

ما جرى لأرض الوادي

WHAT HAPPENED
TO
THE LANDS OF THE VALLEY

BY
GAMAL AL-GHITANI

TRANSLATED BY HENRY WESSELLS

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GAMAL AL-GHITANI

« Ma Jara Li-Ard al-Wadi »

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Translated by Henry Wessells

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE : I first read this story in Cairo in 1983, and it stuck with me. In 1986 I wrote to the author from Philadelphia and received his permission to translate the tale. The formal aspects of the story challenged editors of journals to which I proposed it ; at one point I intended to publish it as part of the eighth issue of the 'zine *Temporary Culture* (still unpublished). What remains astonishing and compelling about ' What Happened to the Lands of the Valley ' is that in 1975, before anyone else, Gamal al-Ghitani foresaw the human consequences of the *infitah*, the opening of Egypt to the free market, and the impact on Egyptian domestic life of what is now called globalization. That brilliant insight, and the unflinching humanity of the story, are what make this story irresistible to me.



ما جرى لأرض الوادي

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LANDS OF THE VALLEY

No one knows when it began. It is no longer possible to narrow it down to a particular year or a specific date, but many of us remember the feelings of anxiety that arose after the promulgation of the Second Series of Executive Decrees. These granted to “ outsiders ” the right to own land in Egypt. Voices were raised in protest. Every newspaper published countless editorials against the Decrees, each paper with its own particular slant. Conferences were held, and political cartoons appeared. Short films on the controversy played in movie houses before feature films. Skeptics and resistance organizers were beaten up.

So many other things happened at the time when our lands were sold from under us, and all the documents from these years have been destroyed. Facts and truth disappeared when circulars and publications from our past were later edited and altered to conform with the official version of events.

Then, from nowhere, an anonymous report appeared. Some of us maintain that the writer was a nonexistent person, others claim that one of us, one of the original inhabitants, prepared the document while hiding in the mountains. Others think it is actual testimony from those days which had never been published before. Every copy which circulates is handwritten : some copies in elegant calligraphy, some copies in a clumsy scrawl, as though by elementary school children or adults who never finished school. Once in a while, we find phrases from the document chiseled into rocks. When a mother cradles her baby in her arms, she murmurs phrases from the text, recounting what happened. None of us knows who pays for these texts, nor who keeps the details alive in the minds of men, but when one meets one of the original inhabitants of the Valley meet, they answer :

“ Let none forget what happened to the lands of the Valley, so that all may return to the Land of Egypt. ”

DOCUMENTS AND MEMORIES

In the beginning, apartments began to be sold, then some small shops and street sidewalks¹. Word spread among us of vast sums paid in hard currency, either as an outright purchase price or as key money. Eventually, we heard of whole apartment buildings changing hands, then it was groups of buildings, and various tracts plots of land.

The number of these sales increased for many reasons, among them cheap land prices in the Valley (in spite of rising values : a square meter in the city center near the river soon reached a price of one hundred foreign Pounds, these prices were considered extremely low when compared to London or Paris or Sydney, Australia); the legal measures enacted as guarantees, as well as studies for modifications and proceedings to supplement them; the permission granted to anyone to purchase as much land as he wished.

It usually took a certain amount of time after the enactment of a Decree, before it was translated into the reality of life. A few months after the enactment of the Decree allowing foreign banking establishments to conduct business in the Valley, men passing in the streets, passengers on the small commuter buses in the city center, refugees from boredom, seekers after comfort and chance meetings in the street, we all noticed sudden activity in an old building known as the "Seven-Storey Tower". A wooden hoarding went up around it and was immediately covered with advertising posters. Then after a few weeks, the barriers were removed, and the scaffolding taken down. We saw an elegant entrance, with revolving signs in three languages, Arabic, English, and Esperanto, advertising the "International House — Specialists in Hard Currencies". Soon, all of us in the Valley referred to it as the "Seven-Storey House".

It soon became an ordinary thing to see signs selling an apartment

¹ The sale of sidewalks occurred toward the end of the Last Session, when one of the "outsiders" purchased the right-hand sidewalk of the principal street of Alexandria. At first, he forbade us to walk on it. Then he enclosed it with an iron fence, which he removed after a while. He began to rent the sidewalk to peddlers — also "outsiders" — setting the rent at one hundred pounds per flagstone (25cm x 25cm).

or a car and requesting payment in accepted currencies, such as *Stoklash*², *Rubanz*³, or *Makrul*⁴.

We heard about a new type of bread that did not make people fat and had no harmful effects for diabetics. Many of us made fun of the long, cylinder-shaped brown loaves. There were thus two kinds of bread for sale : improved bread for the “ outsiders ”, and normal, coarse bread for the masses.

Some of the “ outsiders ” offered to purchase remote stretches of desert. In the beginning, none of us calculated the danger of such sales. Old men remembered land on the outskirts of the city which had been sold at the beginning of the century for trifling prices. The price per square meter had increased thousands of times since then. Some alluded to the mineral contents of the deserts : phosphates, iron, diamonds, turquoise, and marble of unequalled purity. People prepared theoretical analyses of the secret motivations hidden in these purchases ; others published contradicting analyses. This period became known as the phase of Mutually Contradictory Analyses, but no practical measures grew out of this debate, and no definite program emerged to save the lands of the Valley.

