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Egypt in the Early 20th Century in the Light of Newspaper Essays of Tadeusz Smoleński

ABSTRACT

This paper brings to light the reports and analyses written by Tadeusz Smoleński, a forgotten source on the political history of the Middle East and particularly Egypt, in the first decade of the 20th century. Tadeusz Smoleński (1884–1909), the first Polish Egyptologist, was also a regular correspondent of the Lviv daily newspaper *Słowo Polskie* [*The Polish Word*]. In his reports, he outlines a panoramic view of Egypt's extraordinarily complex political situation, determined by tensions between the European powers, i.e., the rivalry between Britain and France, and between Russia and Germany. Another factor whose growing importance was noted by the Polish observer, is the rise of nationalist and Islamist movements in both Egypt and the Arab world as a whole. This takes place alongside the chronic political instability of the Ottoman Empire. While acknowledging all of the beneficial aspects of British rule (especially under the consulship of Sir Evelyn Baring), Smoleński does not hide his sympathies for Muṣṭafā Kāmil Bāšā, leader of the Egyptian nationalists. In his analysis, Smoleński also hints at some analogies between the situation of the Egyptians and the Poles in their ambitions to set up an independent nation-state.

KEYWORDS: Middle East studies, 19th–/20th-century history, the Ottoman Empire, modern Egypt, politics and policy, the Orient, Tadeusz Smoleński, Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer)

STRESZCZENIE

Egipt na początku XX wieku w świetle esejów prasowych Tadeusza Smoleńskiego

Artykuł przedstawia korespondencje i analizy Tadeusza Smoleńskiego jako zapomniane źródło historii politycznej Bliskiego Wschodu, zwłaszcza Egiptu,

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w pierwszej dekadzie XX wieku. Tadeusz Smoleński (1884–1909), pierwszy polski egiptolog, był stałym korespondentem lwowskiego dziennika „Słowo Polskie”. W swoich raportach przedstawia panoramiczny obraz niezwykle złożonej sytuacji politycznej w Egipcie, determinowanej przez napięcia między mocarstwami europejskimi; rywalizację między Wielką Brytanią a Francją, ale także między Rosją a Niemcami. Kolejnym czynnikiem, którego rosnące znaczenie odnotowuje, jest wzrost ruchów nacjonalistycznych i islamskich w Egipcie i całym świecie arabskim. Odbywa się to w kontekście chronicznej niestabilności politycznej Imperium Osmańskiego. Uznając korzystne aspekty rządów brytyjskich (zwłaszcza pod konsulem Sir Evelyną Baringą), nie ukrywa sympatii dla Mustafy Kamila, przywódcy egipskich nacjonalistów. Smoleński wskazuje także na pewne analogie między sytuacją Egipcjan i Polaków, zwłaszcza na ambicje utworzenia niezależnego państwa narodowego.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Bliski Wschód, historia XIX i XX wieku, Imperium Osmańskie, Egipt współczesny, polityka, Orient, Tadeusz Smoleński, Evelyn Baring (lord Cromer)

Researchers of 19th-century Middle Eastern history agree that the contemporary political, social, and economic vicissitudes of that time—and even the cultural vicissitudes, in a broad sense, of that region—were, in fact (to a large extent) an aspect of European policy. It can even be said that the East was a sort of a training ground for the politics and diplomacy of the empires of the old continent; hence, the analysis of various aspects of these events is not limited to “exotic” overtones (Inalcik & Quataert, 1994, part IV). Egypt, which connected the Asian and African Arab worlds, was a country of key importance.¹ The events taking place along the Nile (also in Sudan, which for the most part of the period was an Egyptian-British condominium, though it was in fact administered by Great Britain) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries drew the keen interest of Europe (Mitchell, 1988; Vatikiotis, 1991, part II; As-Sajjid Marsot, 2007, pp. 65–97). The news stories and comments which discussed the development of the situation in the region very frequently featured in the European and Polish press.

Tadeusz Samuel Smoleński was born in 1884 in the region of Poland, which was not a separate political entity at the time and belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. From an early age he demonstrated outstanding potential and a talent for science; he decided to study history in Krakow and devoted himself to researching the sixteenth-century history of

1 “The heart of the Arab world beats in the Egyptian capital” (Aulas, 1988, p. 139).

