁰

The writings of the Azharī shaykh, translator, and leading intellectual Rifā'a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (d. 1280/1873) epitomise the interest in the landscape of ruins representing the traces of a glorious past and the possibility for present rebirth. Rifā'a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī describes ruins according to a cyclical notion of history based on the concept of *tamaddun* (civilisation).⁴¹ He is mainly known for his famous travelogue (*riḥla*) that describes his five-year sojourn to Paris in 1826. He went as the *imām* of a group of Egyptian students sent to France by the Egyptian khedive Muḥammad 'Alī to acquire the Western knowledge that was considered necessary for the project of reforms and modernisation of the country.⁴² The account of his travel to Paris, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz ilā talkhīṣ Bārīz* (The extraction of pure gold toward an abridged description of Paris, 1834), attests to his close contacts with the French Orientalists of his time, including the aforementioned Antoine Silvestre de Sacy. He is also known for his work as a translator and founder of the *madrasat al-alsun*, the famous language school where many of the first early nineteenth-century translations from European languages into Arabic were produced.⁴³

In his writings, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī expresses a refined sensibility toward the meaning of history and the flow of time: the sections of his works related to the theme of ruins combine French antiquarianism and archaeology with the birth of an idea of an Arab progress (*tamaddun* or *taqaddum*), characteristic of *Nahḍa* thinkers. Reading his observations on the traces of the past offers a good example of how the motive of the *āthār* was read through the prism of a new historical sensibility and a specifically cyclical notion of time.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's first observations about antiquity are expressed in his famous travelogue to Paris, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz*. In the introduction, he describes the history

39 According to Allen, *A Period of Time*, 29, Volney's travelogues in Egypt and Syria (1814) were translated in Arabic by Shākir Shuqayr (d. 1896) with the title *Āthār al-umam* under the supervision of Rifā' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī.

40 Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 172–173; Benigni, "Metempsychosis" and "Marvelous Affinities", 287–288.

41 Soler, "Une autre histoire", 294.

42 On al-Ṭaḥṭāwī see: Delanoue, *Moralistes*, 1: 384–487; Tageddin, *Disarming*, 108–151; Newman, *An Imam*, 31–97.

43 The most complete source of information on the topic is still: al-Shayyāl, *Ta'rikh al-tarjama*.

of humankind as following phases of development in time. Each phase follows the preceding one according to a scheme that he drew from the medieval Arab philosophical tradition.⁴⁴ In this frame, however, the prominence of the ancestor (*al-mutaqaddim*) complicates the linear teleology of progress:

However, they [the French] do acknowledge that we [the Arabs] were their teachers in all sciences and that we were more advanced than them. Intellect and observation have established that credit goes to the precursor (*al-mutaqaddim*). It is not the case that the one who comes later delves into what has been left [by his predecessors] and guided by his directions?⁴⁵

A few pages afterwards, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī summarises the cycle of splendour, decline, and renewal of the Arabs in the light of the European Enlightenment ideas that we saw expressed by authors like Condorcet and Volney:

Indeed, in the time of the caliphs, we were the most perfect of all countries (...) The might of the caliphs dissolved and their possessions were broken up, as witnessed by al-Andalus, which has been in the hands of the Spanish Christians for some 350 years now, while the might of the Franks was strengthened because of their skills, organization, justice, technical know-how, versatility and inventiveness in matters of warfare (...) This is why the Benefactor [Muḥammad ‘Alī] – may God the Exalted protect him – since he was made the ruler of the Land of Egypt (...) has made it our goal to restore its former youth and revive its faded splendour.⁴⁶

The reference to the material aspects of antiquity appear in the part of the travelogue dedicated to his visit to Fontainebleau. There, in the royal palace, the Egyptian group sees “a column built in the shape of a pyramid” engraved with the names of the Bourbons. This vision offers to al-Ṭaḥṭāwī the occasion for a digression on ancient monuments, Egyptology and the Pyramids: “It is customary among the Franks to write such inscriptions, after the fashion of the ancient Egyptians and other people. Look at how the Egyptians built the temples and pyramids of Giza. They built them as monuments to be seen by those who would come after them”.⁴⁷ He also meditates on the presence of

44 Colla, *Conflicted antiquities*, 130–131; Abu-‘Uksa, “Imagining modernity”, 677.

45 *Takhliṣ al-ibriz*, 27; tr. Newman, *An Imam*, 111.

