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Modern singing sons of the Pharaohs
Transcriptions and Orientalism in a Digital Coptic Music Collection

Carolyn M. Ramzy

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Résumé de l'article

En 2009, la Librairie du Congrès, aux États-Unis, a procédé au lancement officiel de la Collection Ragheb Moftah, une exposition en ligne qui a présenté les plus grandes archives musicales d'enregistrements de musique liturgique copte et de transcriptions musicales hors d'Égypte. Moftah, un collectionneur égyptien amateur, avait missionné un compositeur anglais, Ernest Newlandsmith, pour qu'il note et enregistre l'intégralité de l'hymnodie orthodoxe. Ils croyaient tous deux que les anciennes mélodies étaient demeurées inchangées depuis leurs derniers liens avec un passé pharaonique et préislamique, quoique « enterrées sous des débris arabes et autres ornementations ». À partir de l'idée d'orientalisme stratégique de Wendy Cheng et de la mise en scène de la modernité de Timothy Mitchell, j'explore les politiques discursives contemporaines des archives sonores de la communauté copte. J'examine en particulier le rôle des archives musicales coptes dans leurs articulations avec la légitimité communautaire, l'indigénéité et l'agentivité de cette minorité politique et religieuse dans une nation majoritairement musulmane. Comment les chantres et les activistes d'aujourd'hui ont-ils rendu les transcriptions occidentales sous forme d'objets sonores avec lesquels ils négocient leur authenticité de derniers « fils modernes des pharaons » en Égypte, même sans être capables de les lire ? En tant que conservatrice principale sur ce site, j'explore la façon dont les rencontres savantes avec l'Occident ont non seulement emmêlé les discours musicaux coptes dans une téléologie de la modernité et du progrès occidentalo-centriste, mais aussi, en rivalisant avec l'Occident, les ont imprégnés d'une critique orientaliste qui assimilait l'hétérophonie et l'ornementation à des « débris arabes » représentant le signe d'une arriération.

Modern singing sons of the Pharaohs

Transcriptions and Orientalism in a Digital Coptic Music Collection

Carolyn M. Ramzy
Carleton University

Introduction

Despite his death nearly 15 years ago, amateur music collector Ragheb Moftah (1898 – 2001) is still a living presence within the Egyptian Coptic Christian community. His memory is frequently evoked among hymn enthusiasts, bishops, and Orthodox clergy as "the father of Coptic music." Over an incredible career that spanned 75 years, he is esteemed for what many regard as "saving" a Coptic music heritage, tirelessly collecting the Orthodox liturgical genre, *alḥān*, into a modern and Western music notation. It was a notation that he himself as well as a majority of community cantors could not read. Nonetheless, between 1926 to the end of his life in 2001, Moftah commissioned a number of Western composers, musicologists, and Coptic cantors to produce 16 folios of music transcriptions, reel-to-reel recordings, and finally, a major publication of one Orthodox liturgy by the American University in Cairo Press in 1998. These folios, along with the recordings, are almost all housed in the U.S. Library of Congress in Washington D.C. as well as the Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo, where Moftah founded the Coptic music department in 1954.[1]

In 2008-2009, I joined the Library of Congress Music Division to curate what had come to be known as the Ragheb Moftah Collection: music transcriptions, recordings, letters, photographs, videos, even historical maps outlining where Moftah lived, worked, and collected Coptic hymns.[2] My

1. While Moftah and Newlandsmith produced a total of 16 folios of music transcriptions, only 14 made it to the U.S Library of Congress and Institute of Coptic Studies archives. These recordings are also housed in the German Center for World Music in Hannover, Germany thanks to Raimund Vogels and Michael Ghattas who digitized these recordings.
2. I would like to thank the Library of Congress Music division staff for their

job was to fulfill a part of Moftah's dying wish: to make Coptic liturgical *alḥān* accessible to the world. This feat was made possible through an online exhibit called *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgical Chant and Hymnody* featured as a Digital Collection on the Library's *Performing Arts Encyclopedia*.[3] In a kind of salvage ethnomusicology, Moftah specifically hoped to preserve *alḥān* with an urgent reminder to Coptic cantors that their liturgical hymns were the last connection to a Pharaonic and pre-Islamic Egypt. Together with English composer and transcriber, Ernest Newlandsmith (1875 – after 1957), Moftah worked to uncover what they both believed were unchanged melodies buried under an "an appalling debris of Arabic and other ornamentation" (1932:146).

In this article, I investigate Coptic music debates of authenticity and modernity through early music transcriptions of the traditional hymnody.[4] Despite not being able to read them, how have the transcriptions in the Ragheb Moftah Collection come to represent and even construct a modern Orthodox music canon to the Coptic Christian community both in Egypt and abroad? Drawing on Wendy Cheng's notion of strategic orientalism (2013) and Timothy Mitchell's staging modernity (2000), I explore the contemporary discursive politics of sound archives in Coptic articulations of community legitimacy, indigeneity, and agency as a religious and political minority in a Muslim majority nation.[5] While Edward Said famously identified Orientalism as Europe's way of justifying its colonial enterprises by framing, inventing, and shaping the Orient as its most recurring image of the Other (1978: 1), I ask: How do Orthodox venerations of Western music transcriptions, compiled within these orientalist contexts, strategically negotiate Coptic exceptionalism and difference as Egypt's last remaining "modern sons of the pharaohs"?[6] As the principal curator of the site, I

hard work and assistance in digitizing the Ragheb Moftah Collection and their continued efforts to maintain the site. Also, I would like to give special thanks to Jan Lancaster who was my liaison during my time in Washington D.C. and whose archival sleuthing and insight provided a rich contribution here.

3. http://www.loc.gov/collections/coptic-orthodox-liturgical-chant/about-this-collection/ (accessed 5 August 2015).
4. In her work, French ethnomusicologist Séverine Gabry has also addressed issues of canonization and patrimonialization of Coptic Orthodox hymns; see Gabry (2009; 2010).
5. Sources on Coptic Christian demographics in Egypt vary. There is a wide general consensus that they make up between 5 to 20% of Egypt's 89 million people though the Egyptian government has not made an official consensus of the Copts since 1986. See Cornelis Hulsman (2012) for more about the discrepancy of Coptic statistics and census in Egypt.
6. Here, I am quoting S.H. Leeder's famous ethnography *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs:*

explore how Western scholarly encounters—including my own—have not only entangled Coptic music discourses in a Western-centered teleology of modernity and progress.[7] Rather, in emulating the West, Coptic music discourses are also infused with orientalist critiques that equate heterophony and embellishments of "Arab debris" as marked signs of backwardness. Through ethnographic research, first in Egypt and then among Canada's largest diaspora choir in Mississauga, the Heritage of the Coptic Orthodox Choir (HCOC), I illustrate how these music conversations strategically co-opt orientalist music discourses to articulate larger relational critiques of Egyptian Muslims, negotiate Coptic identity politics, and navigate exclusionary narratives of Egyptian belonging up to and following the 2011 Egyptian uprising.