At the end of the second year when land was being sold, the Proprietor of the Second Desert put up a giant wall completely enclosing it, a stone wall about six feet high topped with a layer of cement set with shards of glass and sharp nails to prevent anyone from crossing the wall. Large gates and wooden towers were built at intervals, equipped with electric searchlights connected to a private power station.

All this time the sale of parcels of prime land continued, at first along both banks of the river. The “ outsiders ” removed buildings which had once been considered elegant. Old palaces, marinas and agricultural harbors, pottery warehouses, sculpture gardens, sports and rowing clubs, all the cafes and casinos constructed thirty years before — all were destroyed.

After a while, we could see the new buildings, quite unlike the prevailing styles of the country. These were tall buildings, sharp, as though built

2 currency of the Union of Capitalist Nations — one *Stoklash* was valued at two Pounds of the collapsed local currency

3 currency of the Neutral Nations — international value slightly lower

4 currency of the United Socialist Nations before the dispute and schism that gave rise to two varieties

of metal, with no windows or balconies. Even though they were large, they did not take long to build : enormous cranes and huge tractors arrived, and the building was quickly completed. We would awaken from a nap to find another structure finished. It was not known what went on inside. It was said that they encompassed the whole of life, freeing the “ outsiders ” from ever mixing with the populace of the Valley. They contained cinema complexes, bath-houses, small airports — but nobody saw planes landing or taking off. Rumor had it that they contained special apparatus which emitted mysterious rays to prevent the original inhabitants from thinking. These rumors caused turmoil among the people. The newspapers published pictures of those they said were unemployed malcontents.

After a time, we, the people of the Valley, were forbidden to travel in whole sections now owned by “ outsiders ”. In rural areas, this occurred even faster than most of us suspected, in this way : the First Series of Decrees permitted ownership of fruit farms, then of vegetable farms, then the “ outsiders ” were given a free hand, with no restraint. Within the first three years the following percentage of land had been sold :

NORTHERN PROVINCES 75%
MIDDLE PROVINCES 55%
UPPER SA'IDI PROVINCES 25%
COASTAL AND OUTLYING PROVINCES 90%

The buy-out movement met with violent opposition in the Sa'id, Upper Egypt, in particular when one of the “ outsiders ” purchased the entire network of roads, both paved and unpaved. He repaved them and established a toll of one piaster per person per kilometer, on condition that pedestrians wear shoes of a special type produced by another of the “ outsiders ”. Animals were initially forbidden on the roads, but after extended negotiations, donkeys were permitted in the end.

At the beginning of the fourth year, one of the “ outsiders ” contracted to buy all the Coastal Provinces, at what was considered a very high price. The new Proprietor announced his intention to develop the beaches into year-round resorts. He planned to exploit the fishery resources contained within an area extending fourteen nautical miles, saying he would cover the world in *bolti*, white-fish, and *garousi*. Explaining that the pres-

ence of the original inhabitants would hinder his projects, the new Proprietor requested their evacuation to one of the Internal Provinces. The lower population density would create a more attractive climate for investment. Before long, all the inhabitants of the outermost areas had been resettled.

Political activity at that time manifested itself in sharply divided groups engaged in constant, bickering political analysis. Each group published its own analysis of the situation, and devoted its energies to the debate over the issue of “Emigration or Evacuation?” Unfortunately, discussions of the linguistic implications of these two words took up a great deal of time when things were happening quickly.

By early in the fourth year, all of the outlying Provinces had been completely closed to the original inhabitants. Then the largest Northern Provinces were sold. The new Proprietor began paving roads and created an enormous subdivision of square parcels of land, each one containing a swimming pool and a small stone house. He planted thousands of trees, and in every country his advertisements appeared in various languages for travel to the largest complex of swimming pools in the world. Anyone who wanted to could rent a pavilion and a pool. High-security, restricted access compounds were available for lease, equipped with apparatus to foil any attempt to photograph the residents, whether with ordinary cameras on land or using private satellite photography for a subsidiary of the big press agencies in Europe or America. This same Proprietor started a broadcast station transmitting on three short-wave and middle-wave frequencies. The music varied from hour to hour, and each program started with a special news broadcast announcing the arrival of some of the tourists who wished to have their names announced, in exchange for a modest addition to their rent. The cost varied according to the number of words in the message, and its location in the broadcast. The program included the weather report for the Province, along with the temperature of the swimming pools. The flag the Proprietor flew over his Provinces was a field of sky blue in the center of which was a swimming pool with a beautiful woman dangling her legs in the water. These developments all seemed harmless.

This Proprietor made numerous statements that he would never request the emigration of the inhabitants, but in fact he turned out to be extremely wicked, because he compelled thousands to leave their homes, and detained beautiful young girls for service in the motels and beach houses.

The Proprietor compelled the original inhabitants to dig up the graves of their ancestors and carry off the bones of their dead. He filled in irrigation canals and all the principal waterways, tore down wooden bridges, blew up grain silos and razed the adobe houses to the ground. He poisoned the calm, restful afternoon hours, uprooted mulberry and sycamore shade trees, sold the iron waterwheels for scrap, and destroyed the bath-houses.

