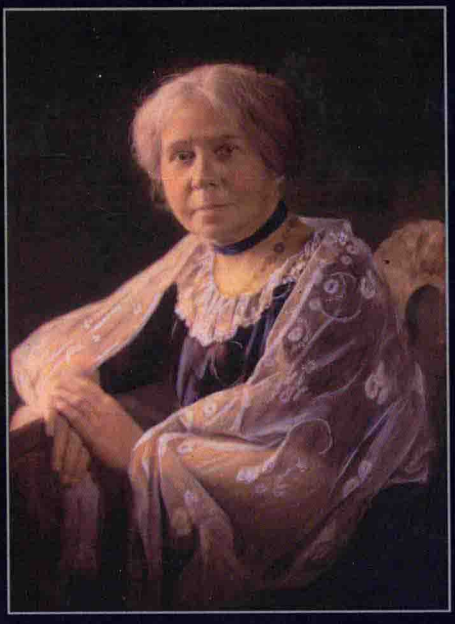
The Life of Margaret Alice Murray



A Woman's Work in Archaeology

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LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published by Lexington Books
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

10 Thornbury Road, Plymouth PL6 7PP, United Kingdom

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sheppard, Kathleen L., 1979– .
The life of Margaret Alice Murray : a woman's work in archaeology / Kathleen L. Sheppard.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7391-7417-3 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7391-7418-0 (electronic)
1. Murray, Margaret Alice. 2. Women Egyptologists—Great Britain—Biography. 3. Egyptologists—Great Britain—Biography. 4. Women archaeologists—Great Britain—Biography. 5. Archaeologists—Great Britain—Biography. I. Title.
PJ1064.M87S54 2013
907.2'02—dc23
[B] 2013020470

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

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Figure 0.1. Margaret Alice Murray at about age 50. Author's photo, from a copy in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL; used with permission

Acknowledgments

This project began as my doctoral dissertation in the History of Science department at the University of Oklahoma in 2007. Biographies, as I have learned, become intensely personal pieces of work for the author. I have come to know so much about myself and my own career choices by being a witness to Margaret Murray's life. Thanks go first to her, for being a fascinating as well as likable character to study. Throughout a long project, scholars are helped by too many people to name, but here I will try to do my best.

None of the many research trips would have been possible without generous funding from a number of institutions. While I was a student in the History of Science Department at the University of Oklahoma, I received a number of grants from the department and the University, which allowed me to travel to England a number of times. Other research trips have been generously funded by a faculty award from the American University in Cairo, a faculty research grant from the University of Missouri Research Board, and from Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T). I have presented portions of this research at meetings of the History of Science Society and the Histories of Archaeology Research Network as well as at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, the University of Oklahoma, and Missouri S&T.

In my research, I was fortunate enough to work with knowledgeable and helpful librarians and archivists. The amazing History of Science Collections at Oklahoma are run by friendly and helpful staff and faculty, especially Sylvia Patterson, Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie, Kerry Magruder, and JoAnn Palmeri. Thanks to the librarians at Missouri S&T for getting all of the books I needed quickly through interlibrary loan. I am indebted to libraries, collections, and archives all over the world, including: the faculty and staff of the Manchester Museum and the Archives, especially Phyllis Stoddart and Sally

Thewell for going above and beyond to help me find sources and images; the archivists and museum staff at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, especially Imogen Gunn, Rachel Hand, and Wendy Stone; the Cambridge University Libraries; at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, Debbie Challis, Tracy Goodman, and Stephen Quirke; at the Egypt Exploration Society, Chris Naunton and Patricia Spencer; the Special Collections at University College London; the London School of Economics; and the Griffith Institute at Oxford University.

Heartfelt thanks go to the History of Science faculty at the University of Oklahoma, especially my doctoral committee, Piers Hale, Sandie Holguín, Suzanne Moon, and Daniel Snell. I could not have made it through the entire process without my mentor and friend Katherine Pandora; thank you for still being a mentor to me. To trusted colleagues who took the time to read part or all of the manuscript and either comment on it or simply sit and talk about it are innumerable, and I thank you. Special thanks to Sam Alberti, Amy Bix, William Carruthers, Debbie Challis, Paul Crook, Karen Exell, Shannon Fogg, Larry Gragg, Imogen Gunn, Rachel Hand, Rosalind Janssen, David Javaloyas, Cornelia Lambert, Stephen Leach, Gabriel Moshenska, Caroline Oates, Sara Perry, Megan Price, Christina Riggs, Eleanor Robson, Jeff Schramm, Lisa Torres Stewart, John Stewart. Thank you to Lexington Books, especially Erin Walpole and the anonymous readers. I have gained so many valuable insights, but any mistakes are my own.