the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As he was diagnosed with tuberculosis in his early youth and attempts to treat him were of no avail, his family and friends decided to send him to Egypt, whose hot and dry climate was then considered beneficial therapy for lung diseases. Smoleński first arrived at the Nile in 1905 and returned there regularly until his death in 1909, spending most of the year in Egypt. He quickly “discovered” the thriving Egyptology studies, in which he found not only the potential to develop his own research temperament, but also real future prospects, as there had not yet been a Polish specialist in this field (Dawson et al., 1995, p. 398; Pilecki, 1960; PSB 2000/39, pp. 274–276; Stachowska, 1990; Śliwa & Zinkow, 2010). In Cairo, he enrolled in studies supported by the Krakow Academy of Learning under the direction of Gaston Maspero (1846–1916), an archaeologist and influential director of the Service des Antiquités (Dawson et al., 1995, pp. 278–279). Antoni Bronisław Stadnicki (1874–1906; PSB 2002/41, pp. 378–379), then chargé d'affaires at the Consulate General of Austro-Hungary in Cairo, headed by Tadeusz Koziębrodzki (1860–1916; PSB 1968/14, p. 616), also extended his direct support. Both the consulate and the Krakow Academy of Learning made efforts to recommend Smoleński to the care (and financial aid) of Karol Lanckoroński (1848–1933; PSB 1971/16, pp. 442–443), not only an influential politician of the Austro-Hungarian Monarch, but also a generous patron of science and art. In supporting Smoleński, Consul General Koziębrodzki saw a chance to increase the prestige of his institution and to secure his own promotion. The spectacular success of the Egyptologist could undoubtedly strengthen the diplomatic rank of the Egyptian post in the eyes of Viennese society, who at the time did not perceive Cairo as an area of direct political interest. In his opinion, the Austro-Hungarian court did not seem to notice the tremendously important Egypt-specific aspect of the competition between the European powers: the “race” in the scientific and archaeological exploration of antiquity. Diplomatic intrigues were no less important than the prestigious rivalries of scholars for enriching the museums of London, Paris, and Berlin with invaluable exhibits (Reid, 2003; Thompson, 2015).

After starting intensive studies under Maspero, Smoleński undertook excavations in the towns of Šārūnā and Ġamhūd (Śliwa, 2002, pp. 435–442). He promised to send scientific reports to the Academy (Smoleński, 1906c, 1906d) and some of the historical artifacts they discovered to Krakow. Apart from the Cairo Museum, the Viennese Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Szépművészeti Múzeum [Museum of Fine Arts] in Budapest also received a share of the findings. Today, the “Krakovian” Egyptian artifacts from Smoleński’s excavations are kept in the local Archaeological Museum (Babraj & Szymańska, 2000). Officially, however, Smoleński’s research

was an Austro-Hungarian enterprise and the sponsor was a wealthy Hungarian merchant, Philip [Fülöp] Back (Vörös, 2008). Smoleński's financial situation did not improve, however. While conducting his studies and the excavations, he held various jobs, often very peculiar ones (e.g., book-keeping), and was also supported by a high official in Egypt of the Suez Canal Company, a Pole named Mieczysław Geniusz (1853–1920; PSB 1958/7, pp. 385–386), with whom he developed a close friendship. Since his university days, in order to increase his budget, Smoleński had been writing articles and reviews for the press. While in Egypt, he continued this relationship with periodicals, mainly with the Lviv daily *Słowo Polskie* [*The Polish Word*] (it was a newspaper with a national-pragmatic profile, addressed to industrialists, traders, officials, clergy and university circles; Wójcik, 2014; Maguś, 2018) and sent regular correspondence (political commentary, travel accounts, and reviews) on various aspects of that region. Thanks to his keen, innate sense of observation, combined with the undeniable temperament of a journalist, he found a special way to maintain ties with his country, afflicted as he was by his deteriorating health.

Tadeusz Smoleński arrived in Egypt during the culmination of political, economic, and social events resulting from processes that had been brewing for many decades. At the turn of the 19th century, the millennia-long history of the Nile Valley was marked by the strong impact of the French military mission of Napoleon Bonaparte between 1798 and 1801. Despite the obviously colonial agenda, this military presence was beneficial for the development of the country in many respects: it led to a loosening of Istanbul's supremacy, staved off the growing odd blend of lethargic stagnation and anarchy, and allowed the creation of a relatively modern, centrally supervised European-style administration and treasury apparatus.

However, there was the colonial rivalry between France and Great Britain, the conflict of interest over trade routes (to India), the reviving interest in the Suez Canal project, the ambition-driven race in the peculiar imperial "civilizing" mission, and finally, the significant role of the "myth of the Orient," which, from the mid-18th century had increasingly been firing Europeans' imaginations. Muḥammad 'Alī Bāḥā (1769–1849), still formally subject to the sultan, skillfully continued and even greatly amplified many aspects of the Napoleonic revolution. He was able to combine firm governance with consistent reform policies, and to finally, deftly play off the conflict of French (political, military, and cultural) and British (primarily economic) colonial influences. The relative balance of these forces favored a considerable (though also unstable) degree of autonomy for Alī and his successors (Hunter, 1999). It was even a bargaining chip in the struggle with Russian expansion in the Middle East.