Modern (Singing) Sons of the Pharaohs

Ragheb Moftah came from a prominent and educated family that, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, already worked to reformulate and "modernize" Coptic religious education with an emphasis on its ancient past. His paternal uncle and a Coptic language teacher, 'Arian Girgis Moftah, was a pivotal figure in a broader Coptic reform movement initiated by Pope Cyril IV (1854-1861) whose accession to the Patriarchal seat proved to be a major milestone in fashioning a modern Coptic political identity.[8] Nicknamed "the reformer," Cyril IV aimed to modernize Coptic tradition by textualizing much of its heritage as a response to missionary encounter and encroachment. He not only appointed 'Arian Moftah to revive the antiquated Coptic language through a more teachable and

A Study of the Manners and Customs of the Copts of Egypt (London, Hodder and Stoughton Press, 1918).

7. The field of Coptic music studies is a flourishing one with a long history beginning with missionary encounters in the seventeenth century and a colonialist intervention in the nineteenth century; see Ramzy (2009b) for a brief historical survey of Coptic music studies and transcriptions. For a more comprehensive bibliography of scholars who have worked on Coptic music, also see "Related Resources" on the Library of Congress Coptic Orthodox Liturgical Chant and Hymnody Collection: https://www.loc.gov/collections/coptic-orthodox-liturgical-chant/about-this-collection/related-resources/ (accessed 14 June 2016).
8. As a response to the burgeoning of Christian missionary schools in Egypt, Pope Cyril IV established and opened a number of schools, including the Great Coptic School, where there was a considerable shift from oral tradition to emphasis on a Coptic textual and rational heritage. For more on discussions about textualizing tradition, missionary education, and modernity in See Paul Sedra (2011: 106-128); Wolfram Reiss (1998); Sinout Delwar Shenouda (2001: 44-56).

"reformed modern style" (Shoucri 1991: CE 1302a-1303a), but to correct and revitalize the Coptic hymnody sung in the language. Working with *Abūna* Takla, one of the earliest officiated cantor priests by the Coptic Patriarch, 'Arian Moftah helped to produce the first liturgical hymnbook *The Service of the Deacons* [*Khidmat al-Shammās*] in 1859. This book was a collection of oral hymn texts that coincided with the arrival of the second printing press to Egypt, just a few years following the first press imported by the Khedive of the Ottoman Empire. As a hallmark of technological advancement and an illustration of the wedded relationship between textuality, sound, and modernity, historian Paul Sedra recounts that Coptic cantors greeted the press in song and marched it in a long procession of liturgical hymns before its arrival to the patriarchate (2011: 112). More importantly, the first book the press printed was the *Service of the Deacons* to accompany the *alhān* in Coptic liturgical services. It is no surprise then that 'Arian Moftah's nephew, Ragheb, would also dedicate his own life to the textualization of Coptic hymns, though this time into Western music notation.

Ragheb himself came of age at the turn of the twentieth century, when interest in Egyptians as a living vestige of an ancient past was at an all time high: in 1922, Howard Carter had just made the remarkable discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. And just a few years earlier, Simon Henry Leeder published the first complete ethnographic account of Egypt's Coptic Christians with the title *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs: A Study of the Manner and Customs of the Copts of Egypt* in 1918.[9] In his observation of one Coptic worship service, Leeder clearly linked Coptic Christians in a linear, continuous history with their ancient forefathers as texted exotic remnants straight out of a book:

> And as the service goes on, and one notes the significance of many of its observances, and the use of its sacred vessels and appliances, it seems that the Coptic Christianity itself might almost be a relic of ancient Egypt. That it still represents life of the early days, when Egypt had become entirely Christian, there is no doubt at all… In this marvelous country, as in no other, the book of history is continuous, and page follows page, in almost perfect order (1918: 170-171).

Despite his largely sympathetic approach, Leeder's book still echoed with orientalist prejudices and early Western conceptions of the orient as

9. It was Edward Lane's celebrated book, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) that many scholars consider as the first anthropological work on Egypt. Unlike Leeder's work, Lane focused a brief section on Egypt's Coptic Christians, though his perspective towards the Copts was much less sympathetic.

"behind" an order centered in Europe. Beginning with missionary biases of Coptic Christians as fallen brethren who were "spiritually poor" (1918: 205), many of his description mirrored broader British and French negative news of Copts as savage, uncivilized, and, contrary to his book title, quite un-modern. Listening to *alḥān* singing during one liturgical service, he writes

> There is something weird, if not almost barbaric, in the performances of the Coptic choir. The lads seem to be chosen for nothing but a faculty for learning the hymns and responses, mostly in a language they do not understand, and not for any vocal qualities or attainments…The only point they are agreed is that their duty is to make a loud noise; their grimaces show their enjoyment on their part of the services (1918: 196).

Leeder's biased descriptions were not unusual for his time. They emanated from larger discourses that Edward Said argues dominated, restructured and produced authority over the Orient by framing it as a deeply exotic and unchanging place in time as a way for Europe to come to terms with its own colonial enterprises (1978: 3). As Egyptians rattled for independence from British colonial rule by the end of World War I, these discourses only became more prominent, with scholars, writers, and archeologists increasingly weighing in on political debates. James Breasted, a noted Egyptologist, emphasized that it was the civilized world, the West, that had an obligation to keep order throughout the region, writing in a letter to his wife "God save Egypt from the Egyptians" (Goode 2007: 73). He repeatedly emphasized the risk of losing a part of Europe's own imaginary ancient past should it come under Egyptian control following independence. Said reminds us that these writing and sentiments not only constructed and reconfigured the Orient as suitable for study in the academy, on display in a museum, or for reconstruction in a colonial office, they also enabled "socio-economic and political institutions, and [their] redoubtable durability" (1978:6). In other words, European invention of Orient, as a mystified reflection of its ancient self, was also fueled by larger material and colonial investment and returns. In the end, it seems that Breasted feared the loss of a lucrative antiquity market.