The unbelievable spiritual and emotional support of friends and family is the glue that held me together; I cannot express my gratitude in words, but here I must try. Many thanks to Pamela Jane Smith, for friendship, support and encouragement, for new thoughts about Murray, for showing me around Cambridge, and for searching the archives with me. Thanks so much to my wonderful friends around the world, especially Hannah Cordts von Lowis de Menar and Dan Barrett, and Claire Thornhill and Tom Aldred for opening your homes and hearts and making London a second home to me. To Pam Abram, Delcy Burford, Nancy Burton, Tara Crowley, Sherry Merrick, Kelly Shockley, and Julie Speer, thank you for your fellowship and prayers. The Brackin family, especially Courtney, Amy, Olivia, and Will, have supported me in every possible way for the last 10 years; thank you for your love and friendship. My friend, Julie Stidolph, thank you for always taking my calls and listening to me about every little thing. To all of my friends whose lives have touched mine throughout this whole project, thank you for all of your help and your understanding when I have had to disappear to work on it.

To my whole family, thank you for your love and support. Especially my parents, Lawrence and Deborah Sheppard, who always encouraged me to do what makes me happy even when it was hard to understand; my mother passed away in the final stages of my writing, but her support never flagged.

My siblings, Christine Barnard and Michael Sheppard, thank you for a childhood full of fun memories and for still being my friends.

Finally to Dan McDonald, my husband, partner, and best friend, you have been with me from the beginning of this project and you have lived with Margaret just as much as I have. Thank you for your love, hard work, and patience through the ups and downs of graduate school, far away jobs, and finally coming home.

Introduction

"A Life without a Single Adventure"

Margaret Alice Murray taunted the readers of her autobiography, written when she was 100 years old, with the following words: "It is very disappointing to have had no adventures; other people have them but not me. So here goes for the record of a life without a single adventure."[1] Born in Calcutta, India in 1863—the youngest daughter of a merchant and his wife—Murray lived a life that was anything but lacking in adventures. Travelling often between India and England, she spent her young life exploring the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Europe. She was proficient in French and German by the age of twelve and was educated briefly at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham. She began as a student in the newly established Egyptology department at University College London (UCL) under William Matthew Flinders Petrie in 1894, but soon worked her way up to junior lecturer in 1898. Murray's career in archaeology took her to more places, like Egypt, Malta, and Minorca. By the time of her retirement from UCL in 1935, she had been appointed Assistant Professor, had received an honorary doctorate, and had been elected an honorary fellow of the university, not to mention her numerous memberships in scholarly societies. After she retired, she continued to research and publish in scholarly archaeology until her death in 1963, at the age of 100 years and four months. Besides publishing in Egyptian archaeology, Murray also produced books on Egyptian scripts, the archaeology of the Mediterranean, the practice of witchcraft, and the history of England. This book examines in detail her life and career as the first professional female Egyptian archaeologist in Britain.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe, archaeology as a field of study had been slowly progressing from an amateur, gentlemanly

pursuit to a discipline worthy of scholarly attention. As a practice, it had been led by classically-trained linguists for decades, by men who focused their sights on ancient Greece and Rome as well as prehistoric sites in their home countries.[2] While the European fascination with Egypt has a long history—stretching back to the time of the Greeks and Romans—the systematic study of Egypt's past began in earnest relatively recently with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798. Expeditions to Egypt were sent by museums such as the British Museum and the Louvre, as well as by wealthy private collectors, and continued throughout the nineteenth century. These trips brought back countless fantastical and mysterious finds, virtually unknowable to their owners due to the lack of knowledge about the area. As a field of scholarly study, then, Egyptian archaeology had a comparatively late start: the first department of Egyptology was founded in 1892 at UCL with Petrie as the first chair of the department.[3] After this, more universities and museums realized the need for trained excavators, who were usually male, leading to the founding of academic departments and programs in Egyptology at universities across Europe and the United States.