Muḥammad ‘Alī Europeanized Egypt, introducing a capitalist industrial structure (many spinning and sugar factories were founded in Egypt at that time) and reorganizing the army by abolishing the Post-Mamluk military structures (Philipp & Haarmann, 2007). The British administration tried to reverse this trend (in fact, it did so throughout the 19th century), as their goal was to use Egypt as a supply of resources and agriculture, in no way competing against England’s industry. Reforms also slowed down due to the escalating conflict with the Ottoman Empire (1839), which with the support of Russia and England—and even Austria and Prussia—again imposed sovereignty over Egypt (with some degree of autonomy) and due to a trade convention that consolidated the primacy of British trade into a near monopoly and ruined the first fruits of Egyptian industry, especially the textile sector.

‘Alī’s successors tried with varying degrees of success to strike a balance between their own (national) ambitions and avoiding open conflict with England, France, or the Ottoman Empire. ‘Abbās I Bāšā (who reigned between 1849 and 1854), a grandson of Muḥammad ‘Alī, granted the British a concession for the construction of a commercially strategic (cotton transport) railway line from Cairo to Suez. His successor, Sa‘īd Bāšā (who reigned from 1854 to 1863), in turn gave the French a concession for the construction of the Suez Canal and a majority stake in this undertaking. His successor, Ismā‘īl Bāšā (reigning 1863–1879), received the dignity of the *ḥīdīwī* (*Khedive*, usually translated as “Viceroy”) from the sultan in 1867 as well as several significant privileges that strengthened Egypt’s autonomy.

A number of educational initiatives were adopted, and the Egyptian railway infrastructure, for example, was developing rapidly. Let us add here that, in an auxiliary way, this stimulated tourist traffic, which until then was based on transportation down the Nile. Ismā‘īl, though he was developing the country, fell into a pernicious economic trap and indebted Egypt to England and France (and to the Ottoman Empire itself). In 1876, he declared insolvency, which resulted in the establishment of an international government commission, in which the representatives of the creditor states (Charles Rivers Wilson and Ernest-Gabriel de Blignières) were appointed treasury and public labor ministers. The savings in military expenditure that Ismā‘īl sought, on the other hand, effectuated a conflict with the army’s officer corps, in which nationalistic ideas that were to determine the events of the decades to come were on the rise. Ismā‘īl soon called for the dismissal of the “European” government. However, this was his last decision as the ruler of Egypt. Istanbul, succumbing to pressure from England and France, forced him to abdicate quickly and instated the completely submissive and passive Tawfīq Bāšā (reigning 1879–1892)

as the ruler in Cairo. However, a major rebellion broke out in the army: Colonel Aḥmad ‘Urābī Bāṣā sparked a revolt under the slogan “Egypt for Egyptians.” The episodic success of the rebels (‘Urābī was appointed minister of war) culminated in a bloody crackdown. The British responded by sending a war fleet and bombing Alexandria, and ‘Urābī’s army was finally defeated in the battle of At-Tall al-Kabīr (13 September 1882). It should be recalled that the Mahdist uprising was simultaneously taking place in Sudan, which also absorbed British military forces.² A further consequence was the abolishment of the decision-making independence of the next khedive, who was a great-great-grandson of Muḥammad ‘Alī: ‘Abbās II Ḥilmī (who reigned from 1892 to 1914). Incidentally, he would prove to be the last viceroy of Egypt from this dynasty. ‘Abbās II turned out to be a defiant ruler, however. His youthful ambition to transform Egypt into an empire constantly collided with the ruthlessness of the British hegemony. Surrounded by schemers, out from under the wing of European protectors (the alternative was to waive any semblance of power and surrender it to England), he was forced to accept the de facto rule of the consul, Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer (1841–1917) (Owen, 2004; Duff, 1897; Goldschmidt, 2000, pp. 43–44). Therefore, he focused on the development of irrigation works and expanded the rail network, although he also limited expenditure on education, which resulted in a regression of education levels. The influence of ‘Abbās II only soared at the end of his reign, towards the end of the first decade of the 20th century. After the outbreak of World War I and after Turkey entered it (on the side of Central Powers), ‘Abbās II appealed to the people of Egypt and Sudan to take up the fight against the English. This was the last highlight of his reign; the British immediately pushed for his abdication and expelled him from the country.

Smoleński documented the balance and the turning point of sir Evelyn Baring’s rule in Egypt in his correspondence report, *Lord Cromer’s Rule* (Smoleński, 1907a), when reviewing a momentous and polemical book about the proconsul’s activity, Edward Dicey’s *The Egypt of the Future* (London 1907),³ which “is for those studying the Eastern issue the most

2 Muḥammad Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd Allah (1844–1885), called Mahdi (Arabic for ‘the one guided [by God]’), became the leader of the Mahdist uprising in Sudan in 1881. The insurgents declared independence while ruthlessly dealing with the British colonists and representatives and the Egyptian administration, to which Sudan was subject; in 1896 troops led by Horatio Herbert Kitchener were sent against the insurgents. The insurgent forces were finally crushed, though not until 1898 (the Battle of Umm Durmān [Omdurman]).

