

A Short History of Egypt – to about 1970

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|---|----|
| Foreword..... | 2 |
| Chapter 1. Pre-Dynastic Times : Upper and Lower Egypt: The Unification. .. | 3 |
| Chapter 2. Chronology of the First Twelve Dynasties. | 5 |
| Chapter 3. The First and Second Dynasties (Archaic Egypt) | 6 |
| Chapter 4. The Third to the Sixth Dynasties (The Old Kingdom): The "Pyramid Age"..... | 8 |
| Chapter 5. The First Intermediate Period (Seventh to Tenth Dynasties)..... | 10 |
| Chapter 6. The Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties (The Middle Kingdom)..... | 11 |
| Chapter 7. The Second Intermediate Period (about 1780-1561 B.C.): The Hyksos. | 12 |
| Chapter 8. The "New Kingdom" or "Empire" : Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties (c.1567-1085 B.C.)..... | 13 |
| Chapter 9. The Decline of the Empire. | 15 |
| Chapter 10. Persian Rule (525-332 B.C.): Conquest by Alexander the Great. | 17 |
| Chapter 11. The Early Ptolemies: Alexandria. | 18 |
| Chapter 12. The Later Ptolemies: The Advent of Rome. | 20 |
| Chapter 13. Cleopatra..... | 21 |
| Chapter 14. Egypt under the Roman, and then Byzantine, Empire: Christianity: The Coptic Church..... | 23 |
| Chapter 15. The Arab Conquest..... | 26 |
| Chapter 16. Early Islam. | 28 |
| Chapter 17. The Fatimids. | 30 |
| Chapter 18. Saladin: The Crusades..... | 32 |
| Chapter 19. The Bahri (Turkish) Mameluks (1250-1382)..... | 34 |
| Chapter 20. The Burji (Circassian) Mameluks (1382-1517)..... | 36 |
| Chapter 21. Egypt under the Ottoman Turks. | 38 |
| Chapter 22. The Beginning of European Intervention in Egypt : Napoleon. ... | 40 |
| Chapter 23. Mohammed Ali. | 42 |
| Chapter 24. The Khedive Ismail (1863-1879): Financial Collapse: Anglo- French Control,..... | 44 |
| Chapter 25. The Sudan : General Gordon. | 46 |
| Chapter 26. British Control of Egypt..... | 47 |
| Chapter 27. Negotiations for Egyptian Independence: The Second World War. | 50 |
| Chapter 28. Egypt Becomes an Independent Republic. | 52 |
| Chapter 29. Foreign Affairs under Nasser's Rule. | 53 |
| Chapter 30. Modern Egypt under Nasser..... | 55 |
| Appendix. Population and Chief Towns..... | 56 |
| CHRONOLOGY..... | 57 |
| Maps: Egypt – Ancient and Medieval | 66 |

Foreword

This short history has been compiled from the study of a number of other works, in particular those of W.B.Emery, Jean Vercoutter, J.H.Breasted, Lord Kinross and G.E.Kirk.

Chapter 1. Pre-Dynastic Times : Upper and Lower Egypt: The Unification.

It is generally agreed that the history of a united Egypt started about the end of the 4th millennium B.C. with the establishment of the "First Dynasty". The date of this event is put by different authorities at various times between 3400 B.C. and 2850 B.C. But there were agricultural communities in Egypt for many centuries before this. Nomadic hunters may have settled to an agricultural life in the Nile valley as early as 5000 B.C.

In the same way that the early civilisations in Mesopotamia owed their existence to the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris, those in Egypt were dependent on the Nile, whose regular annual inundation left a deposit of fertile silt. On either side of this narrow strip of "Black Land" was the desert or "Red Land" - the realm of the dead where the tombs of the kings and nobles were later built.

In these very early times two separate kingdoms developed Lower Egypt in the region of the Nile delta, and Upper Egypt stretching from the southern apex of the delta to the First Cataract some 500 miles to the south. These two kingdoms may have existed as far back as in the 5th millennium B.C.

This pre-dynastic period has been divided by archaeologists into several "cultures", named after the sites of the excavations upon which knowledge of these times is based. The Badarian culture in Upper Egypt flourished late in the 5th millennium B.C. It was followed by the Amratian, and then by the Gerzean culture which developed in Lower Egypt. But these cultures were not basically different. They were stages in a continuing process of evolution and progress. Nor were the civilisations of Upper and Lower Egypt basically different. They were connected by the Nile and were in close contact with each other.