While there are a number of works about the history of Egyptology in the form of biographies, histories of particular sites or field projects, and more, the history of the institutionalization of the science of Egyptology still needs to be written.[4] Margaret Drower and Rosalind Janssen have written comprehensive volumes about Petrie himself and the department at UCL, respectively.[5] However, the study of the history of the discipline is still in its infancy; Margaret Murray is therefore an important subject of focus to broaden the history of this field for several reasons. First, Murray was a fixture at UCL for almost seventy years. She was intellectually active at a new kind of academic institution, and her long tenure there is an essential aspect of the context in which she developed her ideas regarding Egypt, its past, and its relevance to other fields of study. Therefore, issues that confronted women in education and women in the professions throughout this period can be clearly examined by exploring them in the context of Murray's life and career. While men in this period were able to focus their training on more specific areas within their chosen disciplines, women in academia learned quickly that in order to continue working, they must have a broad base of knowledge and experience. In her research, Murray concentrated on the cultural history of ancient Egypt and she published articles, books, and site reports elaborating on aspects of the culture such as literature, religion, art, and economics. Later on in her career, Murray was on staff at the University Museum at Manchester and Cambridge University, which offered other spheres for scholarly growth through her teaching, lecturing, and excavating.

Second, her career spanned much of the formative period of Egyptian archaeology as many intellectual, social, and political aspects changed during the time she was working in academia. She entered the discipline in a period

when not only was it new to institutions, but the concept of the professional archaeologist also was new. At first, due to its uncertain place in the academy, Egyptian archaeology was particularly open to women, especially those working as assistants, illustrators, transcribers, typists, and catalogers. Murray took advantage of this tentative state and established herself on the ground floor of a new university department. Because of her position first as Petrie's student and assistant, then as his colleague, Murray was instrumental in creating the profession not only through her research, but also through her teaching. At UCL she focused her energy on her students and their success in the two-year diploma program which she established in order to train field archaeologists. Highlighting the history, art, language, religion and culture of ancient Egypt, Murray's courses gave students the tools with which to begin their investigations in the field. Even though most field archaeologists were men at this time, Murray believed that it was knowledge of the ancient culture, and not one's sex, that ensured a firm foundation from which to begin fieldwork; many of her female students went on to successful field careers. Her teaching also introduced theories such as the diffusion of culture to the new professionals she trained. Her site reports familiarized students and scholars with new findings from the field, such as previously unknown buildings and unrecognized artwork in tombs. She also wrote many works with the general public in mind, whom she would have considered to be her students; although historians have tended to discount popular science writers as amateurs, Murray's case is one which refutes this claim.

Finally, Murray was always conscious of being a woman in a man's world. Women were entering universities and the sciences in larger numbers and were increasing their visibility, but they were still underrepresented. While Murray found her status as a minority to be discouraging at times, she dealt with her trials and successes in her own characteristic way—combining conservative Victorian thinking with perspectives derived from the new, progressive, and activist branches of the struggle for women's rights. In doing so, she was able to navigate the male-dominated world of archaeology and anthropology in order to maintain her position as an authoritative teacher, writer, lecturer, and professional Egyptologist. Although part of the minority, Murray was not alone in her endeavors. There were other women in her generation who established themselves professionally in other disciplines while fighting for women's rights to suffrage and education. Historically, these women established the tradition of a female presence in the academy upon which later students were able to build.

My intention in focusing on Murray is not to substitute the story of a "Great Woman" scientist in place of another "Great Man" scientist; instead, I want to use her life to shine a spotlight on and to analyze various issues in the science of Egyptian archaeology over the course of her long career. The result is that I have moved the life of an overlooked archaeologist from the

margin to the center of the story, paying close attention to the ideas that she developed and the ways in which she influenced the science.