Despite the inequalities of power, John MacKenzie reminds us that the encounter between Westerners and "Orientalists" was a two way street (MacKenzie 1995:108). Orientalist discourses produced by Egyptologists and archeologists inspired an indigeneity movement that a number of scholars have called Pharaonism (Reid 2002; Goode 2007; van der Vliet 2009). As an ideology among Egypt's political elite, Pharaonism pointed to

an ancient and glorious Egyptian past that rallied all segments of Egyptian society to an independent and more secular nation state (van der Vliet 2009: 283). More importantly, Pharaonism also provided a common bond between Egyptian Christians and Muslims in the face of the British oppressor, stressing a historical continuity and a shared Egyptianness that transcended religious differences. The movement gained enough momentum that, on the eve of the pivotal Egyptian Revolution of 1919, streets and protests were adorned with some of the most historically commemorative banners of the time: intertwined crosses and crescents that symbolized Egyptian unity regardless of religion. The countrywide revolution resulted in the British bestowing conditional Egyptian independence in 1922, with full independence finally declared by Egyptians in 1952.[10]

Pharaonism had a much more profound and long lasting impact on Copts than on Muslims. Following a partial independence and its protectorate status under British control, Egypt's political elite slowly turned from Pharaonism to Arab and Islamic roots to represent a modern Egypt. By contrast, many Copts continued to emphasize Pharaonic roots as a part of their modern identity in what Wendy Cheng called a strategic orientalism,

> … A form of strategic essentialism, in which those who cannot avoid being racialized as 'oriental' embrace rather than reject their stereotyping as model minorities, middlemen, inscrutable exotics, and so forth— and use their inevitable embodiment of these tropes in services of specific goals (2013: 153).

By co-opting European essentialisms as the "purer" remnants of an ancient past, Copts learned to navigate the new nationalist narratives that increasingly excluded them. In his work, Egyptologist Jacques van der Vliet argues that such strategic orientalism left its mark on many fields including the arts, architecture, and even music. He cites Ragheb Moftah's project and the growing consensus in the community of the Coptic liturgical notion as "nothing else but the sacred music of the ancient Egyptian temples, transmitted over a period of 2000 years almost without change (2009:284). While I agree with Vliet's critique here, I argue that the discursive politics of the genre is not only about oppositional binaries to foreignness, but also about intra- communal conversations about how to belong as both Egyptian *and* Christian citizens. By constructing their liturgical hymnody as an unchanging ancient canon and conceiving themselves as Egyptian's "modern [singing] sons of the pharaohs," Copts maintain a vital community

10. For details on the 1919 revolution, see James Goode (2007), Donald Reid (2002), and Jacques van der Vliet (2009).

narrative that has critical implication in today's political sphere.

Constructing a Modern Music Canon

Before moving on, it is important to briefly contextualize *alhān* here. As a liturgical genre, it is an exclusively monophonic oral tradition performed largely by a male and clerical class.[11] It is entirely unaccompanied with the exception of a small pair of cymbals (*daff*) and a metal triangle (*trianto, al-muthalath*) to keep rhythm, and is largely disseminated from male cantor to cantor without any music notation. As early as the third and fourth century, unearthed Greek manuscripts testify to the transmission of an oral liturgical genre with an indigenous notation system that acted as mnemonic aids to cantors.[12] Reminiscent of Gregorian neumes, this music notation did not connote specific pitches, intervals, rhythm, or duration, but instead reminded singers of melodic direction and melismas through a series of dots and dashes over the texts. Today, cantor-teachers (s. *mu'allim*, p. *mu'allimīn*) continue to use a similar system. Known as *hazzāt* (literally "motion" or "movement"), this local shorthand reminds Coptic cantors of the length of melismas, placements of vowels and consonants in words, as well as the upward and downward motion of extended melodies. Alternatively, *hazzāt* are also known as *kharā'it*, literally "maps," to help maneuver the terrain of hymns that are performed in an antiquated language that no one speaks today. They also moor singers during hymns that can go on for upwards of 15 minutes on a single vowel. Primarily used as an educational tool for hymn transmission, *hazzāt* notations are rarely seen in performance and this shorthand can even change from cantor to cantor.[13]

One of *alḥān*'s key features is the genre's place in Coptic eschatological perspective and religious worldview. With the firm belief that life on earth is a transient journey with the primary goal of reaching a heavenly afterlife with God, interlocutors have highlighted *alḥān* as the major

11. Mixed congregations of men and women do sing *alḥān* together during liturgical services. They accompany a choir of male cantors known as *shamāmsa* (s. *shamās*). In turn, *shamāmsa* follow a male priest, *abūna* (literally "our father") who officiates all Orthodox rites. In liturgical settings, woman cannot lead *alḥān* singing and generally do not lead *alḥān* classes with exceptions of consecrated nuns in Orthodox convents. Outside of the liturgical services, Copts also experience and perform vibrant colloquial genre as *taratīl* (s. *tartila*). Sung in Arabic, women can lead, sing, and even compose new songs. See Ramzy (2014: 160-176).
12. See Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt (1898, Papyrus 1786).
13. See Magdalena Kuhn (2014: 73; 2011) for variations of local shorthand that range from dashes and numbers to candles, flashes, and crosses.

connecting medium to both a higher place and a higher power.[14] Their sounds accompany the newborn's first initiations into the Orthodox Church through baptism, propel wedding ceremonies, and provide official soundscapes at funerary services. But death, as people have emphasized to me, is not the end. It is a new beginning of an eternal and heavenly afterlife spent in a state of musical praise, known in Arabic as *tasbīḥ*. In between these major milestones, weekly liturgical services, entirely sung throughout, momentarily lift parishioners on earth to the heavens in a kind of sung communion. Services are almost always long, running an average of three to four hours with the congregation actively singing and regularly standing. Yet despite the length, interlocutors have regularly turned to me following services to say something like "Wow, didn't you feel like you were in heaven the whole time?" In his own 1967 reel-to-reel recordings, Moftah reminds his audiences of *alḥān*'s sonic power to transfer the spirit to another realm:

> No other instrument other than this safeguarded heritage has the power or the heavenly ability that can lift our hearts and our intellect to the heaven. So let us listen to this tradition of our Church in deference, humility, reverence, and lift our hearts to the heavens (Gillespie 1967: "Arabic Introduction").[15]

In one of his final interviews in 1999, Ragheb Moftah talked about the driving force that promoted his extraordinary career as an amateur collector of Coptic liturgical hymns. He cited a Christian reformist movement that inspired the beginning of his project to capture Coptic music in Western music notation.[16] This Coptic communal reform, initiated by landed and wealthy elite, emerged as a response to a growing Egyptian agitation for independence from British occupation and as a mode to resist the influence of American Presbyterian missionaries in the early nineteenth century. Later known as the Sunday School movement, this reform aimed to "enlighten" and modernize a hereditary Orthodox clerical class, who, at this point in Coptic history, largely came from non-literate peasant classes. To achieve their goal, Paul Sedra writes that Coptic intellectuals initiated processes of textualizing a Coptic heritage, advocating for their reform's moralizing

14. This belief is not unlike those of Egypt's Sufis, who also believe in the pivotal role of sung hymns in achieving a kind of communion with God. For more on Egypt's Sufi's see, Frishkopf (1999) and Waugh (2008).
15 These recordings are available online: http://www.loc.gov/item/2009655441/ (accessed 6 August 2015).
16. This interview was actually undertaken by Albair Mikhail, the cantor who would immigrate to Canada and start the Coptic Orthodox Heritage Choir (HCOC) that would expand on Moftah's work. This interview is available online: http://www.copticheritage.org/interviews/ragheb_moftah (accessed 6 August 2015).

and disciplinary potentials. It was a process that would later significantly alter all Coptic subjectivities and religious identities. Borrowing orientalist archeological interests in Copts as the supposed and direct descendants of the pharaohs, and missionary beliefs that they were the last remaining Christian ancients, these Coptic reformers ushered in strategic orientalist narratives to lay claim both to their land and social status:

> This 'imagined' narrative of cultural distinctiveness was vital for the elite Copts of the nineteenth century, with their disproportionate influence and wealth, for the narrative declared Copts 'the most Egyptian' of all of the Egyptians. With the 'modern sons of the pharaoh' claim at hand, endorsed by the 'scientific' judgment of a host of archeologists, how indeed could a Muslim question Coptic involvement in Egyptian public life? (2011: 160).

Such discourses of belonging, exceptionalism, and later modernity, especially distilled themselves in early Coptic music reforms. In the following century, these discourses had great implications for Christian and Muslim interrelations by widening and polarizing community rifts.[17] First, early reformists borrowed Aristotelian missionary convictions that a modern [Christian] nation could only be attained if its citizens pursued a pious self both through literacy (Sharkey 2006) and through devotional and liturgical music. Secondly, much in the same way that Leeder echoed orientalist bias against the Copts, early Coptic educators reflected missionary bias towards Arab culture and Muslim Egyptians who overtly resisted Christian conversion and were protected by Khedive law against evangelization. More precisely, Copts emphasized European endorsement of their pharaonic lineage as the "purer" race, with the belief that, through intermarriage, Egyptian Muslims lacked the same racial purity as the Copts (Reid 2002: 282). These racist beliefs bordered on now outdated and deeply flawed eugenic ideas of modernity and progress. English archeologist and the first British chair of Egyptology, W. M. Flinders Petrie famously wrote:

> A Coptic village is clean and well swept, the women sitting at work in the doorways and cutting across the street. It is on the level of a civilised Mediterranean land, and not like the filthy Mohammedan village… Egypt will never be a civilised land till it is ruled by the Copts—if ever (1931: 207-208).

It was in these historical contexts that two differing Egyptian narratives of reform emerged to achieve what anthropologist Lara Deeb calls a "pious

17. In his final chapter, "The Egyptian Christians and British Rule," Leeder (1918: 327 – 343) actually argues that it was the British occupation that agitated and widened a religious rift between Christians and Muslims.

modernity" (2006): one transposed and embedded spiritual progress within the universally assumed characteristics of technological advancement, consumerism, and prioritization of individualized subjectivities; the other looked to scientific studies in archeology and anthropology to authenticate and resurrect an indigeneity movement that sought to reclaim and constructed an imagined ancient past through communal reform (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Davis 2004; Sumarsam 1992). Both discourses, however, assumed Western history, representation, and notions of modernity as central cultural determinants for the rest of the world and a basis to "stage their own modernity." By imitating a Western-inspired notion of modernity, Timothy Mitchell argues that local articulations produce a simulacrum of an assumed universal narrative of "progress." But, as he writes, "every performance of the modern is the production of this difference, and each difference represents the possibility of some shift, displacement, or contamination," (2000: xiv). In other words, in their attempt to mimic a Western modernity—here the legibility and scientific study of *alḥān*— a Coptic pious modernity mirrored an Orientalist and subjugated impression of their community. Such inherited bias against the assumed illegibility, "Arab backwardness," and improvisatory potentials of their similarly colonized Muslim compatriots folded into Coptic anxieties about colonial racism and class. Anthropologist Ann Stoler reminds us that modernity, as it was negotiated in colonial contexts and then exported back home, also emerged as part of racist and classicist categories of who belonged to empire and how (1989).[18] By constructing a modern music canon that more closely resembled their Christian [singing] colonizers, Orthodox Christians looked to managed their images and audibility within new and imagined constructions of European-ness in a colonized Egypt.

I begin with Mofath's greatest rival, an Egyptian lieutenant by the name of Kamil Ibrahim Ghubriyal, who espoused this first interpretation of a pious and specifically Christian modern. In 1916, Ghubriyal published a small music booklet called *Al-Tawqīʿāt al-Mūsīqiyah li-Maradāt al-Kanīsa al-Murqusiyya* [*The Musical Notation of the Responses of the Church of Saint Mark*]. It was part of his own reformist efforts to combat what he described as a Coptic moral decay and loss of a (religious) self in the face of cultural imports, namely the arrival of pianos in upper and middle class homes. He also hoped to counter the seducing influences of the American Presbyterian missionary education whose formidable presence in Egypt marked a shift in

18. See Ann Laura Stoler's discussion of how white settlers had to negotiate their own class biases to those in power, emphasizing their own legitimacy as rightful progeny with privileged access to property and power (1989: 137).