The newspapers of the First Capitalist Bloc dubbed the district a “refuge for lovers”. One journalist wrote that a man could fly in from any part of Europe to spend a day with his mistress and return home before evening. The Proprietor established a Directorate of Health for awakening sexual appetite, with a branch for scientific research to study methods of increasing enjoyment. He also set up the most extensive air-conditioning system in the world, using innovative methods to generate freon gas directly in the atmosphere. The project supervisors explained that within four years the climate would have changed, and air conditioning would no longer be necessary.

This “outsider” then purchased all the romantic places in the Valley, shadowy pillars and isolated gardens, all the softly-lighted streets and the quiet beaches along the Nile. Emotions became scarce, passions fizzled. Youths of the Valley were forbidden to hold their girlfriends’ hands except in places owned by the Proprietor, where it was always expensive. These were difficult times for those in love in the Valley. One newspaper issued a plea for the sake of love among local people, but none of the “outsiders” paid any attention.

After some months the Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Provinces were sold. These contained the tombs of the great saints of the country, its protectors and former rulers, pilgrimage sites for the afflicted. We rebuilt alternate tombs in remote places.

Photographs showed the signing of the Agreements, where the new Proprietor could be seen seated, smiling, while a bureaucrat flips through the pages of the Agreement. The new Proprietor of the Fourth Province issued a statement, the text of which follows: “I am pleased to announce my intentions to establish the world’s largest plantation devoted exclusively to the raising of mangoes. We will develop varieties that are without skin or pit.”

Old farmers flexed emaciated fingers and scowled, trying to imagine the enormous profit which these mangoes would yield the Proprietor of

the Province, comparing it with the former harvest from a *feddan*⁵ planted with trees. No matter how much we struggled, we would never arrive at the true figure, because we still reckoned in the collapsed, local currency. It was even difficult for us to imagine the different varieties of mangoes that the land would yield in this new era, because the entire production was exported. All of these had little round stickers with the new owner's name in various languages. In response to questions, the new Proprietor said that naturally he would never forbid the people of the Valley from growing mangoes, but we understood from these words that our varieties of mangoes would be rejected, with their slightly blotchy skin, and irregular shape and size, all deviating from the standard for export fruits.

In the middle of the fifth year, one of the "outsiders" managed to purchase two entire Provinces, but never made his intentions known. He was a very wealthy man, who owned several airplanes and an enormous yacht. He also owned a submarine with glass walls, in which he spent much of his time observing the wonders of the sea. The Proprietor seemed only to want to purchase the Provinces, to put his name on them, and to come a day or two every year and wander around, at every moment repeating in a loud voice, "This is my land, mine!" His greatest dream was to purchase the entire planet, and to expel humanity into outer space. He was unmarried and had no heir. One odd thing is that he minted his own currency, to circulate in his Provinces among the few people remaining for security and maintenance purposes. A rumor went round that he had offered to buy the entire population of the Indian sub-continent, but we never knew if this was true.

The strangest of the "outsiders" the country ever knew was the purchaser of the public toilets. It was announced at the end of the fourth year that all the public toilets, located in squares, movie-houses, mosques, and courthouse buildings, had become the property of a foreigner. The Proprietor declared his intent to rebuild them, to maintain constant cleanliness, and to improve their comfort. One day he had suffered from a digestive disorder while out walking, and was distressed at being unable to find a toilet. He had joked to himself about buying all the public lavatories. Of course, the new Proprietor fixed an entrance fee so steep that poor "outsiders" could not even afford it.

⁵ one hectare or two and one-half acres (translator's note)

Matters became worse still for the poor of the Valley. One of these investors bought the drainage ditches, irrigation canals, dams and weirs. He decided to upgrade the irrigation system, but he simply diverted the waters to the lands of the “ outsiders ”. This was when talk began of selling the Nile at public auction. After a massive advertising campaign, a date was set, and a minimum reserve price announced. In honor of this occasion books about the river appeared, followed by radio and television specials. These were devoted to the history of the river, its strategic importance, the civilizations which evolved on its banks, and an analysis of river water, with discussions of its usefulness and benefits to health. Emil Ludwig’s book was reprinted, and the one by Dr. Muhammad Iwad Muhammad. New editions of *The Nile in Arabic Literature* appeared, as well as many others. A documentary film, made years before by the Canadian producer John Feeney, was revived and used as public relations material.

It is interesting that the auction itself lasted less than half an hour. The river was knocked down in the end to the same investor who had purchased the waterways and agricultural canals. Some of us began to think that the whole thing had been rigged, that enormous sums had changed hands and the auction was only a smoke screen.