FINDING MARGARET MURRAY

Even though she was an active and central figure in the history of University College London and in Egyptology, Murray actually left surprisingly few records. Therefore, there are only a few main sources that I am able to depend upon for Murray's life narrative: her autobiography entitled *My First Hundred Years*, one recent but short biography by Drower, and some letters and lecture notes found mainly in the archives at University College and elsewhere.[6] Therefore, in order to write a more expansive analysis of Murray's life and career, I supplement these limited resources with other primary and secondary sources that add to the historical context of her life and work. Sources such as excavation reports, journals and letters from her colleagues, and interviews of her students help to piece together parts of her life she omitted or glossed over.

Murray claimed that she kept a diary for about four years, but that it "was so deadly uninteresting that I gave it up and never tried again."[7] When writing her memoir she had this to say:

> In an autobiography there is no research, no discoveries, no fun at all. Just trying to remember any interesting or exciting events that have happened to you, but if no such events occurred you feel that the words of Mark Twain's diary are the only ones that really fit my life-story: 'Got up, washed, went to bed.'[8]

My First Hundred Years was well received among the scholarly community, and many archaeologists appreciated the important links her life made to the earliest days of Egyptology and Flinders Petrie.[9] However, using an autobiography as a main source for a biography is problematic, due to issues of perspective and objectivity; in Murray's case, it is necessary also to take into consideration first, that she claimed that she had no diaries to use as sources, and second, that she was a woman writing an autobiography. Some have argued that, although it seems that autobiography presents as "untroubled a reflection of identity as the surface of a mirror can provide," in truth, there is considerable debate as to whether or not the art is true to life.[10] Many critics of using autobiography as a central source for historical research agree that there is indeed a tendency for the authors of these life narratives to create more of a fictional character than to portray reality.[11] It is likely that the autobiographer will paint an idealized picture of themselves by committing "acts of audit and surveillance."[12] Sometimes called an "autobiographical injunction," this is the situation where a woman's autobiography becomes "a

history of expectations, orders, and instructions rather than one of urges and desires."[13] Indeed, this is something any biographer must consider when constructing a life story.

Diaries and letters as sources present many of the same problems that autobiographies as sources do. For centuries, people of all classes, genders and ethnicities have kept private diaries—many times with the intention that they would one day be public.[14] Women's diaries especially may "provide invaluable testimonials to individual female lives and reveal patterns of female existence over many centuries."[15] It was much the same for letter writers. Many times, "each letter, however private and personal it may seem, is a letter marked by and sent to the world."[16] Letters were, at the very least, dialogues between two people: they were meant to be seen by one other person. However, many letter writers may have written with the knowledge or forethought that others might see their words as well. Those who wrote diaries also knew that their thoughts might not be secret for long. Thus the diary, like the letter, should not be considered an "unprocessed autobiography."[17] Even though Murray did not leave a private or professional diary, it may be possible to obtain diary-like information from her autobiography and collected correspondence simply because of the similarity of purpose and voice among the three kinds of life writing.

Unlike Murray's autobiography and her student Margaret Drower's anecdotal biography of Murray, my biographical treatment will do what Murray's and Drower's do not. I examine how Murray performed in and thought about the professional world she inhabited by reshaping the historical understanding of the relationship between Murray—a woman—and the profession of Egyptology. Her work in science was undoubtedly affected by the fact that she was not only a single woman coming from a Victorian colonial background, but that she was also a feminist activist and suffragist. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate her pursuits as a social activist within the narrative of her professional life and to analyze them within the context of her professional roles. This type of analysis has never been done for Murray. Situating her as a professional archaeologist allows me firmly to place Murray within the larger historical narrative of Egyptology and to foreground her experiences as central to the story, rather than as merely peripheral. Marginalization happens too often when the career of a female scientist is considered solely in the light of the career of a male mentor, such as Petrie. Petrie is indeed a central part of Murray's story, but he will not be the principal character here.

