

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70076-4 - A History of Egypt: From the Arab Conquest to the Present,
Second Edition

Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot

Frontmatter

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A History of Egypt

Egypt occupies a central position in the Arab world. Its borders between sand and sea have existed for millennia and yet, for centuries, until 1952, the country was ruled by foreigners, remote from its neighbours. Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot's book explores the paradoxes of Egypt's history in a new edition of her successful *A Short History of Modern Egypt*. Charting the years from the Arab conquest, through the age of the mamluks, Egypt's incorporation into the Ottoman empire, the liberal experiment in constitutional government in the early twentieth century, followed by the Nasser and Sadat years, the new edition takes the story up to the present day. During the Mubarak era, Egyptians have seen major changes at home with the rise of globalization and its effects on their economy, the advent of new political parties, the entrenchment of Islamic fundamentalism and the consequent changing attitudes to women. The author explores these developments and what they have meant for the Egyptian people. This short history is ideal for students and for travellers visiting the region for the first time.

AFAF LUTFI AL-SAYYID MARSOT is Professor Emerita of History at the University of California at Los Angeles. Her previous publications include *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (1984) and *Women and Men in Late Eighteenth Century Egypt* (1995).

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*To my mother, Atiya Rashwan,
to V1 and V2 with all my love*

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Preface

The major theme of this book is the alienation of the population of Egypt from their rulers. Having suffered foreign occupations of various kinds, from the Arab conquest in 639 AD to the British occupation in 1882 which lasted until 1954, Egyptians through the ages have had to cope with alien rulers, or with rulers who were dominated by aliens so that a truly national government could be said to exist only after 1952. Yet throughout the eras of alien rule the native Egyptian recognized the existence of a fixed and unchanging territory that was Egypt, which had fixed natural boundaries, and which was separate as a territory even when it was the centre of an empire or amalgamated into an empire as a mere province. Thus the native Egyptian, while coping with alien rulers, also clung to the fixed piece of territory that he identified and knew as Egypt. Even before the age of nationalism made people conscious of national affinities Egyptians were conscious of living in a land called Egypt.

With the advent of the first native Egyptian government over fellow Egyptians after 1952 one would have expected the alienation of the rulers and the ruled to come to an end. Yet that alienation has persisted because the governments that came after 1952 were too insecure to adopt a truly representative government, and so opted for authoritarian and repressive rule which ended by representing vested interests rather than the interests of the majority such has been the characteristic of all successive governments. Even when political parties were allowed to exist, their freedom was restricted lest they vote for a change of ruler or of regime.

When Hosni Mubarak came to power after the death of Sadat he allowed political parties to reform and elections for parliament

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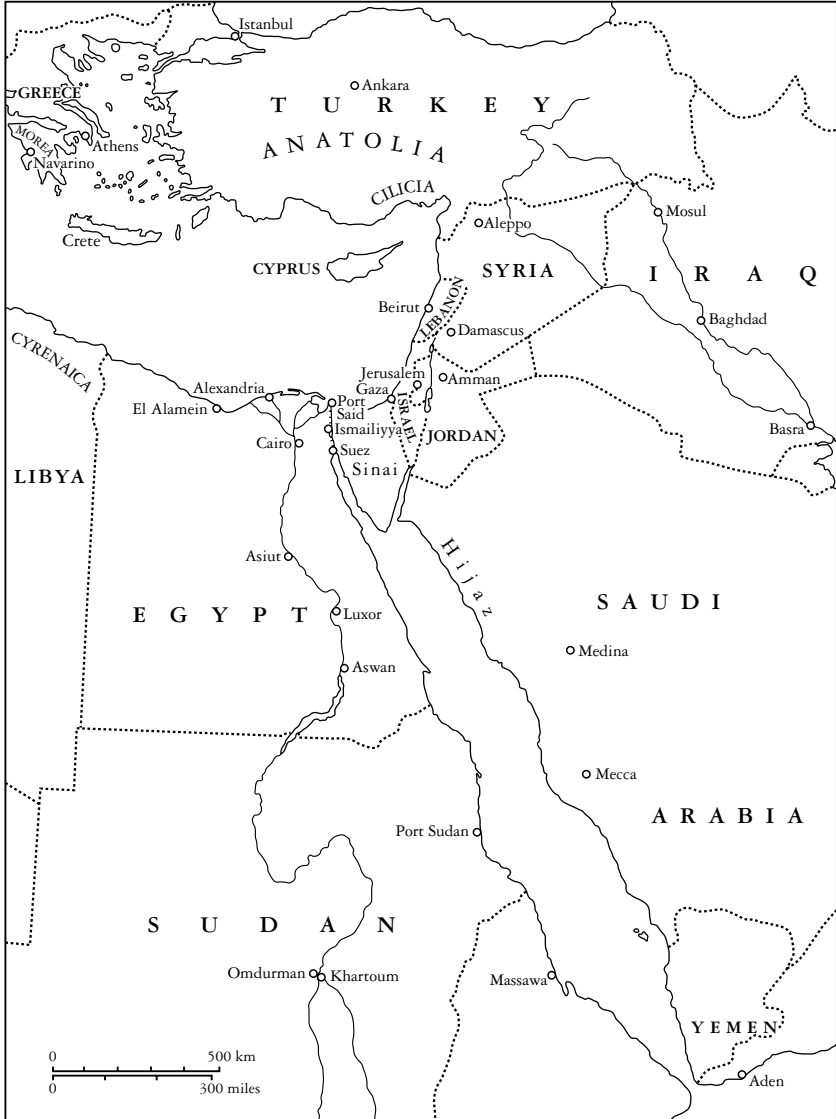
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X PREFACE