THE HISTORIC AUCTION OF THE NILE VALLEY

At precisely ten o’clock in the morning, foreign correspondents were permitted to enter the Capitol. They sat in the circular balcony surrounding the chamber. One photographer from each newspaper descended into the Hall, where their identities were verified. Off to the right, a platform had been reserved for various celebrities, most of them “ outsiders ”. To the left hung a vast relief map, the river’s tributaries and slender course resembling an X-ray picture of a skeleton. Large photographs lined the walls, depicting various views along the banks of the river. Banners in many languages faced the journalists’ balcony, with slogans and texts such as these :

“ The Nile Valley was known at the dawn of history by the name Haaby. ”
“ The river itself was worshipped until the end of the pagan era, and Ancient Egyptians often referred to it as *Yar’u* or the Great River. ”

“ In The Torah, the Nile is referred to as *Bi Ur*. ”

“ In the Odyssey, the Nile is given the name *Ægyptus*. ”

“ The Glorious Qur’an designates the Nile as the *Yamm*: ‘ Cast him into the *Yamm*, and fear not, nor grieve ! ’ ”

“ The surface area of the Nile basin from source to mouth is 2,867,718 square kilometers or 1,207,227 square miles. ”

“ Whoever drinks its waters will one day return again. ”

This last banner was considered merely tourist propaganda. Other banners listed additional facts about the Valley, the sources of the river, its course and tributaries, the dams built at each of the Cataracts.

The bidders entered and stood about a railed circle. In the center, there was a small desk on a dais. Behind it sat the international auctioneer, a well-known specialist in rivers. In the corners of the Hall were four main raised platforms, each one supporting a television camera team and a documentary crew.

The auctioneer delivered a speech on the special characteristics of the Nile, its advantages, its place among the rivers of the world. While he rambled on, the announcer commented :

“Ladies and gentlemen, we’re watching here in this historic moment the beginning of the great event . . . ”

The auctioneer said that the sale would include the flowing water in the Valley, up to the mouth. The Proprietor would sell water to all Provinces and regions. He would have the right to determine price and quantities.

The correspondent for Stakuza News directed a question regarding fishery resources.

The auctioneer said that all the fish within the river would belong to the owner, as well as the plants and bushes which grow along the banks up to a distance of one meter from the water. The Proprietor would have the right to regulate and confiscate sailing boats and skiffs which float in the river. He would be able to forbid the original inhabitants from fishing or from using the river for recreation.

The Kolonia broadcast representative asked about the weirs and dams.

The auctioneer announced that every stone erected above the river would belong to the new Proprietor.

The scientific affairs editor of the technical magazine *Latriata* inquired about islands located within the Nile.

The auctioneer said that all lands lying between the banks of the river would be the property of the Proprietor of the river, as well as any increase in the watercourse. Any new islands that appear will become his property. He will have the right to protect his river in any manner. All constructions falling within one meter of the river's edge will belong to him, along the entire length of both banks. Specifically, the promenade running along the river will belong to him as well.

The Reuters correspondent asked about any projects which might be greeted with resistance.

The aged auctioneer laughed, wondered aloud about the nature of the resisters, and concluded: "The Proprietor will have absolute freedom to conduct himself as he wishes."

The sale began. The auctioneer announced the reserve bid. A silence filled the Hall, and spread outward through all parts of the Valley. People everywhere gathered around electronic loudspeakers. Old men remember that a hot wind blew, carrying fine reddish dust that changed the sky to fire. A lamentation was heard. People clamored, some even fainted at the moment of the auctioneer's shout:

"Largest of the world's rivers, who'll buy?"

The original inhabitants heard a voice shout in English, followed by the auctioneer's call:

"Historic opportunity, who's buying the river that started civilization after civilization, that is Life itself!"

Another voice screamed out a bid. The television announcer's voice responded:

"People of the Valley, see how much your river is worth!"

A voice rang out in the local Arabic dialect, calling out a figure about twenty-three minutes after the start of the auction. The television viewers saw him, observed his features. He was the only one of the original inhabitants who attended the auction. Everyone wondered who he was. How had he come into the auction? Where did he get the money? Immediately after he spoke, a confident voice spoke up, mentioning a figure that far exceeded all previous bids.

"Going once, going twice, thrice . . ."

As the small ivory-handled hammer swooped down over the desk, the announcer shouted :

“ This is an historic moment, unequalled in the history of mankind ! ”

Cameras flashed. The new Proprietor of the river smiled for the journalists. The Secretary of the Hard Currency Foundation ⁶ left his box and shook hands with the Proprietor, embracing him.

In this instant, a vast sadness spread through the Valley. People began wandering aimlessly. Some claim that the dead groaned in their graves, that people heard their lamentations through the night. The level of the Nile rose from the flood of tears shed. A rumor that no one would be permitted to see the river without a special permit. Its waters would be bottled and exported. The careworn and griefstricken would come no more to its shores, nor would it be accessible to those fleeing depression or illness. The original inhabitants would even have to search for other sources of water to slake their thirst and fill their needs. The evening papers discussed the great event and inevitably warned against idle chatters and narrow mindedness. At dusk, silence spread through the Valley shrouded in pain.

One week after the sale of the river, the “ Association of the Proprietors of Egypt ” ⁷ was formed. The auction is considered by scientific historians to be the watershed between the two periods, not, as some have

6 For complete information about the role of this Foundation and its responsibilities in events in the Valley, consult the *History of Hard Currenct in Egypt*.