Coptic religious and music education at the end of the ninetieth century. He writes:

> …We noticed that this honorable religious sentiment has weakened in the last era, to the that point that it has almost disappeared from the heart due to the shameful habits that have become widely known as part of a trendy and modern-day living. (1916:1).[19]

By combining "religious traditions with modern tastes," *Ghubriyāl* proposed to restore such a spiritual loss by replacing the growth of popular love songs in Egypt, regarded as inappropriate, with transcriptions of Orthodox hymns that Copts could perform in middle class homes and communal events such as wedding and funerals. Modeling his work after missionary education, *Ghubriyāl*'s transcriptions mirrored the sheet music of imported parlor songs, transforming *alḥān* into easily played melodies without complex harmonies and only supported by octaves in the left hand. Furthermore, he also proposed modernizing Coptic music and liturgical services by adding an organ to all the churches in Cairo, mixing and matching "traditional" hymns with "modern tastes" that increasingly encroached into people's living rooms and lives outside of Orthodox worship. When he proposed to personally finance such an endeavor himself, a growing number of Coptic elite met him with outright rejection, including the traditionalist figure of Ragheb Moftah. In the end, Ghubriyal never managed to garner enough support to publish the second edition of transcriptions he had promised in his first publication, or install any organs in Orthodox Churches.

Strategic Orientalism in the Ragheb Moftah Collection

Despite Ghubriyal's monumental efforts a decade earlier, he is all but forgotten today. Instead, it is Ragheb Moftah that Egyptian cantors and activists remember, for taking a more indigenizing perspective of an Egyptian pious modernity. As an Egyptian scholar, he is also praised for his "scientific study" to "save" Coptic music from outside influence. Just a few years before Moftah's materials were presented at the Library of Congress, the late Coptic Patriarch, Pope Shenouda III (1923 – 2012), even publicly praised his transcription efforts as almost divine, due to his saint-like, ascetic devotion to his enterprise for almost all of his life:

> In my depths, from time to time, I ask this particular question: What would happen to the Coptic Orthodox hymns if God had not created

19. This is my English translation from Ghubriyal's original text in Arabic.

> Ragheb Moftah and guided him to this path? There have been many who chant the Coptic *alḥān*, each with their own way. Many of these cantors are prone to improvisation… [but] they leave the text behind. *Ustaz* Ragheb Moftah has come to anchor the *alḥān* in the church in a scientific, sound way.[20]

In his effort to emulate European scholarship and to mirror the "scientific" ordering of sound, Moftah worked for over 75 years to transcribe, publish, and standardize the entire Orthodox liturgical hymnody. In 1955, he established a Coptic Music Division in the newly inaugurated Higher Institute of Coptic Studies, and even set up a recording studio to make his own reel-to-reel recordings. There, he worked hard to iron out the "debris" of regional improvisation characterized by illiterate cantors and priests who disseminated the genre orally. Yet, as Moftah could not transcribe *alḥān* himself, he commissioned English violinist and composer Ernest Newlandsmith between 1926 and 1936 to notate the Coptic hymnody using Western music notation.

Ragheb Moftah met Ernest Newlandsmith as a traveling pilgrim friar, raising funds to support his missionary Christian ministry in England known as The New Life Movement. Coming from a long-line of clergymen, Newlandsmith had taken vows as a "minstrel of God" as early as 1908 (Newlandsmith 1927: 28-29). As a violinist and composer, he had a firm belief that the arts should bring the masses back to God, and tailored concert programs to evangelize his listeners through one-man pastoral plays (Ramzy 2009). He was also an avid writer, publishing a number of evangelical pamphlets as well as his own autobiography *A Minstrel Friar: The Story of My Life* (1927). When he met Moftah en route to pilgrimage in Jerusalem, the two must have bonded over their shared interests in music and its religious role. In exchange for transcribing *alḥān*, Moftah invited Newlandsmith to live on his docked houseboat on the Nile during the winter months and for the next decade, Newlandsmith worked with the official patriarchal cantor, *al-mu'allim* Mikhail Girgis al-Batanuni (1873 - 1957). Al-Batanuni himself learned *alḥān* from students of *Abūna* Takla, the renowned cantor who first collected the liturgical hymnody *The Service of the Deacons* in 1859. Al-Batanuni was also the teacher of the next generation of prominent singers in the Church including Sadiq Atallah

20. *Ragheb Moftah's 100th Birthday Party* [video recording] (1999), Video Recording Gallery, "Coptic Orthodox Liturgical Chant & Hymnody; The Ragheb Moftah Collection at the Library of Congress" *Performing Arts Encyclopedia; Explore Music, Theatre, and Dance at the Library of Congress* http://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200155987/ (accessed 6 November 2015).

and Farag Abdel Massih. The cantor had a remarkable career both as a singer and teacher at the Saint Didymus Institute for the Blind, where he introduced an Arabic and Coptic Braille system. But, it was after singing and recordings with Moftah and Newlandsmith that al-Batanuni also gained his title as *al-muʿallim al-kabīr*— "the great teacher" (Moftah et al. 1991).

It was in their transcription volumes that Moftah and Newlandsmith clearly struggled. Unsure what to do in order to fit *alḥān's* quarter and highly melismatic tones within the Western diatonic music scale, Newlandsmith provided simple, prescriptive descriptions of the genre in an easy duple meter. American cellist, and later music editor of the *Coptic Encyclopedia* (Aziz Atiya, ed., Macmillan Publishers: 1991), Marian Robertson Wilson writes that transcriptions often reveal more about the transcriber than the music itself. With his background in classical music and lack of ethnomusicological training, she writes that Newlandsmith "saw no need to notate nuances of pitch, rhythm foreign to the Western ear" (1987: 194) as he sought to squeeze complex and melodies into Western notation. Scribbled draft after draft in the Moftah Collection also reveals Newlandsmith's orientalist preoccupation to unearth the true ancient Egyptian sounds under what he called an "appalling debris of Arabic ornamentation."[21] Convinced that *alḥān* held the key to the roots of Western classical music and, in turn, to Western civilization, his transcriptions only captured *alḥān's* bare melodic contours. He also toured throughout Europe presenting his findings in provocative lectures. In one presentation at Oxford University, his writings echoed Leeder's predilections for Copts as unchanging ancients, though with more overt bias against Muslim and Arab musical influence:

> Be this as it may, I, for my part, after devoting several winters to first-hand research into the music of ancient Egypt, feel able to announce the discovery of rich art treasure. It is true that I have had to dig deep; for the original Egyptian element lies largely buried under an appalling debris of Arabic ornamentation. But after piercing through this unfortunate outer coat, the true Egyptian idiom has emerged. The music is not Arabic; it is not Turkish; and it is not Greek -often as these elements appear. It seems indeed impossible to doubt but that it is ancient Egyptian (Newlandsmith 1931).