46 *Takhliṣ al-ibriz*, 28–29; tr. Newman, *An Imam*, 112–114.

47 *Takhliṣ al-ibriz*, 273; tr. Newman, *An Imam*, 362.

obelisks in France and on the role of artefacts from the past in the history of the nations, asking what significance they hold both in Egypt and abroad.

Because of their [the obelisks'] strangeness, the Franks transported two of them to their countries; one was shipped to Rome in ancient times, whereas the other was taken to Paris not that long ago, marking the abundant beneficence of our ruler. I should like to say as Egypt has started to emulate the civilisation and instruction of European countries (*bilād Ūrūbā*), it is more entitled to that which has been left by its ancestors in terms of artistic ornaments and craftsmanship. The fact of stripping (this heritage) away piece by piece is considered by intelligent people to be like taking away the jewels and fineries of others in order to adorn oneself.⁴⁸

The theme of antiquities as connected to cyclical history and to the preservation of local heritage will be developed by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī in his *Anwār tawfiq al-jalīl fī akhbār Miṣr wa-tawḥīq Banī Ismāʿīl* (The glorious lights the history of Egypt and the consolidation of the Banū Ismāʿīl, 1868), a history of Egypt from the Pharaonic days onwards that consists of a re-elaboration of Latin, Greek and Arab historical sources.⁴⁹ In the section of the work devoted to the description of ancient monuments, significantly titled *On the ancient monuments (āthār) that can be seen in Egypt*, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī juxtaposes two apparently synonymous concepts: *āthār* (remnants, monuments) and *antīka* (heritage in an antiquarian sense).⁵⁰

These ancient monuments (*āthār*) are called *antīka*. The distinguished pasha Muḥammad ʿAlī issued around the year 1252 [1835] an order to put under the protection [of the state] whatever was excavated, which now is preserved in the storehouse of antiquities (*makhzan antīkāt*) under his custody. He also issued an order to forbid the export of these goods to foreign countries and the looting of the artefacts of Egypt, which have attracted the interest of other countries around the world.⁵¹

48 *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz*, 274; tr. Newman, *An Imam*, 363.

49 The title can also be translated as “The Majestic lights of the Divine help and the justification of the Banū Ismāʿīl”. The work is dedicated to two princes of the dynasty of Muḥammad ʿAlī Tawfiq and Ismāʿīl. On the meaning of the work and his sources, in particular on his use of Guizot’s *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* see Soler, “Une autre histoire”, 272.

50 On this topic see also Colla, *Conflicting antiquities*, 135–136 and Berardi, “They Call Them Antīka”, 253–274.

51 *Anwār Tawfiq*, 49.

This terminological switch from *āthār* to *antika* is meaningful; the terms are synonymous but also different. *Āthār* are part of the landscape, integral elements of the Islamic order of things and, as such, universal; *antika*, in contrast, are those specific *āthār* that are preserved, protected and controlled by the Egyptian nation. In short, they are the ones that are collected and incorporated in a museum. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī goes on to express an Islamic ethic for collecting the past in a museum. The custody of these *āthār* in a storehouse in Būlāq, a space that preserves them from the rapacious commerce of foreign and local interests, is considered an act of *maṣlaḥa*, of public interest.⁵²