7 Apologists have said that the expression “ outsider ” should not be applied to the new Proprietors, because of their love for the country. The proof of this is the amount of money they have supplied for investment purposes. Furthermore, within a short while they would become more Egyptian than those who have lived for thousands of years on the banks of the Nile. This is a special attribute of Egypt, which embraces all those coming to her, and absorbs them. In addition, a study was released showing the capacities of the Valley for absorption, indicating that the Proprietors would develop a spirit of nationalism. These apologists noted further that the lands of the Valley had been owned by individuals at several times in the past, mentioning Pharaoh and the high priests, the Romans, the Persians. They concentrated on the Mamluke period, during which the Sultans divided Egypt into twenty-four sections distributed among themselves, their commander-princes and armies. Later, when Muhammad Ali Pasha assumed power, he had seized all the lands and distributed them among his own men. Unfortunately, nothing remains of any of our responses to these justifications.

contended, the day when representatives of the “ Association of the Proprietors of Egypt ” stood before the Supreme Council of the United Nations demanding the evacuation of the original inhabitants.

**TEXT OF THE MEMORANDUM
PRESENTED BY THE
ASSOCIATION OF THE PROPRIETORS OF EGYPT
TO THE
SECURITY COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

We, the Association of the Proprietors of Egypt present a petition of eviction against the inhabitants of the Valley on the following grounds :

The undersigned have entered into possession of all the lands of the Valley prior to this date : it has become our property to the last inch, without exception. Immediately after title changed hands, we began to carry out projects of the type in which humanity rejoices, yet difficulties arose to hinder all our efforts. The population increased with such rapidity as to create a burden on local productivity, and to diminish the capacity for export. The inhabitants refused to carry out any suggestions to limit their propagation. This situation obliged the Proprietor of the Seventh Province to enact a private resolution to sterilize every man remaining in the Province, which was greeted with derision and acts of premeditated sabotage. Similarly, serious events occurred in the International Swimming Pool Province, where local inhabitants committed hostile acts, including robberies of the swimmers, thefts of leftover food, the circulation of opposition literature, and threats of criminal activity. One of these inhabitants confessed to participation in a conspiracy to poison the waters of the Nile. Our Security Forces were able to impound the substance the conspirators intended to use. Included as Exhibit A is a photograph of this criminal conspirator.

In response to arguments stating that the Proprietor of the river has forbidden water to the original inhabitants, we reply that the

river is considered his property, free and clear. He paid its price in hard currency, in Stoklash, check number 8983852, drawn on the Paris branch of the International Creative Bank, Limited. He has completed the improvement of both banks of the river. As a result of recent discoveries of unique medicinal properties, the waters of the Nile are packaged in one liter plastic bottles and exported to all parts of the world at a purely nominal price in comparison with production costs. These inhabitants did not discover such properties during thousands of years, nor allow the world to reap the benefits. In spite of this, the Proprietor did respond to the humanitarian appeals directed by the Great Powers. Even though the loss of a single drop diminishes his profits, he decided to permit the inhabitants a quantity of drinking water for a period of one year, beginning last month, until other sources of drinking and bathing water are found.⁸

“There is no denying that the density of population within limited areas⁹ gives an opportunity for germs to multiply, which is harmful to world health, and harmful to our projects. It is thus necessary to clear out these enormous numbers, and to transport them to other regions of the world where their energies are needed and their numbers welcome.

8 A few notes are necessary to clarify this petition: after the Proprietor of the river cut off the waters from the inhabitants of the Valley, illness spread and millions died. All efforts to find alternate sources of water failed. The First Socialist Bloc brought the matter before the Security Council of the United Nations. The Second Socialist Bloc, however, vetoed all discussion of the matter. (This action must not be interpreted as adopting a hostile stance towards the original inhabitants, but rather has its roots in the old ideological dispute which divided the Socialist camp into two antagonistic groups, each one of them taking a stance in light of this old dispute, disregarding any other considerations.) During the debate, a letter from the Proprietor of the river announced his response to humanitarian appeals; he seized this opportunity to advertise his projects from the international podium, broadcasting the prices of bottled Nile water and of overnight accommodations in floating hotels, and inviting all the delegates to visit the river. His statements were subsequently denounced by delegates of twenty-four nations, who said that their intelligence units had contradictory information.

9 After the establishment of the Association of Proprietors and the beginning of the emptying of remote districts, inhabitants were restricted to designated areas, and they were not to move outside them except by special permission.

Our demand is strengthened by recent scientific discoveries that stress the depth of the historical ties of the Proprietors to Egypt. Some of the inhabitants of the Valley have attempted to disseminate propaganda stating that the Proprietors of Egypt are alien to the Valley. Putting aside for a moment our firm belief in the sanctity of Property, we hereby announce a summary of discoveries confirming that the bonds of the Proprietors of Egypt are older than those whom some have called 'original inhabitants'. It is no mere coincidence that every Proprietor left the country where he was born and came to Egypt to buy land, invest money or establish some project. Every one of them hastened to return to the nation of his ancestors. This fact must be understood by the world : the principal Proprietor in the Valley, the Proprietor of the Nile, its irrigation and drainage canals, weirs and dams, is able to trace his remotest origins to a member of the Fourth Dynasty of the Pharaonic state six thousand years ago. His ancestor at that distant epoch was Ankh-Mat, President of the Council and overseer of irrigation matters in the Valley.