Yet, contrary to Newlandsmith's refined notation and accompanying

21. Newlandsmith mentions this a few times, such as in his lecture at the Oxford University Church entitled, "The Ancient Music of the Coptic Church," on May 21, 1931. Also see his three-part article, "Music of the Orient: Recent Discoveries in Egypt," in *The Musical Standard* 37 (May, June, and July 1932): 146; 161-62; 184-85.

reel-to-reel recordings of a strident but plain-singing Batanuni, all of Batanuni's students have emerged to sing *alḥān* quite differently than the recordings in the Ragheb Moftah Collection. Instead, singers such as the most widely celebrated *mu'allim* Sadik Attalah, sang in a richly ornamented and improvisatory style that broadly resonates with Egyptian folk music aesthetics.[22] Another cantor, Farag Abdel Massih enjoyed a few ornaments, but certainly not as much as his colleague Attalah. Even today's official patriarchal cantor, Ibrahim Ayad, sings in an especially ornate and improvisatory style, indicating a dissonance between *alḥān* as Newlandsmith transcribed them to paper and what is being transmitted orally through the generations that followed.[23]

After I completed my work as curator of the Ragheb Moftah Digital Collection at the Library of Congress, I continued my field research among various cantors and choirs in Egypt. I also visited a number of diaspora communities abroad, including in Toronto, only to encounter much of the same highly improvisatory and ornamented singing during liturgical services. It seemed that non-melismatic singing was not an equivalent to modernity for everyone, but only for those exposed to western discourses of modernity.[24] As I listened to cantors and deacons deftly shape complex and melismatic phrases—all without losing the central melody of the hymn— I was haunted by Moftah's desperate fear that *alḥān* would one day die away.[25] I was further perplexed by the strange discord between Moftah's preservationist recordings and everyday lived performances of *alḥān*. Could it be possible that Newlandsmith and Moftah asked Batanuni *not to sing* the highly melismatic style as a way to filter a Coptic authenticity from an assumed backwardness of "Arab debris"? I do not know. Nothing in either of their writings indicates this. But underlying Coptic tensions, bias, and anxieties about social class as well as fears of echoing Muslim and Arab

22. Egyptian folk aesthetics are also expressed in local Sufi hymns (*anashīd*), as well as the elongation of vowels in traditional Qur'anic chant. See Kristina Nelson's discussion of the sounds of Qur'anic recitation (1985).
23. Unlike Newlandsmith, other transcribers have painstakingly tried to capture all Coptic melismas onto Western music notation; see Ilona Borsai (1968), Borsai and Tóth (1969) and Margit Tóth who later worked with Moftah (1991), and Kyrillos (2002).
24. I would like to thank Michael Frishkopf, one of this issue's guest editors, for astutely pointing out that despite reformist detours to notate Coptic *alḥān*, the oral tradition continues unabated among cantors.
25. Moftah's niece and current gatekeeper of Moftah's collection, Laurence Moftah, also vocalized the same fears when I met her while working on collection between 2008 and 2009.

aesthetics — partly inherited from a historical colonial and missionary encounters— speak to the sonic negation of these ornaments. Such a dissonance between archival recordings and lived performances continues.[26] In the next section, I address one choir whose heritage recordings have emerged as a contemporary expansion of Moftah's Collection of Coptic Hymns.

The Heritage of the Coptic Orthodox Church Choir in Canada

In 2000, the Heritage of the Coptic Orthodox Church Choir (HCOC), a diaspora group in Mississauga, Canada began one of the largest efforts to record and preserve Coptic *alḥān* after Ragheb Moftah. Directed by cantor Albair Mikhail, the choir aims to preserve the "most accurate version of the hymns." Using language that echoes with Moftah's "scientific" drive, they look to his collection as the starting point with which to complete the job. On their website, under a dated photograph of Batanuni, a part of their mission statement reads:

> In handing down the hymns, we follow a rigorous study and analysis of Coptic hymnology from Cantor Mikhail El-Batanouny [*sic*] the Great. We have access to the recordings of the Ragheb Moftah Collection of Coptic Orthodox Liturgical Music and Chants... Taking Cantor Mikhail as our root source, we attempt to single out the renditions of hymns that he has handed down to our Church, then receive those hymns and record them.[27]

As another avid collector of *alḥān*, Mikhail states that his own project began while he was still living in Egypt, after his first encounter with Moftah's recordings.[28] It was a bit serendipitous, he told me; as he was

26. In 2014, the French record label *Maison des Cultures du Monde* affiliated with the *Centre français du patrimoine culturel immatérial* published recordings with the latest Choir of the Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo with prominent cantor *mu'allim* Gad Geris. With the exception of the last recording, hymn ornaments and melismas are once again minimized and disciplined for a uniform and monophonic sound. This stands in contrast to Geris' typical ornate live performances and his reputation for musical playfulness. See the numerous video recordings of Geris on Youtube uploaded by his students and followers. For an example of his singing in a liturgical service, please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-5RfAK5VpM (accessed 7 August 2015).
27. http://www.copticheritage.org/about_hcoc (accessed 24 July 2015).
28. On October 11, 1999, Mikhail was fortunate to meet and interview Ragheb Moftah. He posted a transcription and recording here: http://www.copticheritage.org/interviews/ragheb_moftah (accessed 7 August 2015).

comparing Moftah's recorded hymns with the latest edition of the *Service of the Deacons* hymn book, Mikhail began to collect *alḥān* performed in everyday services that were missing from both Moftah's collection and the book. He not only began to look for regional cantors who may have sung his missing hymns, but also compiled text inserts in his own copy of *The Service of the Deacons*. If he could not find any recordings of a particular hymn, he travelled to make a recording himself. Before he immigrated to Canada in 1999, a friend requested a copy of his amassed collection and it was then that Mikhail realized he had been building on Moftah's work. When he settled in his new home in outside of Toronto, he not only published an updated third edition of the *Service of the Deacons* hymn book, but also started a 35-member choir that recorded and produced updated heritage recordings.[29]