These monuments (*āthār*) have to be preserved as part of our history because they bring awareness to past ages and they are witnesses to the books of revelation. The Quran mentions them and regards viewing them as an utmost good and learning a lesson from them an act of virtue (*faḍīla*). Their preservation teaches us something about the ancients, their life, the vastness of their knowledge, the inclination of their thoughts, and all those things that attract the soul toward their knowledge.⁵³

Remnants are not just trace of a distant past, but specific markers of a continuity with the Egyptian land and its Islamic past. As part of a larger vision of history as a cyclical process, the *āthār*, if properly preserved, are also a possibility for the future. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's arrangement of Islamic and European historiography and chronology, combined with an acute archaeological sensibility, shapes his complex and original approach to history. The Islamic "tradition" enters in discursive conversation, through the medium of translations, with non-Islamic chronologies and with the interest in antiquities, in order to offer praise for the Khedival dynasty in the larger spectrum of a surging patriotic sentiment.⁵⁴ The overarching theme of Egyptian ruins, those emblematic signs of decline, comes to foreshadow a national awakening.

52 *Anwār Tawfīq*, 50.

53 *Anwār Tawfīq*, 50. The arguments that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī uses to praise the value of ancient monuments (they furnish evidence for Holy Scriptures since the Quran mentions them; they remind of human fate; they manifest the great knowledge of the ancients) are the same used in classical Arab sources, such as for instance in al-Baghdādī's *Kitāb al-Ifāda wa-l-ʿitibār*. See el-Daly, *Egyptology*, 10.

54 On classical Islamic historiography see Rosenthal, *A History*, 3–17. On the topic of nineteenth-century Islamic historians, translations, and the appropriation and alternative chronologies, see Mestyan, *The Garden of Ismail's*, Eldem "Début des lumières", 268–318. On the patriotic use of historiography in Egypt, see Soler, "Une autre histoire" and Mestyan, *Arab patriotism*, 73–76. For the broad reference to Islamic "discursive tradition" see Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology".

4 al-Muwayliḥī: An Antiphrastic Use of Ghosts and Ruins

In 1899, Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī published the first episode of his *maqāma*, *Fatra min zamān* (A Period of Time) in his father's journal, *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq* (The Lamp of the Orient). It would be later published as a book with the title *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* (The Story of ʿĪsā bin Hishām). The beginning of the *maqāma* recalls to the readers' mind an entire tradition of weeping voices walking through ruins, from the *aṭlāl* in classical poetry to popular tales like the *Tale of the City of Brass*, from al-Maʿarrī's *ubi sunt* to Volney's *Ruines*.⁵⁵ The protagonist, ʿĪsā ibn Hishām, walks at night in the eerie landscape of a cemetery where old remnants of tombs evoke the passing of time.

In a dream, I saw myself walking among the tombs and gravestones in the Imam Shafīʿi cemetery. It was a brilliant moonlit night, bright enough to blot out the stars in the sky (...) As I stood there amid the graves atop of tombstones, I contemplated man's arrogance and conceit (...) his excessive desires, his idea of self-aggrandisement, and the way he chooses to forget about the grave.⁵⁶

Quotations from al-Maʿarrī's poems and images of ruins run through the *maqāma*, until the moment in which, in the midst of "such sobering notions", a ghost appears in front of the protagonist:⁵⁷

Suddenly there was a violent tremor behind me which almost brought my life to an end. In terror I looked behind me. I discovered that one of the graves had opened, and a man had appeared. He was tall and imposing, carried himself with dignity and a majestic aura, and displayed all the signs of nobility and high birth. I felt as stunned and terrified as Moses on the day when the mountain was destroyed.⁵⁸

The ghost coming from the grave, despite his majesty, is not Volney's muse of history, nor the Greek or Roman heroes of Verri or Foscolo, but a minister of war from Muḥammad ʿAlī's time, a pasha who had died just few decades before,

55 On the topic of the reformulation of the classical Arabic archetype of the observation of ruins in the work of Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī see Kilpatrick, "Literary Creativity", 30–31. See also Allen, *A Period of Time*, 28–31.