3 Edward James Stephen Dicey (1832–1911), an opinion-forming writer and journalist, holding the post of editor-in-chief at *The Observer*, had already been known for his publications on Egypt: *England and Egypt* (1884) and *The Story of the Khedivate* (1902).

prominent publication of our time, and is being distributed in London as well as in Cairo, in thousands of copies” (Smoleński, 1907a). Smoleński emphasizes that Dicey did not approve the uncritically optimistic reports of the proconsul and undertook an independent analysis:

Great Britain had [...] three times the excellent opportunity to proclaim a protectorate over the Nile Valley: first in 1882 after the victory at Tel al-Kebir, then after the outbreak of the Mahdi uprising, and finally after the suppression the Dervish movement and the siege and fall of Khar-toum. And yet all these opportunities have been overlooked and the offices of England to this day proclaim that the occupation is only temporary and will be ended, as soon as Egypt, reborn under British rule, is able to maintain itself as an independent state. Dicey is firmly convinced that keeping Egypt, i.e. the path to India, is one of Britain’s most vital matters. As for Lord Cromer’s rule, he is skeptical; he sees in him a certain highly educated and a goodwill autocrat who rules no less absolutely, like the Khedive Ismail in the days of its greatness. Under the rule of Lord Cromer, Egypt made enormous material progress, but regressed in moral terms. All administration was entrusted to English officials, most of whom were insufficiently familiar with the language, laws, customs, traditions, and religion of the national population, and only second-rate positions were left to the natives. Egypt was being reorganized according to English concepts, which were incomprehensible and repugnant to most Arab people. Today, the only barrier against the absolute power of a representative of England are international institutions, founded long before the occupation, which the British authorities want to abolish today: mixed tribunals (the work of Nubar Pasha) and the so-called capitulations, granting foreigners privileges that natives do not have. Dicey admits that these institutions are a scandalous injustice to the Egyptians and that they must be abolished, but Egypt must first come under the open protectorate of England (Smoleński, 1907a).

Smoleński is leaning towards the concept of Dicey that the so called Eastern issue is close to final resolve:

After the end of internal strife, Russia will probably start a war with Turkey to banish it from Europe. As we are close to settling the Eastern issue, we must consider England’s attitude towards Egypt, and Albion will have to choose between announcing the protectorate or determining the date when Egypt is going to be vacated of British troops. Frequent statements by English statesmen that this vacation will occur at the right moment were undoubtedly sincere, but today we know that it is impossible: that the road to India must remain in British hands. European countries unjustly accuse England of intrigues, lies and, perfidy. France has only herself to

blame that she did not want to cooperate in the bombing of Alexandria in 1882 [...]. Today England can only fear protests in Germany; as long as friendly relations prevail between them, the British government can do in Egypt whatever it pleases (Smoleński, 1907a).

Smoleński cites the conclusions of a British analyst that the most appropriate system for Egypt, at least temporarily, would be the same system that England introduced in India, France in Tunis and Algeria, and Austria in Bosnia and Herzegovina: real, centralized power, under metropolitan authority, where lower-level administration is left in the hands of the local clerical apparatus (loyal, though with a wide range of local discretionary powers).

Smoleński also referred to the decline of Cromer's rule in *The Swan Song of the Proconsul*, sent a month later to *Stowo Polskie* (Smoleński 1907b), which focuses on the issues of the Egyptian nationalist movement (for more see Fahmy, 2011, pp. 1–61) and its links with the ideology of pan-Islamism, and, at the same time, on the topic of the antagonisms between these tendencies and Christianity, understood both in the context of the Coptic domestic minority and “resisting Christian powers,” and thus all of Europe:

According to Lord Cromer, the Egyptian people of the future must embrace all the inhabitants of Egypt regardless of race, religion, or origin. As long as the capitulations in the current form last, not only Egyptians and foreigners living in Egypt will continue to be divided into two separate camps, but also total solidarity among Europeans will not be possible either. This solidarity can only be created by the establishment of the International Legislative Council [...] composed partly of elected members and partly of those appointed by the Egyptian-English Government; this institution is to replace the archaic system that has already become outdated and which hinders all progress (Smoleński, 1907b).

Smoleński devoted one more later, ample correspondence report to the period of Cromer's rule in Egypt. The catalyst for writing it was the publication of a very important book, which, as an aside, is still a key text describing in detail, naturally, and from a very specific angle, the situation in that country (in 1876–1907, with particular emphasis on the events of 1882). *Modern Egypt*, penned by Cromer (Vol. 1–2, London 1908, reprinted 2000–2001), is based not only on his own experience, but also on rich archival material, of both the London Foreign Office and the local archives found in Cairo.