When Murray entered the profession, and throughout her career, she was on the cusp of variety of different dichotomies, depending upon which role she was filling at a particular moment. She did scholarly research in Egyptology while at the same time publishing works for the general public; she taught in-depth and complex information to her university students while she

was teaching similarly-structured courses to paying ticket-holders at the British Museum; to unwrap two mummies, she organized a strong interdisciplinary team of scientists as well as lectured and exhibited one of the bodies to an audience of over 500 people. Until recently, working with the public has been seen historically as a feminine endeavor or as not important to the study of the practice of science. However, Murray's career demonstrates that by engaging the public, the scientific sphere of influence can be greatly expanded to reach hundreds or thousands of curious people, lending authority to those who are able to educate a general audience. In doing so, Murray was empowered and recognized within the scholarly world, where she continued to train field archaeologists as well as pursue new avenues of knowledge. Finally, a seeming contradiction that stayed with Murray her whole life was the professional woman/feminist suffragist image set against the likeness of the demure Victorian daughter. Her Victorian childhood in India and in England instilled in her a sense of duty and obedience to her father and mother, but Murray's ambition and desire for a career was at odds with the patriarchal system that was in place in England. Murray looked to her mother's example of hard work in India and in service to other women, however, and became conscious of the fact that she could serve herself and her colleagues by fighting for rights to suffrage and education. Her mother's example as a good Victorian wife and a champion of women's rights acted as her guide. She tried to be a professional and a popularizer, a loyal daughter and an activist, at distinctive times in her career, changing hats when the situation called for it. Each of these aspects is crucial to a thorough study of Murray's life as a woman and as an archaeologist.

This book presents a cultural history of a woman in a scientific vocation. As such, this biographical study therefore includes various histories as part of the analytical framework of the chapters, such as histories of archaeology, of particular universities, of higher education, of feminist, women's, and gender history, and the history of scientific collaboration. Due to the dearth of unpublished information about Murray's life, we must place her within the appropriate contexts. Detailing the background of Murray's career will contribute to the breakdown of the "Great Man" view that is still prevalent in the history of archaeology by recognizing the importance of a diversity of scientists who too often go unnoticed, but who were integral to the productivity of certain scientific networks. Furthermore, by concentrating on Murray's career as that of a scientist, and not simply a female support staff member, I challenge current understandings of the history of Egyptology in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It is essential to consider Murray's life outside of the classroom as an activist and a woman in order to understand the contours of her career and the nature of her intellectual commitments. Studying the ideas, careers and lives of those such as Murray who were essential participants in their disciplines—yet who went unrecognized

in the past, as well as in the present historiography—allows historians to present a more complete picture of a science. By doing so, it becomes clear that the field was not the only place archaeology was done; the heroic excavator was not the only person working long hours; and women, far from needing to be "discovered" by historians, did their share of discovering, digging, and writing.

In the relatively new study of the history of archaeology there have been several recent attempts at removing women from their partnership narratives, excavating them from the dust of the archive and bringing them to light.[18] Primarily their activities have been documented in the field; not as much attention has been paid to their work in the classroom, and even less to their pursuits as scholars in their own right. For women in archaeology, "the worst curse is the curse of erasure."[19] In order to keep this situation from happening, women and their professional efforts must be "legitimized by inclusion, by anthologizing, [or] they will not be assessed; they will not be contextualized."[20] While finding sources about some of these women is notably difficult, digging them out means going past the level of inclusion in an anthology to examining their careers, their work, and their lives, using the methods of cultural history. This biography thus adds a new level of scrutiny to the life and work of a female archaeologist in order to complete one part of the excavation.

BIOGRAPHY

A general theoretical work about women in archaeology would not do justice to the richness of the lives of these interesting women, of which Murray's is a fruitful case in point. Furthermore, to write another prosopography or an anthology of women in the discipline would be to contribute another piece of work to the already overcrowded encyclopedic genre. Biographies combine many different and complex attributes of society, such as class, gender, familial and domestic relations, and professional relationships into one narrative which can then be used to make claims that illuminate broader viewpoints and conclusions.[21] In particular, scientific biography possesses the advantage of being a way in which historians attempt to unify a life that would seem fragmented in a work that uses case studies or in a brief encyclopedia entry.[22]