According to some authorities the King of Lower Egypt conquered Upper Egypt at some time in this pre-dynastic period, and for several centuries the two were united, with the capital at Heliopolis. But this "first union", if it took place, fell apart, and the universally accepted 'Unification of Egypt' - and the end of the pre-dynastic era - was achieved by the King of Upper Egypt at, as mentioned above, an uncertain date somewhere around 3200 to 3000 B.C. At this time the capital of Upper Egypt was Hieraconpolis (or Nekhen), and of Lower Egypt Buto in the delta.

The king who accomplished this unification was Menes, the traditional name of the first Pharaoh of the First Dynasty. It is far from clear who Menes was, he has been variously identified as the Upper Egyptian kings Scorpion and Narmur and as Narmur's successor Aha, or as a combination of some or all of them. But the fact of the unification is agreed by all.

Another controversy exists as to whether the great cultural and material advances which were made during the late Gerzean period before the unification were wholly the product of native Egyptian progress, or whether they were inspired by an

infusion of people from western Asia, by infiltration or invasion. It seems to be usually accepted that the changes must at least in part have been due to the penetration of Asiatic influences, probably from the Sumerian civilisation in Mesopotamia.

In political organisation, however, Egypt after the unification was ahead of other known civilisations of that time. It was the first nation state. Sumeria was a collection of small city states; and, as far as is known, the civilisations of China and the Indus valley in India, if they existed in a settled state as early as this, also had no "national" organisation.

Chapter 2. - Chronology of the First Twelve Dynasties.

For over a thousand years from the unification Egyptian civilisation developed with little interference from the outside world. The history of Egypt in this period - and onwards to the end of the Dynastic era with the conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. was compiled in the 3rd century B.C. by Manetho, an Egyptian priest. His work was unfortunately lost in the destruction of the Library of Alexandria (see Chapter 11), but his list of the kings of Egypt survived. He divided them into thirty one dynasties, an arrangement which has been adopted in all modern versions of Egyptian history. In the earlier dynasties no reason for the transition from one dynasty to the next one is apparent.

Up to about 1800 B.C. the dynasties have been grouped as follows (the dates vary by a century or two in different versions)

3200/3000 B.C. to c.2700 B.C. - First and Second Dynasties (known as Archaic Egypt).

c.2700 - c.2300/2200 B.C. - Third to Sixth Dynasties (known as the Old Kingdom).

c-2300/2200 - c.2000 B.C. - Seventh to Tenth Dynasties (known as the First Intermediate Period, during which there was a breakdown in the central government of the Pharaohs).

c.2000 c.1800 B.C. Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties (known as the Middle Kingdom).

Chapter 3. *The First and Second Dynasties (Archaic Egypt)*

With the establishment of the First Dynasty there arose a theory of kingship which remained the basis of the Egyptian state for nearly three thousand years. The Pharaoh became a divine absolute ruler to whom the whole nation and people belonged. ("Pharaoh" meant "great house" or 'palace". It was not the title of the king, though in later times the term was used to refer to him.)

The home of the kings of the first two dynasties was Thinis in Upper Egypt, near Abydos, the site of tombs of First Dynasty Pharaohs. From Thinis comes the name Thinite, applied by Manetho to the first two dynasties. The first two kings of the First Dynasty are usually accepted to have been Narmur and Aha, and it was probably Aha who founded the new capital of all Egypt at Memphis.

There were eight or nine kings of the First Dynasty. Their tombs have been found at both Abydos and Sakkara, the necropolis of Memphis. An explanation which has been advanced for this apparent duplication is that, as Kings of Upper and Lower Egypt, they required tombs in each.

Less is known about the kings of the Second Dynasty than about those of the First. The period covered by these two dynasties is put by Manetho at about 550 years - about 250 years for the First Dynasty and about 300 for the Second - but modern estimates put the total Archaic period at about four centuries.

Though united, Egypt in archaic times remained in many ways two lands. The Pharaoh was the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and his title remained so throughout the dynastic period. He wore the White Crown of the South and the Red crown of the North; and there is evidence that in Archaic Egypt there were separate administrations for the two kingdoms. An advantage of the union, though, was that it facilitated an efficient national system of irrigation, on which the prosperity of the country depended.

The army in later times was organised on a feudal basis, and it seems probable that this originated in Archaic Egypt, with the tribal chiefs supplying soldiers for the service of the King. It seems that campaigns were fought during the First Dynasty against the Libyans to the west and the Nubians to the south; but in the Second Dynasty the kings appear to have been too preoccupied with keeping internal order to allow of foreign wars. And in general the ancient Egyptians were not a particularly warlike race.