to take place. Yet the parties, save the major one supporting the regime are minority ones and often their members are proscribed, consequently the average Egyptian has not developed much faith in his parliamentary delegates, feeling that they are not truly representative. Furthermore the cabinet is not responsible to parliament but to the president. President Mubarak, had assured the public that he would not run for a fourth term, but a massive campaign was mounted in July 1999 to give him an oath of allegiance, a *baya*, a form of early Arab ceremony whereby people give their support to the person they wish as a leader. This was followed by an equally massive public relations attempt to present President Mubarak as the only viable candidate and he ran unopposed for another term, which he won in October 1999. Most of the population voted with its feet by staying away from the elections, in spite of government assurances that voter turnout was massive. Out of a population that is over seventy million, fifteen million allegedly voted positive. Banners congratulating the president on his victory were being painted two days before the voting had even begun. Throughout his term the president promised great changes, few of which were forthcoming. He also announced he would not stand for a fifth term but then changed his mind. His sole opponent Ayman Nour was eventually jailed and Mubarak won a fifth term of office. To date he has held power since 1981. Consequently it comes as no surprise to note that the Egyptian citizen feels nothing but cynicism towards his government allied by feelings of alienation.

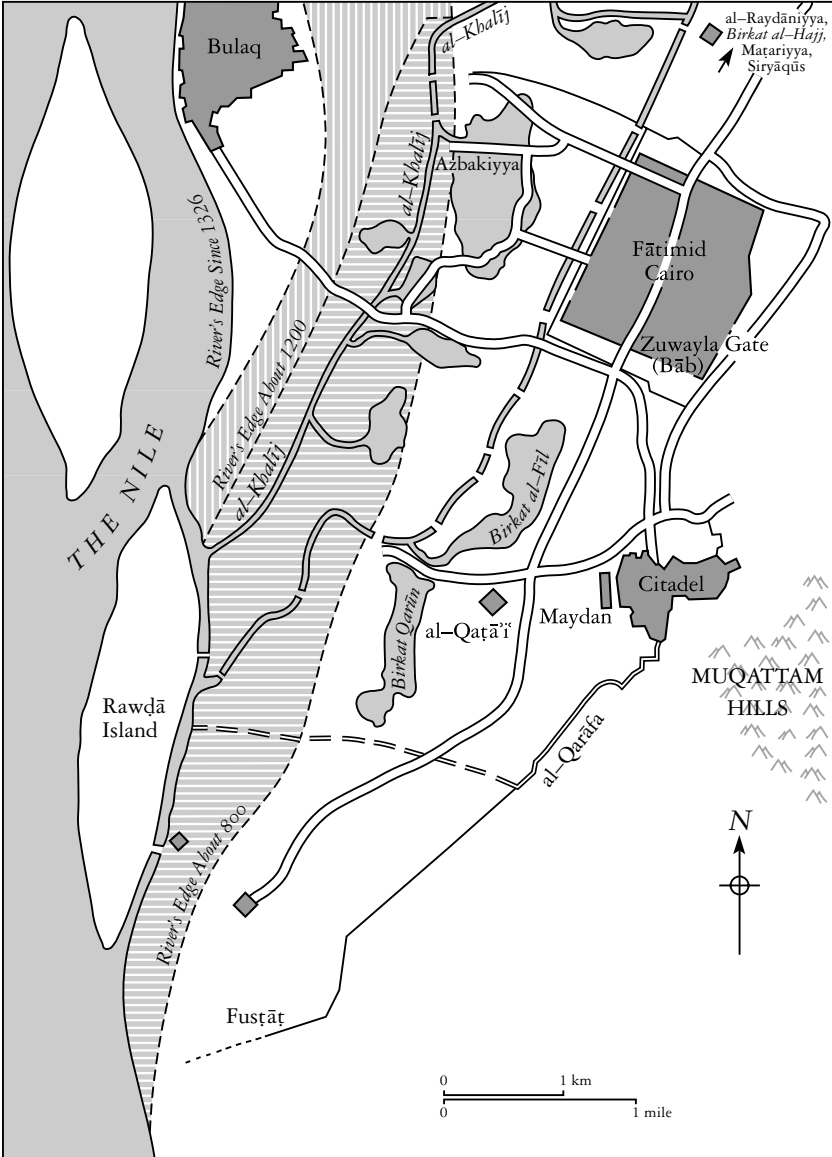
I am grateful to Ms Hala Fattah for the care she took in reading the manuscript and helping with its index, and above all for her invaluable comments, which have greatly improved it. I am equally grateful to my husband Dr Alain Marsot for undertaking the same task, and for the patience and understanding with which he greeted the various revisions.

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MAP I Egypt and its neighbours

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MAP 2 Medieval Cairo