Exhibit B consists of a photograph of the tablet discovered by the archaeological expedition under the leadership of the eminent Egyptologist, Maître Madd. The team spent two full years conducting research and excavating in the area of the famous Pyramids, after their ownership was transferred to the Proprietor of the Second Province. The tablet contains the names of the family of Ankh-Mat, which held the Presidency of the Council and the supervision of irrigation until the Ptolemaic period. With the evanescence of the Pharaonic civilization, one portion of the family emigrated to Phoenicia, and subsequently to many other countries, the last of which was the country of origin of the present Proprietor. His Excellency retains many of the papyrus scrolls passed down from generation to generation, summarizing the goal of his noble family : the restoration of its ancient glory. Other important documents to be presented to the commission clarify the facts that the Security Council intends to determine. Aside from the legal weight of these learned documents, there is no doubt that they will cause a great uproar in the historical sciences. These texts will be a tremendous

improvement over the erroneous information which has predominated in history books until now.¹⁰

We, the Proprietors of Egypt, in view of the arguments presented above, demand the eviction of those who refer to themselves as the ‘original inhabitants’, so that justice be served.

VARIOUS INCIDENTS

After deliberations and discussions during which one of the members became agitated, pounded on the desk in anger, and threw down the simultaneous translation headphones, the Security Council of the United Nations issued a decree confirming the eviction of the original inhabitants from the entire Valley. They were to be transported to distant parts of the world, as long as the number transported to any one place did not exceed a specified number. The Member-nations of the Security Council would bear the expenses.

The Security Council relied on numerous documents, including the *Eviction Report* prepared by the intelligence unit of one of the First Capitalist Bloc nations, as well as eloquent testimony from the Association of the Proprietors of Egypt. After the announcement of the Decree, delegates of the Second Socialist Bloc left in protest, in spite of their opposition to the First Socialist Bloc in earlier sessions, in accordance with the conventions of their ideological dispute — since in this instance, representatives of the First Socialist Bloc remained, which was seen as approval of the Decree.

On the same day, Executive Measures established a United Nations Committee headed by the foreign minister of one of the great neutral nations, a man of international stature. The Committee’s mission was to conduct an inventory of the inhabitants in preparation for their removal. In

10 The delegate of the Union distributed a number of pictures of the archaeological tablet. In the center was a long cartouche, within which there were hieroglyphic characters. On either side were two persons in the familiar stance of ancient Egyptian images, where the body is turned to the front but the head is seen in profile. Each of these figures extended its hands to touch the cartouche. On the feet of the left figure were traces of light red coloring. It was clear that the tablet had been affected by the forces of time.

addition to the Committee, a Sub-committee was formed for administrative purposes, comprising a specialized cadre of representatives and experts in population issues, health, and transportation.

Two weeks later, the United Nations Committee for the Inventory of Egypt started its task in the Valley. During its sojourn, the Committee drew upon the resources of the private security units established by each Proprietor in his sector. Within the space of one month of interviews, inspections, and travel, the Committee prepared and submitted its detailed Inventory Report to the Supreme Council.

REPORT OF THE INVENTORY OF EGYPT

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
70,000,000	People of the Valley, including men, women and children : 40 million females (15 million virgins; 20 million women of childbearing age ; 5 million post-menopausal) <i>and</i> : 30 million males (15 million suitable for employment in all forms of hard labor, such as killing, war, mine work, stone quarrying, as well as crude mental tasks. Many of these have engaged in widespread acts of destruction and a great number have been killed ; 15 million infants and youths).

The following numbers do not add to the total census of the People of the Valley, but rather define the most important classes and their numbers :

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
One Million	Engineers, Medical Doctors, and Researchers in various scientific disciplines, who have been obliged to perform work unrelated to their original professions after the arrival of vast numbers of “ outsiders ” with the same qualifications.

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
100,000	Playwrights, Story-tellers and Thinkers. Hermits and Ascetic Dervishes. Sailors, Seamen, and Captains.
70,000	Reciters of poetry and folk songs ; provokers of <i>ooohs</i> and creators of sighs. Most of these composed poetry after the sale of the Nile. *
Tens of Thousands	Silversmiths; Painters; Builders and Tanners. Miniaturists and Woodworkers. Specialists in growing violets, designing gardens, raising jasmine, growing willow, blue eucalyptus, sycamore, and olive-trees, training grape arbors, pollenizing date-palms and tilling the soil.
A Few Thousand	Tentmakers; saddlemakers ; mother-of-pearl mosaic workers ; minaret, shrine and mosque builders ; crafters of metal crescents, sun banners, church bells, and prayer niches ; dike-patchers ; weavers of wool, silk, and muslin.
Hundreds	Master craftsmen and specialists in : steel-smelting, ironworking and metal-forming ; canal digging ; bridge and masonry arches ; tunnelling ; splitting date-palm stumps ; aviation ; purifying the soil from disease ; prophesying the future ; digging coal-mines and phosphate pits ; driving trains ; investigation ; and specialists in the writing of reports.

This comprises the human inventory.

* The most famous of them is a blind player of the *rebaba* or two-stringed folk-violin, who wears a *gallabiyya*. His voice is very strong : when he stands at one edge of the Valley in the evening, he can be heard at the other edge. He recites folk poetry and preserves the names and memory of all those who have ruled Egypt, the Muslim holy men and their miracles, as well as the Christian saints, all of whose graves have been destroyed in recent years.