In the introduction, Smoleński, referring to Cromer, emphasizes the obvious and crucial importance of Egypt (and Sudan) for both England

and France. The point of departure for the British proconsul's narrative is the aforementioned financial collapse of Ismā'īl's rule in 1876: this event introduces the British diplomat to the political stage as a public debt commissioner. Smoleński alludes to Cromer's guiding idea, according to which Great Britain did not, in fact, plan to establish military control over an occupied Egypt, and even that "it at all did not have firm and permanently observed rules when it comes to Egypt [...] in 1879, the French diplomacy worked unconsciously to smooth the path of England's future, when England, equally unknowingly, was laying obstacles on that path" (Smoleński, 1909). He goes on to say:

At the end of 1881, France considered the Turkish intervention to be the worst solution to the Egyptian issue and preferred the Franco-English occupation, while England did not want to let it happen. Much was said about the hypocrisy with which the English government sought to finally occupy Egypt; Cromer argues that this allegation is unfounded and shows that England has always acted fairly [...]. For a number of years, therefore, England was opposed to the occupation of Egypt, afraid of international complications, and there could be no question of a cutthroat pursuit of the goal (Smoleński, 1909).

Smoleński clearly sides with the apologia of the achievements of the British administration under Cromer's guidance. He appreciates and points out both the structural reforms and the beneficial evolution away from archaic morals, including, for example, the noticeable lessening of the traditional ("Eastern") clerical corruption and of the nepotism in administrative bodies. What followed from these changes, as well as from the consistently followed budgetary discipline (imposed by the British), was the measurable economic development of the country. However, Smoleński, citing Cromer, discerns an obvious dilemma:

The future of Egypt depends on the Egyptians themselves. The country will either achieve an autonomy or become incorporated into Britain: Lord Cromer personally advocates the former. For long, long years, evacuation would amount to a defeat: in terms of the Egyptian system of government, of the licentiousness of the press, the ignorance of the gullible people, and the absence of statesmen. Maybe sometime in the future, the Egyptians will be able to govern themselves without the threat of someone else's army, but that future is very remote. The unfortunate capitulations of the European powers must change: this may happen due to Egypt being taken over by a foreign empire or by creating local legislation calling all residents to the government (Smoleński, 1909).

Smoleński (1908a, p. 2; 1908b, pp. 4–5) also acquainted his readers with the views of Cromer’s successor, Eldon Gorst (for more on Gorst see Goldschmidt, 2000, pp. 65–66; Mellini, 1977; Hunter, 2007), who was slightly more skeptical than Cromer of the ability of the Egyptians to select representative bodies, and pointed to significant impairment in “moral and mental development” of not only the peasant population (fallāḥ), but even of the higher classes, which handicapped the mental capacity to introduce the European model of the constitutional nation-state and to establish capable and efficient local government institutions. On the other hand, when it came to the Sudanese issue, there was a fear of the spread and—as he put it—“the outbreak of Central African fanaticism,” but also a threat of the escalation of traditional, local internal conflicts—unrelated to the British presence—in a multi-tribal community, which should be addressed with a specific, preferably principled position. The retreat of the Belgian army, the demarcation of the borders with Abyssinia and Uganda, and the agreement on stabilizing the Darfur borderland all normalized the situation in the region somewhat. Keeping the law enforcement and intervention units on alert posed a significant challenge, which was constantly pointed out by a representative of the British administration, Sir Reginald Wingate, who additionally highlighted the relatively strong loyalty of the local administration.

The Sudan issue had already surfaced in Smoleński’s earlier report, *New capture of Sudan* (Smoleński, 1906b, p. 4), in which he outlined the political situation and economic relations of the country, with particular reference to the role of the new railway line connecting Egypt with Dongola (suggesting ironic analogies with Austro-Hungarian Galicia):

it may rightly be called a new conquest of the former Mahdi lands, a conquest for the culture rather than for the English crown—the opening of the second line foreshadows a whole series of great civilization works that the government of Edward VII is to bring about, like powerful irrigation plans, like the bridge over the Blue and White Nile in Khartoum..., however, there is strong dissatisfaction among the Egyptians which stems from the belief that diverting Sudan trade from the Nile river is a disaster for Egypt. The Arab press rebukes the English that they do not want to connect Wadi Halfa with Aswan by rail, and discerns artful war intentions hiding behind the new rail network, namely, that it will allow the Indian troops to be transported, if necessary, far faster by a new railway than through the Suez Canal [...]. When preparations for the construction of an iron railway in a remote province were being made several years ago in Galicia, the owners of horses and carts in several towns strongly opposed it, fearing losses, when the population would not need their help in travel (Smoleński, 1906b, p. 4).