Writing biography is a challenge to present a "unified picture of a scientific life"; therefore different biographers may write about and focus on a variety of diverse traits about a particular scientist, with the result that each author presents a unique picture of a scientific life.[23] Biography allows room for many authors to write about the same person, so that each may find a different life to present. In the end, "scientific biography is an effective

means for engaging readers in the struggles, successes, and failures of scientists crafting their own lives as they explore and construct knowledge of the natural world."[24] In this sense, then, a scientific biography of a woman must combine the private life with the public work, with attention given to explaining the science for the reader. No matter what, however, biographers choose different aspects of life to represent, so in any biography there will always be something left out.[25] For Murray, this is undoubtedly true. This is the first full-length biography of Murray, and the lack of unpublished primary sources for her life presents a distinct challenge. With this in mind, I have made use of the available sources—such as letters, novels, poems, biographies of other women and men in the same period, national histories, and more—in order to establish social and cultural contexts for Murray's life and the lives of her scientific cohort.[26] Within the scope of this biography I evaluate Murray's life as a scientist and work with previously unused sources to add new dimensions to the narrative that already exists.

Finally, although finding Murray in the archives and in the published sources is indeed difficult, there is the temptation to use indiscriminately all the given material and create what has been called a "trash bucket biography."[27] Murray lived a long life and had an amazingly wide range of interests and accomplishments, so it is difficult to include them all here. I make no claims to completeness in this biography as some of her activities are outside the scope of my focus—her work in archaeology—and are better left to other scholars. Murray's work in folklore, witchcraft, and Mediterranean archaeology have been addressed in more depth by others, and I have included the appropriate references to guide readers to research in those areas of study if they are interested in learning more about Murray in other frameworks. I do, in fact, leave out some aspects of her life, such as vacations to Russia and Egypt, and a lecture trip to Finland. My hope is that other scholars, thus introduced to Murray, will continue the path down which I have begun.

EGYPTOLOGY AND ORIENTALISM

Like many other pursuits of knowledge, archaeology was not professionalized or specialized until the early twentieth century. However, if seen generally as an interest in the material remains left by the inhabitants of the past in order to understand the past, it is clear that archaeology began long before the nineteenth century. Egyptology, as a discipline that studied the remains of an ancient yet historical civilization, developed as a distinctly separate practice from prehistoric European archaeology.[28] There are innumerable accounts of the history of the discipline of Egyptology, from the times of Herodotus to today, so I will not fill space by restating those works.[29] Throughout this study, I focus on the development of Egyptology in Britain, especially at

University College London, since that is where Murray spent most of her career.[30]

An important aspect of this story is the intersection of professional Egyptian archaeology with the dynamic of Orientalism. The two are intertwined, thus making Orientalism a key part of Murray's professional life. Orientalism, as a "cultural and political fact" in Europe and America over the last two centuries, was defined by Edward Said as "a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient . . . [it is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[31] He argued that Western Europe has attempted to deal with the Orient "by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it," and in order to achieve these goals, it was necessary to *know* it.[32] This particular type of knowledge "means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. . . . To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it."[33] Said extended much of his argument about the East and West colliding from Napoleon's 1798 expedition into Egypt up to 1994, and his conclusions intended to impact the study of the Middle East and policy concerning the area.[34] While some critics have argued that Said's assertions and "only secondary concern with history per se make this book of lessened interest to historians," Orientalism is, without a doubt, a key factor in the practice of Egyptology, and thus the study of its history.[35]

Throughout the history of the study of the East by the West, the Orientalist, in our case the Egyptologist, "describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West."[36] Thus, guided by the objectives of imperialism and Orientalism, Egyptologists began what has been called the "anti-conquest."[37] Although the term is problematic—the process is clearly an invasion—this course of action consists of creating an archaeological past "that has ensured an alienation of Indigenous cultural heritage from its Indigenous owners, which leads to the questions of who owns the past and who has the right to interpret it."[38] The "anti-conquest" has led, inevitably, towards the "creation of a past that identifies historical episodes as scientific phenomenon and people as specimens," as *objects* of study.[39] People and cultures can then be studied objectively, separate from their environments, waiting to be revealed to a curious West. Continuing this process in the late nineteenth century, British archaeologists—and those working in Egypt especially—were expected to collect objects to be placed in museums, which in turn would support and justify imperial ideologies throughout the colonies. Doing so was to stake ideological and physical claims on both the land and the objects that came from it.

Because Murray was an Egyptologist, her work sits at the center of this framework and sheds light on the fact that Orientalism and imperialism are crucial ideologies from which the history of this discipline cannot be separat-