56 *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā bin Hishām*, 24; tr. Allen, *What ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*, 20.

57 In the original text in the journal, al-Muwayliḥī refers to the ghost as *shabḥ*, whereas in the collected edition he changes it *dafīn*, "The man from the grave". See Allen, *A Period of Time*, 107, n. 10.

58 *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*, 26; tr. Allen, *What ʿĪsā ibn Hishām Told Us*, 22.

who is uneasy with the “curse of modernity” at the end of nineteenth century. From his first appearance, the character faces a series of misunderstandings and problems due to the complexity of the current Egyptian lifestyle. From the astonishing fact that houses have numbers and street have names, to the clothes that he forcefully takes from ʿĪsā ibn Hishām and wears with disdain as he feels that they are poor and shabby, everything points to the comic effect of the displacement in space and time. The pasha’s own language marks his foreign temporal origins: he speaks Arabic studded with Turkish words, relics of an era when the dominant culture in Egypt was Ottoman and not British or French.⁵⁹ In short, rather than being the eternal ghost of history and progress of Volney, the Pasha emerging from the ruins in Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī’s work is a creature outside the “modern” course of time who brings embarrassment and discomfort. The *maqāma* eventually becomes more and more hilarious as the Pasha starts to have problems with the complexity of the Egyptian legal system and as he tries to find his way in a contemporary Cairo inhabited by Egyptians who try to imitate Western styles and habits.

The motif of ruins appears again in other episodes of the work. In these episodes, the ruins are not the generic sepulchral *āthār* of the opening scene, but rather they are closely contextualised in the Egyptian landscape. One episode turns around the ruins par excellence of the Egyptian past, the Pyramids.⁶⁰ The opening pages display, once again, al-Muwayliḥī’s profound knowledge of classical Arabic literature. The description of the Pyramids that the author puts in the mouth of ʿĪsā ibn Hishām echoes the descriptions of the grammarian and historian Abū Jaʿfar al-Idrīsī (d. 649/1251) or that of the already mentioned ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baḡhdādī.⁶¹ Pyramids are the most spectacular and representative among the *ʿajāʾib*, the mirabilia that bring awe and wonder for God’s creation. They are witnesses of the knowledge and majesty of the past generations but also of their decline and fall, and so they contain an *ʿibra*, an admonition or lesson, for the present and the future.⁶² Al-Muwayliḥī opens the episode with these words:

When we reached the Pyramids, we stood in awe and reverence before the landmark, one that bests all others, the mountain that overtops

59 See the first two episodes: *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*, 20–33.

60 *Miṣbāḥ al-sharḥ* 104, May 18, 1900.

61 See al-Idrīsī, *Anwār ʿubwiyy al-ajrām*, 13–48.

62 On the description of Pyramids see el-Daly, *Egyptology*, 48–49; Haarmann, “In quest of the Spectacular”, 57–67; Fodor, “The origins”, 357–358.

mountains and hills, that structure that in its pride rivals Raḍwā and Shamām. Their structure erodes the ongoing freshness of days, and their very permanence obliterates eras of time (...) They still provide an eye-witness account of man's talent for creating miracles of potential (...) and to show how such a transitory and ephemeral creature can produce such an abiding and eternal structure.⁶³

However, after this rhetorical introduction, the aulic tone transforms into one bitter irony, as the Pasha says:

In olden times when I used to treat things as givens, I regarded this structure as the crown of Egypt (...) evidence of advancement in industry, culture, and civilisation. However, now that I've been enlightened by knowledge (...) I've come to realise that it's not the way I thought; they're just a collection of paved stones and neatly arranged rocks with no benefit that I can see (...)⁶⁴