In the second half of the 19th century, Muslim intellectuals initiated the movement to modernize Islam with a center in Cairo. Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī (1839–1897) disseminated the slogan of Pan-Islamism (he also visited Egypt several times), which—when opposed with Western ideology—could be understood as a prototype of a regional version of nationalism (Moazzam, 1984; Black, 2001, pp. 303–305). For Egyptian nationalist movements, however, the defining moment was the year 1882 and the entry of British troops into Cairo, which gave rise to a much more onerous and unequivocally humiliating British presence on the Nile, incapacitating the most basic sense of independence, not only, of course, political independence, but also ideological and intellectual. The decisive takeover by Britain was evidently a logical consequence of the developments of the situation in the region, even taking into account the positive aspects of the colonial expansion of Europe and the power shifts arising from the conflicting intentions of France, England, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia⁴—to name only the key players in this game of strength and ambition. Nationalism, however, is a secular ideology and as such, it is, in its essence, contrary to the baseline Muslim tradition. Paradoxically, certain aspects of nationalism appeared in Egyptian thought when it became infiltrated by Western socio-political ideas during the ramped-up colonial expansion of the second half of the 19th century. The domestic source was the natural emergence of mechanisms for defending cultural identity that preceded political reflection in the community (Wendell, 1972; Gershoni & Jankowski, 1986). Some elements of proto-nationalism are undoubtedly connected to the concepts of emancipation within the structures of the Ottoman state. Despite having religion in common, a Turkish–Arab nationalist opposition was noticed. An ideological polemic can be seen in Cairo’s reactions to events in the Ottoman Empire, especially in view of the political ventures of the “Young Turks” movement [Jön Türkler], which had been articulating the need to adopt a constitutional system (Şükrü Hanioglu, 1995; Kayali, 1997). In turn, the Young Turks’ clearly formulated idea of uniting the representatives of all nations and religions within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, based precisely on a modern parliamentary model, led to their seizure of power in 1909 and to the accession of Sultan Mehmed V Reşâd to the throne.

4 Smoleński had discussed the current situation of the region several times before from a Russian perspective; for example, in a review of a Russian book translated into Polish (Doroszewicz, 1905, pp. 447–448). Smoleński evaluates it negatively, not only because of errors and inaccuracies: he accuses Doroszewicz of Anglophobia, which “blindsides him from a sober look at the events, hence he writes nonsense, worth shrugging your shoulders at.”

Smoleński had already presented the Cairo perspective of these events in his report, *Egypt and the Turkish Breakthrough*, where he pointed out the position of Egyptian nationalists who wished to maintain good relations with the superior power: “The Egyptians believe that the future of Islam and Muslims depends on the progress and strength of the Ottoman Empire, hence Turkish affairs arouse widespread and enormous curiosity” (Smoleński, 1905, pp. 3–4). The standpoint of the leader of the Egyptian national movement, Muṣṭafā Kāmil (for more on Kāmil see Goldschmidt 2000, pp. 101–103 and Steppat 1956), a politician as well as a journalist and the publisher of an influential daily—*Al-Liwā* [*The Standard*]¹—was unambiguous:

the partition of Turkey would coincide with the national pogrom of the Egyptians. “Egypt,” says [Kāmil], is an important part of the Ottoman Empire. Solving the Eastern issue according to the wishes and desires of the enemies of Islam through the fall of Turkey and its partition, would result in a fatal consequence of the total destruction of our autonomy (Smoleński, 1905).

In one of his early reports from Egypt, Smoleński (1906a, p. 3) interviewed Kāmil, who “so values and raises our patriotism that he sets Poles as an example to the Egyptian compatriots,” as the author claims, not without satisfaction. The conversation with Kāmil and his closest associates also revolved around the topic of Sudan and the stance of the Egyptian nationalist movement ideologues towards the events there, as well as around the ambiguous role of England:

I am not denying, says [Kāmil’s brother, ‘Alī] [...] that the opening of a new railway line is of great importance for trade, industry and tourists [...]. But do railways only have good sides? Sir, if we had a war, for example with England, the railway from Alexandria to Cairo would bring in the enemy army to the unprepared capital in a few hours [...]. If there was no railway, however, there would be more time for deliberation and preparation! (Smoleński, 1906a, p. 3).

The problem of the transformations of the Ottoman system taking place at that time also came to Smoleński’s attention. In his correspondence report *Egypt and the Turkish Constitution*, he aptly illuminated the European repercussions (simultaneous to the Egyptian ones) of the events in Istanbul:

Turkey has a constitution; and what about Egypt? This is the province of the Sultan, so reforms should be introduced here. The Viennese correspondent of *The Polish Word* addressed Austria’s extremely difficult position

towards Bosnia; there is undoubtedly a lot of similarities with England's attitude towards Egypt, and who even knows if the two powers, Habsburg and British, will not agree on consistent action. Egyptian press, especially the nationalist press, such as *Leua* [*Al-Liwā'*], urgently demands a constitution. They even wrote that the Khedive, who is about to leave his trip to Western Europe to go to Constantinople, will ask the Sultan for permission to bestow Egypt with these freedoms that Abdul Hamid offered to his subjects. But the Khedive cannot do anything without London's permission, and will London agree? Doubtful (Smoleński, 1908c, pp. 2–3).