Besides completing the gaps in Moftah's collection, Mikhail explained that he aimed to create a modern choir that resembled his time, a "chorus for the 21st century." As Moftah and Ghubriyal looked to technologies of textualization and transcription to negotiate questions of identity, authenticity, and a kind of pious modernity, Mikhail grappled with the genre's transition to an English speaking diaspora context. Additionally, he wanted to update the collection's aging reel-to-reel recordings with their characteristic hiss in the background. To date, Mikhail and his choir have produced 16 large CD sets, many with *mu'allim* Batanuni's refurbished recordings and English liner notes to explain liturgical rites. Also, Mikhail released three DVD productions called "Learn the Hymns of Your Church" based on his television show on the satellite and diaspora Orthodox channel, Aghapy TV. And finally, HCOC recorded one Coptic liturgy entirely in English, again based on Batanuni's recordings.[30] On their website, the choir features an extended section dedicated to long-distance learning with Coptic hymn classes addressed to an English speaking audience.[31] In

29. For a list of HCOC's CDs, books, and DVDs, see http://www.copticheritage.org/productions (accessed 6 July 2016); Mikhail wrote supplemental explanations in his own work *The Essentials in the Deacon's Service* (2002).
30. See http://www.copticheritage.org/productions/the_liturgy_of_saint_basil_coptic_and_english (accessed 6 July 2016) for an audio sample of an English translated hymn. Despite the translation from language to the other, English translated *alḥān* retain much of their musical integrity, melismas, and quarter tones. Tensions, however, do continue about language and translation of Coptic *alḥān* and community identity in the diaspora as is evident in a recent paper delivered by Fatin Guirguis, "English, Arabic, or Coptic: Linguistic Anxiety and the Challenges of a Contested Identity" in the last International Congress of Coptic Studies (Claremont Graduate College, Los Angeles, July 2016).
31. See http://www.copticheritage.org/tv_episodes (accessed 6 July 2016).

another section called "Article and Research," encyclopedic entries teach cantors about the genre's historical significance. And finally, in a section titled "Community," framed by a minute picture of a world map, cantors can connect to each other on various social media networks. In a way, Mikhail had truly fulfilled Moftah's dying wish to make *alḥān* accessible to the world. Like the Library of Congress collections, his work is disseminated as largely digital collections in the Coptic community's vast and mediated networks.

As one of the last people to interview Ragheb Moftah, Mikhail has an intimate knowledge of Moftha's work. Unsurprisingly, his own narrative to preserve *alḥān* also echoed with the same distaste that Newlandsmith and Moftah had for the genre's "Arab-sounding debris." But with Mikhail, his ambivalence begins with language, evoking the community's politics around their spoken Arabic tongue back home that replaced colloquial Coptic in the 11th century.[32] While Arabic translations worked for older generations, the director confessed that it had the potential to "ruin" *alḥān*'s original melodies. English "fit better" to the Coptic translation of the hymns, he explained to me, because of the discrepancy of Arabic sentence lengths (Personal communication 15 May 2015). Mikhail also advised his choir to produce melisma-free uniformity though it sounds quite different than the bustling and heterophonic liturgical Church singing where the choir is housed. When I pressed Mikhail about the lack of ornaments and improvisation in their recordings, he evoked the choir's mission statement to sing praises to God in unison, with one voice, and to make sure that "the tunes of the hymns are rendered without any augmentation or musical adornment."[33] To ensure accuracy in which ornaments to leave in and which to take out, Mikhail even regularly checks Newlandsmith's transcriptions despite not being able to read the music, basing his analysis on the Coptic and English transliterations below the staff.

In Canada as well as other parts of a Coptic diaspora, Coptic immigrants are wary of any Arab and Muslim inflections in their own culture, perhaps even more so than concerns in Egypt. Like Newlandsmith who looked to peel away "Arab debris" for "purer Coptic sounds," Coptic-Canadian communities also strive to eradicate any Arab associations in an effort to assimilate as Coptic Christian Canadians.[34] Drawing on broader

32. See Mariam Ayad's discussion (2012: 11-42) for a critical discussion on the discursive politics of the Coptic language and its strategic uses among Coptic elite and political classes as early as the Roman and Late Antiquity period.
33. http://www.copticheritage.org/about_hcoc (accessed 7 August 2015).
34. In the Coptic diaspora, there is a growing trend of "multicultural ministries" that look to serve congregations that are increasingly diverse due to assimilation as

undercurrents of Islamophobia in Canadian politic discourses, this trend has only intensified since the 2011 uprisings in the Egypt. While all religious minorities in Egypt witnessed a significant rise in sectarian tension following the election of Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi in 2012, these tensions came to a particular head for Copts in 2013. Following Morsi's forceful removal and replacement by military chief Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, major church burnings across Egypt shook already fragile relationships. Citing fear as well as Egypt's ailing economy, Coptic Christians have begun to leave the country in significant numbers, joining the already sizable communities abroad, including the Mississauga parish, St. Mary and St. Athanasius Coptic Church, where HCOC is based. Today, many Egyptians, including Copts in and outside of Egypt, support Sisi's heavy-handed treatment of Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters as "terrorists." In Canada, similarly biased narratives have further fanned Coptic-Canadian ambivalences about belonging to Egypt, with some going as far as to relinquish any ties to the country, including language, folk heritage, and connections to Muslim compatriots.[35] In our final exchange, when I asked Mikhail about how his work helped immigrant and first generation cantors to maintain a sense of Egyptian identity, his response was quite telling:

> It's not meant to help their Egyptianness. It's meant to help them keep their Coptic identity, I think. Not Egyptianness. We don't want Egyptian culture that has been adulterated by Arab things—Arabic culture, not language or the other things from Islam… that has affected a lot of things. The purpose, again, is to build on Ragheb Moftah [and] to be, as much as possible, a reference for the Church heritage. Whoever wants to use it, can use it. It is not for land of immigration only. It's mainly for Egypt, so that something strong remains in Egypt (Personal communication 15 May 2015).