Then, the Pasha asks the Friend (*al-ṣāhib*), who joined the company if there is something else that has escaped his knowledge. The Friend answers that the Pyramids' construction is the sign of oppression of tyrannical kings who built sumptuous tombs for themselves at the expenses of poor Egyptians enslaved "in order to transport these rocks".⁶⁵ Pyramids represent in his eyes nothing but the "oppression, tyranny, enslavement, ignorance, delusion, falsehood, and futility" not only of the distant past but also of a more recent one.⁶⁶ With a subtle reference to Napoleon, he adds that "the only other use for this first pyramid I know about is that it was once used as a platform by another tyrant who climbed up it, then duped his armies with ringing words so they would be prepared to kill at his whim".⁶⁷

In the next episode, the scene moves from the open space of the Pyramids to the enclosed one of the museums of Giza.⁶⁸ Inside the Giza palace, constructed by the Khedive Ismā'īl as his harem and turned into a museum in 1889,

63 *Ḥadīth 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 299; tr. Allen, *What 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 355.

64 *Ḥadīth 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 299–300; tr. Allen, *What 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 356.

65 *Ḥadīth 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 300; tr. Allen, *What 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 356.

66 *Ḥadīth 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 300; tr. Allen, *What 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 357.

67 *Ḥadīth 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 300; tr. Allen *What 'Īsā ibn Hishām*, 357. The name of Napoleon is included in the book version of the text. The reference is to the battle of the Pyramids on July, 21 1798. See Allen, *Ibidem*, 507 n. 239.

68 *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq* 105, May 25, 1900.

‘Isā ibn Hishām, the Pasha and the Friend begin to comment on the antiquities displayed. The Pasha asks the Friend his opinion about the value of collecting these “faded relics and decaying bodies”.⁶⁹ He responds that the enthusiasm for collecting antiquity is influenced by Western interest in “archaeology” and “philosophy of history”.⁷⁰ Egyptians, however, “get no benefit at all, except that they have a museum whose contents surpass anything to be found in Europe”.⁷¹ On the contrary, according to him, Egyptians would profit much more from an investment “in the spread of education, stimulating culture by printing books archived in the Egyptian National Library”.⁷² Which is more profitable, he asks rhetorically: “putting on display a picture of Osiris or Isis, a statue of Ibis, the arm of Ramses and leg of Amenophis; or rather having at hand a work by al-Rāzī, a treatise by al-Fārābī, a chapter by al-Asfarayīnī, an essay by al-Jāhīz, or poems by Ibn al-Rūmī? By God, in our country things only work in contradictions; they always operate contrary to what’s in the public interest (*al-‘awjāj*)”.⁷³

The Friend’s bitter conclusion echoes, antiphrastically, the link between archaeology and public benefit that we saw expressed by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī. Al-Muwayliḥī’s irony and social criticism, that is central to the entire work, suggests a different use of the theme of the ruins. The author is conscious of Egypt’s imaginary of ruins, to the extent that he can play with the theme of decline and self-Orientalisation. The lesson of Volney and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī has been not just absorbed but also re-invented, and, here, used in antiphrasis. The ruins, in al-Muwayliḥī’s view, are the sign of the westernisation of customs in Egyptian society and of the blind imitation of a foreign culture by new generations.

5 Conclusions

In this essay, I presented different examples of how the description of Mediterranean and Egyptian ruins were used and interpreted in the long nineteenth century. I first discussed the ruins and antiquities treated in the work of the French Orientalist Silvestre de Sacy, who translated the thirteenth-century work of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, collaborated on the monumental *Description de l’Égypte*, and translated parts of Ibn Khaldūn’s work. Then I introduced

69 *Ḥadīth ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 307; tr. Allen, *What ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 366.

70 *Ḥadīth ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 308; tr. Allen, *What ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 366.

71 *Ḥadīth ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 308; tr. Allen, *What ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 366–367.

72 *Ḥadīth ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 309; tr. Allen, *What ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 368.

