CHAPTER 3

The First International Congress of Arab Music (Cairo, 1932)

3.1 Historical and Political Background

On February 28, 1922, precisely a decade prior to the convening of the First International Congress of Arab Music, Great Britain concluded its eight-year protectorate status of Egypt, thus declaring Egypt’s independence, albeit with limited sovereignty.1 A fortnight later, on March 15th, the fifty-five year old Aḥmed Fuʾād Pāshā, who had ruled as Sultan of Egypt and the Sudan since October of 1917, now proclaimed himself King Fuʾād I of Egypt. He was the grandson of the first Khedive Mohammad ‘Ali (d. 1849) and youngest son of the fifth Khedive Ismāʿīl Pāshā (d. 1879).

More than a century had passed since the French attempted to colonize Ottoman Egypt.2 Inasmuch as their primary intentions were to secure trade interests, hinder Britain’s overland access to India, and spread French culture consistent with the trends of the Enlightenment, they, nonetheless, made noteworthy improvements to Cairo’s infrastructure during their brief occupation, known as the Egyptian Campaign (1798–1801).3 Having antagonized both the Sublime Porte and Western rivals by their abrupt yet determined incursion, the French were successfully ousted by Turkish armies, with the support of British and Russian troops. Whereas the Turks regained control of their so-called

1 The declaration achieved “little change in Egypt’s de facto status” (Sicker, “The British Protectorate”, 107).
2 Mameluke Egypt had become an integral part of the Ottoman Empire in 1517, when it was conquered by the Turks under Sultan Selim I. Thenceforth the defeated Egyptian Mamelukes were subjugated as vassals of the Sublime Porte and were held responsible for managing the land, collecting taxes, and paying tribute to the Sultanate.
3 A.J. Racy (“Music in nineteenth-century Egypt”, 164) explained how their brief occupation affected the Egyptians and particularly their Ottoman overlords, as a turning point in the history of the Islamic Near East:

“Besides arousing [their] resentment, the occupation triggered their interest in self-analysis and eventually led them to question their own self-image [while arousing] their curiosity about the cultural values, social institutions and political ideas of Europe. It also led them to borrow some of Europe’s material achievements and cultural traits.”
Ottoman province, the British remained in Egypt until 1803, thus ending their first period of occupation.

For the following two years, Egypt was in a state of anarchy, particularly in Cairo, where a group of restless officers from the occupying Turkish army were vying for power. Among them was the young Albanian-born Moḥammad ʿAlī Pāshā (1769–1849), who had distinguished himself militarily. Through a series of self-promoting intrigues and political alliances, he became the commander of Egypt’s Ottoman army. In 1805, he seized control of the government and established a dynasty of Ottoman khedives who would rule Egypt as an independent state until December of 1914, four months after the outbreak of the First World War. Moḥammad ʿAlī’s reign brought vast improvements to the country through such vital domestic projects as industrialization, irrigation canals, railways, the cultivation of cotton, and a flourishing publishing industry (particularly guide books to attract tourists). He also renovated the country’s system of education, its urban centers, and the military to meet European standards. With these achievements, undertaken with responsible fiscal management, he ushered Egypt into an era of Westernization and modernization, thereby encouraging the first mass wave of European immigration and tourism. Although he attempted to secure political and economic independence for Egypt, he chose not to sever relations with his Ottoman superiors.

The succeeding reigns of Ibrāhīm (1848), ʿAbbās Ḥilmī I (1849–54), and Moḥammed Saʿīd (1854–63) could not match that of the ambitious, French-educated Ismāʿīl Pāshā (1863–79). His wish to control the entire Nile Valley as far as Tanzania was ultimately placed in the hands of the British. Irresponsible and somewhat naïve, he not only approved the financing of the Suez Canal project, but actively monitored its construction. In anticipation of its grand opening in November of 1869, he had squandered millions from the Egyptian treasury to modernize Cairo. For that occasion, he ordered the construction of new palaces, Parisian-like boulevards, luxurious hotels, and even an opera

---

4 Moḥammad ʿAlī reigned until Aug. 2, 1848. From Sept. 1 to Nov. 10, 1848, the brief period of his incapacitation, his eldest son, İbrahim Pāshā ruled. Then followed the reigns of ʿAbbas Hīlmī I, grandson of Moḥammad ʿAlī (1848–54); Moḥammed Saʿīd I, son of Moḥammad ʿAlī (1854–63); Ismāʿīl Pāshā, son of İbrahim Pāshā (1863–79); Moḥammed Tawfīq Pāshā, son of Ismāʿīl (1879–92); and ʿAbbas Hīlmī II, son of Tawfīq (1892–1914). It should be noted that the first five were wālīs who declared themselves khedives (see Hunter, *Egypt under the khedives*).