BUILDINGS AND DURABLE GOODS

Countless houses of various types: multi-storey houses; old palaces; gardens; thousands of residences built of adobe; mausoleums of saints and pious men; places of worship for the poor; hospices; pyramids; archaeological sites and temples from pre-Islamic eras, from the Pharaonic period, the Ptolemaic, Roman, and Coptic periods; tablets, mummies, clothing thousands of years old which looks as though woven yesterday; caverns with painted walls in the bowels of the mountains; millions of split date-palm trunks used as bridges over distant irrigation canals, or as pillars supporting roofs, as benches furniture, and fences.

Ovens; skiffs; ocean-going freighters; harbors; literary works; poetry of diverse epochs, forms and meters; uncounted quantities of folklore, cultural heritage and beliefs; melodies and popular songs; a limitless number of domesticated animals used by the inhabitants when they still engaged in agriculture: cattle and water buffalo, donkeys, camels; dogs and cats; numerous types of wildlife in distant regions in danger of extinction before the formation of the Association of the Proprietors of Egypt.

This is the result of the Inventory; interpretation of these data is necessary before beginning to transport the inhabitants and to clear the lands of Egypt.

(Signed, The Committee for the Inventory of Egypt)

SUBSEQUENT EVENTS IN THE LANDS OF THE VALLEY

The reactions of the original inhabitants differed widely after the sale of the Nile. The anniversary of the auction became a day of mourning. A fire ignited in the souls of the *fellahin*¹¹ after they were driven to the edges

¹¹ Egyptian peasants, smallholders; *fellah* in the singular (translator's note).

of the Valley. They grieved for the river, for the irrigation canals and drainage ditches, and memories of planting-time and the growth of their crops, afternoon walks over the bridges, the smell of *mulukhiyyah* at noon-time, the calls of birds and frogs, the joy of the coming of the Festivals, going to visit the cemeteries, scratching in the dust when sitting cross-legged, pulling the weighted sweep of the irrigation buckets, the squeaking waterwheels, the intermittent whistling of the millstones, the smell of figs along the sides of the roads, the rustling of the date-palm leaves.¹² Illiterates recited poetry that brought tears to our eyes. Some of us called out to dam the river with our bodies, asking: “Will the Nile still give as it has each year, now that it has been sold?” Hunger was widespread: fathers tried to sell their sons for a sack of flour, and there was no one buying.

Our response to the sale of the river included passive resistance and violent opposition. Prior to the sale, the youths of the Valley organized a campaign to gather an enormous sum of money to enable them to enter the auction, and keep the river as their possession. The ultimate goal, if they acquired the Nile, had been to control the possessions of the “outsiders”. In spite of the divisive preoccupation of the political parties with their attempts to define the concepts of the campaign, all of the original inhabitants participated in the campaign to save the Valley except the real-estate brokers and stock speculators, and those who had adopted foreign nationalities in order to invest their money after the right to undertake projects was restricted to “outsiders”). Everyone participated — intellectuals, scientists, the “good people”, those who sat in doorways counting over the hardships of time, insomniacs in bedrooms measuring thoughts of what the morning would bring, those stumbling under casks and bales and all other types of burdens, those whose skins are blackened from the succession of heat and cold on their naked bodies, men whose arms alone power their boats, those who pack brick upon brick to raise up a wall, those who climb scaffolds, those who till the soil with sweat.

The amounts donated varied from a few counted piasters to a million dollars sent by some of the original inhabitants living in the West. On the day of the auction, one of the youths appeared and paid the required

12 After the sale of the Valley, all date-palm and doom-palm trees were uprooted. No explanation for this was ever given.

deposit. To this day the “ outsiders ” do not know how such an enormous sum of hard currency had been made available to him. The matter has remained an embarrassing mystery to the Association of the Proprietors, and their search continues to this day for the youth who spoke in the local language in the midst of the auction. Rumor has it he is very intelligent, speaks eight languages, and that all the information he gave about himself is false. All his documents had been forged by one of the original inhabitants.

The youth’s voice was heard three times during the auction : first, inquiring about the amounts bid ; second, when he raised the bid a trifling amount, twenty four minutes after the start of the auction. His bid was followed by that of the present owner of the Nile. The third and final time, twenty-six minutes after the start of the auction, he called out a figure which analysts now believe was the highest he could afford. He withdrew and disappeared. Neither the evening nor the morning papers mentioned him in any way. His words have been edited from the minutes of the auction, and his speech and presence removed from tape-recordings and films of the auction as well.

A folk legend tells of his flight to the mountains to lead determined men who had never admitted defeat, and who will regain the Nile by force. No one knows how the collected money was finally spent. This has stirred up concern among members of the Association of the Proprietors of Egypt. Mysterious violent acts followed. Suicide squads appeared, men and women convinced that their lives had become meaningless after the sale of the Nile, and the death of their families from thirst. They attacked the newly purchased lands, set themselves on fire, stormed installations. When the waters of the river were denied to the inhabitants, thousands and thousands died daily, but the spirit of the people was not extinguished.