73 *Ḥadīth ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 310; tr. Allen *What ‘Isā ibn Hishām*, 368–369.

another important literary and historical work on antiquities, this time set among the ruins of Palmyra, namely *Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires*, by the famous Volney. I proposed that we interpret these works in light of the interest in a cyclical conception of history, progress and decline that circulated in different areas of the Mediterranean, such as France, Italy and the Ottoman Empire. This interest is also demonstrated by the recurrent translations and editions of the work of Ibn Khaldūn that appeared during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

I then moved from French to Arab authors through a glimpse into the vision of ruins in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italian literature. Italian intellectuals, I argue, were at the crossroad of Northern European archaeology, grand tour literature, and the consciousness of the important material and symbolic aspect of their own heritage, anticipating the feelings of national attachment that would become a characteristic of the Arab *Nahḍa*.

The works of the Egyptian intellectual and translator al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, written and published during the first half of the nineteenth century, testifies to a complex relationship with Pharaonic ruins as the author elaborates different traditions: the ruins are traces, *āthār*, that with their majesty and splendour reminds us of the magnificence of God's creation in the frame of the Islamic tradition, but they are also antiquities, *antīka*, and as such have to be preserved as a national heritage. Ruins shed light on the glory of the present and the future state of Egypt. In al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's work, the effort to preserve ruins from the rapacious aggression of European interests and to collect them in a storehouse/museum is the sign of the path toward the progress. To broaden our Mediterranean perspective, in the same years in which the Egyptian collection was created by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, the National Museum of Athens (1834) and, shortly thereafter, the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (1869) were founded. In the three cases, reconciling the legacies of their respective pasts – Pharaonic, Hellenistic, Byzantine – became a central issue in the negotiation of a local identity.

By the very end of the nineteenth century, another Egyptian author, Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī set his work in a landscape of ruins inhabited by a ghost who calls back to the memory the text of Volney. The ruins in al-Muwayliḥī's work, however, invite reflection on the discontinuities and gaps in Egyptian history. Whereas the material past described by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī traces the path toward the symbolic progress of Egypt, in the work of al-Muwayliḥī the past is a background for the grotesque contradictions of the present. Al-Muwayliḥī introduces the Pyramids and the museums of Egyptian antiquities of Giza through the words of the classical Arabic descriptions of *'ajā'ib*, but, in the end, the traces of the past remind him of the tyranny of kings of all ages, from the Pharaohs to Napoleon, and of the bad use of public investments.

Some decades later, still in Egypt, antiquities will figure predominantly in the writings of the authors belonging to the literary-cultural movement called Pharaonism (*al-Fir'awniyya*). Through their writings, the theme of antiquities was disseminated and popularised with a strong nationalist and anti-colonial spirit. Travelling to the south of the country in 1909, the Egyptian journalist and reformist thinker Salāma Mūsā (d. 1958) complains about how the antiquities fell into the hands of Europeans and feels ashamed about it.⁷⁴ Feelings like those of Salāma Mūsā evoke the words of Ippolito Laurentano, one of the protagonists of the novel of the Sicilian author Luigi Pirandello (d. 1936), *I vecchi e i giovani* (The Old and the Young, 1913), who gives voice to the author's idiosyncratic views toward foreign archaeologists in Sicily: "I can no longer stand these Teutons – said the Prince entering the museum with Don Illuminato Lagaipa – who invade with books when they cannot invade us anymore with their weapons and come to babble in our home, as if we have not had enough babbling already".⁷⁵

The ruins stand as signs of a past that participates in the present and reminds us, with their imposing presence, the discontinuous flow of time. They are not silent witnesses but are inhabited by the spirit of their time, and each time, over and over, they claim their voice in history.

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74 Colla, *Conflicted antiquities*, 156.

75 "... non posso sopportare questi Tèutoni, – disse il principe, rientrando con don Illuminato Lagaipa nel Museo – questi Tèutoni che, non potendo più con le armi, invadono coi libri e vengono a dire spropositi in casa nostra, dove già tanti se ne fanno e se ne dicono ...". Luigi Pirandello, *The Old and the Young*, 1913.

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