Some Conclusions

well as interreligious and interethnic marriages. In Canada, Father Pishoy Salama established the St. Maurice & St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church (SMSV) in the greater Toronto area with the notion of stripping away both Arabic and Egyptian culture. Instead, there is a great emphasis on services in English and on a kind of multicultural evangelization. During their liturgical services, all *alḥān* have been translated into English and no Arabic is used. This includes the non-liturgical songs, *taratīl*, that follow the Eucharist. In turn, many new songs are borrowed North American Protestant traditions. See the Church's mission statement here: http://smsv.ca/our-mission-at-st-maurice-st-verena-church/ (accessed 7 August 2015).

35. For more discussion regarding Coptic-Canadian discursive politics, see my forthcoming work (Ramzy 2016).

Ragheb Moftah's vibrant legacy lives on and will continue to do so for many generations to come. His life-long work to preserve Coptic *alḥān* has long been critical to negotiations of community identity, indigeneity, and a sense of authenticity as Egypt's remaining "modern sons of the pharaohs."[36] As Ann Stoler writes, such appropriations of tradition are deeply political and strategic. They signify a colonized population's active agency to engage and resist colonial impositions, thereby transforming the terms of that encounter (1989: 135). But, as she argues, indigeneity movements are not without their double-edge. She describes how orientalist and racist discourses were part of critical class-based logics of European settlers in North Sumatra, a kind of logic that Coptic elite and political classes inherited and sounded in their own reform towards a Western-centered notion of modernity. Coptic music discourses, early transcription scholarship, and contemporary mediated performances not only reflect internal anxieties about social class but also intracommunal debates of power, agency, and modernity. While Coptic cantors and Ragheb Moftah himself could not read early Coptic music transcriptions in his collection, Moftah's volumes and reel-to-reel recordings also mirror broader cultural commentary about Coptic Christian belonging in Egypt as early as the country's first rumblings for independence from British control in the twentieth century. Today, the construction of an official Coptic music canon as part of an ancient Egyptian tradition must be reassessed within its new political soundscapes. Following the 2011 Arab uprising, as Egyptians redefine notions of civic agency and citizenry, new conditions and narratives of belonging have emerged for Coptic Christians, both in Egypt and abroad.

While Ragheb Moftah's indigeneity route lined up with broader nationalist conversations of pharaonism at the turn of the twentieth century, current Orthodox reconfigurations are negotiating Egypt's contemporary efforts to (borrowing Mitchell's phrase) stage its own modernity as a nation.[37] Yet, by constructing a music canon that washes away an assumed

36. It is important to highlight that there are certainly gender dimensions are play here, particularly since it is *alḥān*, a genre exclusively performed by male clerics and cantors that emerged as a makers of Coptic indigeneity and authenticity. *Taratīl* and *taranīm*, a popular devotional genre that is also performed and many times led by women, are undervalued for their performance in the Arabic language and their missionary history.

37. In the final writing of this article, the Egyptian military launched the New Suez Canal on August 6, 2015. Against the backdrop of growing Islamic militancy and military brutality in its fight against "terrorism," the $8 billion project is a technological feat that is considered Egypt's "gift to the world." In the words of President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, "Egyptians have made a huge effort so as to give the

backwardness of "Arab debris" to fit Western discourses of modernity, Coptic music debates inadvertently play into orientalist bias that placed them *outside* of empire and power, and that continues to do so. Mitchell writes that colonialists considered "non-West" communities to be a *tabula rasa* "whose history has to be begun, whose archives must be filled out" despite their rich oral traditions (Mitchell quotes Homi Bhabha, 2000:16). Yet, as I have illustrated, Coptic reformers strategically co-opted these orientalist discourses to articulate larger political aims about how to belong in Egypt. In fact, while Coptic transcription may have failed to capture *alḥān*'s ornate melismas, Coptic cantors continue to sing *against* them in everyday services. Despite continued disciplinary efforts to textualize a Coptic heritage in official recordings and archives, day-to-day practices contest the community's status as missionized subjects in a book. In other words, Copts use music transcriptions, not to read, sing, or remember *alḥān*, but rather to talk about their status as indigenous citizens of Egypt.

Finally, canonizing *alḥān* is not only about preserving a Coptic heritage, but is also about a local agency to segregate, define, and maintain religious and political identities. Yet, by emphasizing difference and by turning to Western music transcriptions to negotiate a separate Christian "modern" citizenry untouched by Arabic and Muslim inflections, Copts embody Mitchell's argument that every performance of the modern is the production of difference. By constructing themselves as exceptional, Copts push themselves further and further outside of Egypt's narratives of belonging. And yet, it is important to highlight one dissonance that emerges here: despite Moftah and other reformist fervent efforts to canonize, notate, and strip the "Arab" out of *alḥān*, the power of oral tradition lives on beyond purified and canonical written transcriptions. Today, Batanuni's students sing in a highly ornate, melismatic, and resonant style that quite different than Newlandsmith's transcriptions and Moftah's recordings, and more closely resembles their Muslim compatriots.[38] But, as Coptic cantors immigrate, modernist ideologies seem to take a firmer hold, with a striking desire for standardization and desire to return to a "roots source" as espoused by the Coptic Orthodox Heritage Choir. Such desires further converges

world this gift for development, constructions, and civilization" (see Jard Malsin 2015: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/06/egypt-suez-canal-expansion [accessed 7 August 2015]).

38. Ensembles such as *Ana Masry*, or *I am Egyptian*, a group dedicating to promoting Egyptian heritage and diversity, plays on these sonic similarities by regularly combining Sufi *anashīd* hymns with Coptic *alḥān* in their performances; See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5AQhgRoOVA (accessed 7 July 2016).

orientalist discourses and a push towards a "modern" Coptic church, and emerges in full force in Canada, a place where Copts live within an entirely Western, English-speaking system, with every reason to assimilate and to reject sectarian problems back home. Here, the Choir's drive to reject Arabic and to only preserve and record Coptic and English translation *alḥān* fully realizes Moftah's preservationist vision, while entangling it with exclusionary politics that continue to haunt Egypt's Christians and Muslims in Egypt and abroad. By curating the Ragheb Moftah's Collection at the Library of Congress for an online exhibit, I also inevitably curated larger relational critiques about Egyptian belonging. But, it is my hope that such a site also creates digital spaces to compare, listen, and to talk about the dissonances that emerge from Moftah's recordings and living experiences of Coptic *alḥān*, and finally, to facilitate discursive spaces to reconsider a more inclusive Egyptian heritage.

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