Some of the sons of the Valley who had travelled in earlier times made tremendous efforts to attract the eyes of the world. Their campaign reached its climax at the same time as archaeologists working for the Association of the Proprietors of Egypt concluded their alteration of the known history of the Valley. This amounted to a reinvention of the hieroglyphic language, and the overthrow of everything since Champollion had deciphered the Rosetta Stone. The archaeologists could depend on the absence of any living native speakers of the language, and thus a lack of precise meanings.

At this time, too, the Proprietor of the Ninth Province, formerly

Sohag, finished his private project, the building of an artificial mountain. He announced that he would cover it in snows and forests. It would become the most beautiful of the world's summer resorts. He established an architectural competition with a prize of one million *Stoklash* for the most beautiful design. At this same period, the son of the Proprietor of the Fourth Province was married to the daughter of the Proprietor of the Second Province. The campaign of the sons of the Valley, however, bore fruit in a broadcast confronting the "outsiders" with a situation they had not expected.

TEXT OF THE BROADCAST

We, the sons of the Valley transmit to the world:

A short while ago the Association of the Proprietors of Egypt presented its case before the Security Council of the United Nations, demanding that our People be evicted from the Valley. Disregarding for a moment their fraudulent propaganda, their alteration of legal documents, their falsification of history and their claims to be the earliest occupants of the Valley, we declare the fundamental untruth of the legal argument on which they rely in establishing their claim for eviction. They allege that the entire Valley has become their property, and that they have set aside a portion of their holdings for the remaining inhabitants to live on. We state that this allegation is false. The truth is that the lands of the Valley are not entirely their property. There is one *feddan* which is still the property of its original owner, located in the Sa'id, Upper Egypt. Its owner had been subjected to pressures and countless enticements, but it is now guarded by the divinely protected people of Egypt, and known among all as the "Land of Egypt". No matter how modest the extent of this land, it invalidates the argument on which the "outsiders" have relied, and thereby annuls their claim for eviction.

THE LAND OF EGYPT

The announcement of the Sons of the Valley came as no surprise to us, the people of the Valley. For some time, we had begun to hear sayings about this *feddan*, first as a delusion, as a rumor. These whisperings increased after the sale of the Nile. The inhabitants of the Upper Sa'id said that they knew this *fellah*, the owner of the "Divinely Protected Land of Egypt". He was poor, and had owned only this piece of land, passed down to him from generation to generation. He was an old man, the patriarch of a large family, so old that no one knew his age. We started hearing legends that he was more than a hundred and fifty years old, but his hair was still black and his posture erect, his teeth had not fallen out and he still worked daily, sowing grain, smoothing over furrows in the ground, pulling out harmful weeds.

The folk sayings and proverbs about him say that ferocious bulls grow calm in his presence because he never frowns and has no worries. He knows stories and tells unusual anecdotes. He knows all the towns of the Valley and their lesser villages, the families of the Valley and their members, their origins and the places they have travelled to. He has countless descendants, living to see his grandchildren's grandchildren and still able to father children. If he grasps the trunk of a date palm tree, he can tear it out. Years ago, he had suffered terrible pains. He went to the doctor, who told him it was the prostate. "If you can bear it, I won't remove it. I'll give you medication to ease your pain". Upon examining him, the doctor found that he was still able to impregnate a fourteen year old girl and a woman late in her life. Another rumor said that he had had four wives, and that the *feddan* had been the property of the first, but many denied this. His sons were determined warriors, leading violent actions, calling out people to fight. He had held the grandest ceremony mourning the memory of the sale of the Nile.

People headed towards the "Land of Egypt" to protect it, forming a living wall around it. When the "outsiders" cut off the water so that the crops would die and the green wither, dozens of the Sons of the Valley who had obtained advanced degrees in agriculture headed to the *feddan* that was the "Land of Egypt", and invented ways of ensuring its continued irrigation. We do not know what they did, but some say that a spring burst

forth to irrigate the crops, and to ease the thirst of its owner and those who protected the land. When the fruit grew, words appeared on the skins, “ May God protect the Land of Egypt ”. When the trees shook, they did not whisper or rustle, instead, the call of “ May God protect the Land of Egypt ” was heard.

When sandstorms blew from the mountains, they changed their course around the *feddan*. In the glaring sun, clouds moved in to cast shadows over the remaining orphaned *feddan*. When the “ outsiders ” used airplanes to spray the plantings, winds carried the poisons far away. Scientists among the sons of the Valley prepared substances to counteract the effects of the poisons and crop diseases never found their way to the “ Land of Egypt ”. Many of us saw cotton weevils veering away.

When the “ outsiders ” offered a fantastic price to the old man and offered him land anywhere in the world, with up-to-date livestock, an incubating machine, and a butter churn, he refused. When they sent murderers and saboteurs, they were greeted with violence and their hands were powerless.

Some of the emigrant sons of the Valley left their homes in different parts of the world to come to the *feddan* that was the “ Land of Egypt ”. When the “outsiders” opened all the sluices of the nearby dams one night, and breached the dike opposite the *feddan* that was the “ Land of Egypt ”, countless numbers of old men, youths, and children headed there. With unending numbers of women carrying suckling infants at their breasts, they stood next to each other and grabbed each others’ arms. Mothers held their children with one arm, breastfeeding them as they pressed in with their neighbors. They pushed backwards to dam the breach and hold off the floodwaters.

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