However, he goes on to point out that:

Egypt has long enjoyed the many freedoms that Turkey is only receiving today. Personal freedom, freedom of the press—these are known things. And the treasury? It is going to be years before such orderliness can be introduced into the Turkish finances, while the Egyptian treasury is in order, thanks to the long work of the public debt commission, which was set up under Ismail—and thanks to the wise rule of the great financier, Lord Cromer. So what use is the constitution going to be for Egypt? The Parliament. Not even representation in general, because it exists in the Legislative Council and the General Assembly. But the matter of the Parliament and the slogans of the Turkish upheaval always occupy the minds of English politicians [...]. England does not consider the Egyptians mature enough for a parliamentary government [...]. The first Egyptian parliament, as long as it could rule fairly freely, would vote on the abolition of the English occupation; would it be a boon for civilization and for Egypt itself—*Ecclesia dubitat* (Smoleński, 1908c, pp. 2–3).

Some of the more politically sophisticated Egyptians hold a sort of “fascination” with Turkey. It seems that they would even reckon themselves to be “Turks,” uplifted by the democratic change at the Bosphorus. Muṣṭafā Kāmil (died in 1908) and his political successors, especially Muḥammad Farīd and ‘Alī Fahmī Kāmil, Muṣṭafā’s brother, uttered extremely favorable opinions about the Young Turks, quoted by Smoleński in his article, *The Young Turks and Egypt*. They saw in him (in fact paradoxically) the pan-Islamic movement, because, as Smoleński argues:

despite temporary moments of clarity, the “nationalists” always fought under the Prophet’s green banner, they worshipped the relationship with the Sultan as the Khalif; they felt closer ties with the Muslim brothers of Yemen or Algeria than with those born and raised in their homeland, fed with the same grain, fed with the same Nile water, the Copts (Smoleński, 1908d, p. 4).

Smoleński recognizes and indicates this dissonance; his sympathies for the national movement give way to noticeable criticism, emphasizing the much nobler message of the Young Turks, who:

without marking any distinction between the followers of the Prophet and the Armenians, Greeks, and Albanians, etc. called everyone to work equally and build the future of the homeland equally! Of course, the Young Turks could not approve of the pan-Islamism of the Egyptian “nationalists,” and the sentimental scenes of the brotherhood of religions and languages have recurred in vain in recent weeks (Smoleński, 1908d, p. 4).

The events soon to come painfully tempered this enthusiasm. The reign of the Young Turks, degenerating into a dictatorship, ended very tragically for the Armenians. The Young Turks consistently manifested their principle that the Ottoman Empire should be inhabited only by “Turks,” and they exterminated those who refused to identify as Turks. It is worth adding that the Young Turks admired the Prussian model of management. Of course, the concepts of this movement were no longer so harmoniously inscribed in the complex, multi-layered fabric of European relations, especially seen through the prism of the power shifts on the Nile:

when the Egyptians joined in shouts against England for immediate evacuation and constitution, the Turkish patriots lost their patience. Taking the Egyptian side, they would have to come into conflict with powerful England, which is their best friend today! The Young Turks frown upon the Germans, and they are the perfect allies of Egyptian nationalists! No, too much trouble: let the Egyptians take care of themselves and not expose the Turks to international frictions at a time when they need peace and European support (Smoleński, 1908d, p. 4).

According to Smoleński, Istanbul reforms can count on the kindness of European powers—though under certain conditions. From the British perspective, restraint in supporting nationalist aspirations in Egypt was desirable, while from the Habsburg monarchy’s perspective so is moderation in supporting similar aspirations in Bosnia. In his report, *The Egyptian case*, Smoleński returned to the events of 1905—clashes between Egyptian young nationalists, identified with patriotic liberation struggle and pan-Islamism, which was believed to be its overt opposition—asking the rather general question, “Is Egypt capable of self-government today?” (Smoleński, 1908e). He further presented the commonly expressed doubt that:

if England succeeded in establishing an administrative system in Egypt, which was major progress compared to the past, it was only thanks to

British officials. Had this work been placed in the hands of natives independent of the English rule, the old abuses of all Eastern governments would have returned right away (Smoleński, 1908e).

The correspondence report *From the Nile* was supposed to reassure the readers, among whom Smoleński pointed out two significant groups of potential newcomers to the Nile: tourists and patients. In his opinion, the development of the nationalist movement did not pose any danger. He mentioned rumors circulating in the European press about the likelihood of anti-British riots (“uprisings”); he downplayed them, stressing that the Muṣṭafā Kāmil faction “puts great hope in the liberal members of the English Parliament” (Smoleński, 1906f). Smoleński writes:

Currently, [Kāmil] has set up a joint-stock company for the publishing of a French–English newspaper entitled *L’Etendard Egyptien* [*The Egyptian Standard*] from New Year. The purpose of this newspaper is to defend Egypt and Egyptians; the demand for the independence of the country in accordance with Sultan’s *firman*s and international agreements; the demand for constitution; strengthening of the principles of justice and freedom; and finally the elimination of prejudices and misunderstandings between the Egyptians and foreigners living on the Nile (Smoleński, 1906f).

In the same report, he also signaled another important postulate of Egyptian nationalists: the creation of a national college modeled on European universities. He develops this thread in another note (Smoleński, 1908e, p. 5) on the establishment of such an institution, which would become a kind of alternative to the old, venerable but explicitly religious Al-Azhar university (Reid 2009). This undertaking was to be a completely non-governmental initiative, although it enjoyed the support of the ḥīdīwī, who was offered “honorary presidency.” Gaston Maspero, who was also appointed to the organizing committee, took on an advisory role, both in the preparation of the programs and in the placement of scholarship winners in professorships at European scientific institutions.

The characteristic signs of a kind of chagrin and even undisguised aversion of Egyptians towards European residents, especially towards the British “settlers” in Egypt, was observed by Smoleński (1906g, p. 4), which the authorities ascribed to the political and ideological agitation of the “national” press, and on a personal level, with the journalism of Muṣṭafā Kāmil in *Al-Liwā’*. Smoleński recalls an interview that Kāmil gave to the newspaper *Journal du Caire* in order to prove that the leader of the political movement:

not only does not rouse to riots, but, on the contrary, he deters from them—in European circles Kamil has not ceased to be very suspicious, especially

since the fear of turmoil did not subside, and a month after the events in Alexandria, news was traveling from mouth to mouth of a new disturbance in Damanhur, a town located on the left side of the Delta (Smoleński, 1906g, p. 4).

At the same time, he recalled a collection of Muṣṭafā Kāmil's political speeches published in French (*Egyptiens et Anglais*), which was meant to prove the same, and which was to contribute to the administrative prohibition of subscribing to *Al-Liwā'* in Tunis, as a result of pro-Christian sentiments being detected in the texts. Of course, this was a projection of the French perspective. Smoleński, however, emphasized that one of the key ideas propagated in the pages of *Al-Liwā'* is the close ties with Turkey (perceived here as an ally of the Arab world), "based on the religious solidarity of the Mohammedan world, which feels deeply offended by England imposing on it unbearable power and foreign civilization forms" (Smoleński, 1906g, p. 4). He goes on to say that "while condemning all riots that would only benefit the enemies," Muṣṭafā Kāmil zealously sows harmony and communication, raises hope and lifts the spirits, setting the Poles as an example:

What we need—we read [Smoleński quotes Kāmil]—is to look at the nations that are experiencing similar (!) disasters like us to find out how they fight each hour for their freedom and independence. Has a Pole ever experienced one moment without the worshiped image of Poland before his eyes and without demanding freedom? Don't we see Poles taking positions in the Austrian ministry and directing Austria's policy, and not forgetting about their homeland in their luck? [...] I wish, for the good of my own homeland, that her children's hearts should be overwhelmed by such love and that my country should see the birth of people working on its advancement and glory (Smoleński, 1906g, p. 4).

Finding various parallels between Poland and Egypt was naturally not new. Józef Popiel, a nineteenth-century Polish traveler and a keen observer of events in the East, searched (not without irony and satire) for alleged similarities between the Polish (Slavic) mentality and the one he observed in Eastern Europe, although in a different context than Smoleński did:

I noticed during my first stay in Egypt that the East mostly has a bad influence on the European, but the most detrimental effect on Slavic nature [...]. A Slav in the East, as if he was in his element, drinks up the political freedom that is guaranteed for a foreigner [...]. A Pole may mostly regret the feeling that he feels at home, because if he is not a master, he is no one's servant (Popiel, 1878, pp. 155–198).

In a separate correspondence report, *The Death of Mustafa Kamil*, Smoleński noted that the death of the leader and ideologist of Egyptian nationalists would not have an impact on the modification of the group's program and goals, although certainly the lack of the strong, charismatic personality of Kāmil and the significant importance of his personal relations with French or British politicians would surely be a certain obstacle in developing the movement's activities (Smoleński, 1906h, p. 3). Kāmil died at the age of 34. His funeral turned into a national demonstration: nearly 50,000 people joined the procession.

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