In religion, they worshipped a number of gods. At the time of the unification the supreme deity of the ruling classes was the sky-god Horus; but many, particularly in Upper Egypt, acknowledged Set as their chief god. (One theory is that the ruling class, or dynastic race, came from outside Egypt - perhaps from Mesopotamia - but other authorities believe that this ruling class was indigenous.)

There were many other gods besides Horus and Set, usually local in their following. Among these were Osiris and the sun-god Re., the centre of whose worship was Heliopolis. In time, there appears to have been a fusion of Horus and Re; the king,

identified with Horus, became the son of Re. The cult of Osiris was a mixture of nature worship and the worship of dead kingship; Osiris became the ruler of the dead in the underworld. The belief in a life after death is exemplified by the provision in the tombs (mastabas) of food, furniture and weapons which might be required for the after-life, and by the practice of embalming to preserve the body from perishing (though this art was not perfected until later than the Archaic age.)

For writing, a hieroglyphic script was well established by the time of the unification, and it continued to develop during the Archaic period. It was either carved on stone, which began to be used in this period, or on wood - which was imported from Syria or written on papyrus (from which the word 'paper" is derived). Art, architecture, and the production of both utilitarian and luxury goods made great advances. Beautiful stone vessels were produced, as well as the traditional pottery vessels (whose form and decoration had provided one of the main differences between the pre-dynastic cultures). Weaving, metal work, the manufacture of jewellery, leatherwork, bone and ivory carving, were all well established industries. Brick was the main building material, and the houses of the nobility achieved a considerable degree of luxury, with baths and comfortable furniture.

By the end of the Archaic period Egypt was a firmly established pharaonic monarchy. It was prosperous, and had reached an expertise in the technique of building, and in the arts and crafts, that was to produce works in the "Pyramid Age" of the "Old Kingdom" which were to be a lasting wonder of the world.

Chapter 4. The Third to the Sixth Dynasties (The Old Kingdom): The "Pyramid Age".

The Third Dynasty comprised, according to Manetho, nine kings, of whom the most famous is Zoser, the first or second king in the Dynasty. The great event of Zoser's reign was the construction of his tomb, the 'Step Pyramid' at Sakkara, the oldest surviving monument in the world built of stone. Over 200 feet high, the Step Pyramid and its surrounding group of other beautiful tombs and temples were designed by the vizier and royal architect Imhotep. It was the forerunner of the 'Pyramid Age' of the Fourth Dynasty.

In the Fourth Dynasty (from about 2650 to 2500 B.C.) the most celebrated kings were Snefru, Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus. Snefru campaigned in Nubia, Libya and Sinai, and built many temples, palaces and fortresses. Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus achieved everlasting fame for the construction of the three huge pyramids at Gizeh, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The largest - the Great Pyramid of Cheops - was nearly 500 feet high, covered an area of thirteen acres, and contained some six million tons of stone. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, who visited Egypt about 450 B.C, it took 100,000 men twenty years to build it, and a further ten years to build the accompanying funerary complex - the mortuary temple where offerings were made for the use of the dead King in the after-life, the processional causeway, the "valley temple" where the King's body was embalmed before burial, and the trenches dug into solid rock where the boats for the dead King's use were laid. As well as showing great skill in building - the sides of the pyramid face exactly north, south, east and west, and each stone block (of average weight nearly three tons) fitted, with no mortar, exactly onto its neighbours - the work was a remarkable feat of organisation.

The Pyramid of Chephren, Cheops' son, was slightly smaller than his father's, but his memory is preserved also in a further monument - the Great Sphinx, a knoll of rock carved into the shape of a lion's body with a human head in the likeness of King Chephren. It stands over 60 feet high.

The Pyramid of Chephren's son Mycerinus was much smaller than those of his father and grandfather, and was left incomplete at his death.

Though these three pyramids are world-famous, there were many others. The line of pyramids was over sixty miles long, commemorating the kings of Egypt over a period of some 500 years. Nor were the tombs of the great confined to those of the kings. Surrounding the royal pyramids were the tombs of the nobles, also provided with stores for the after-life.

In the Fourth Dynasty the kings were supreme, with absolute power and apparently unlimited wealth. And as well as great progress in the arts and architecture, the royal administration was developed and perfected. To enable the administration to function the ancient Egyptians had a system of mathematics for such purposes as tax assessment and their arithmetic and geometry was clearly adequate for the exact calculations required in the building of the pyramids. They also were probably the originators of the

365 day calendar year divided into lunar months. This was in use before the "pyramid age", though there are differences of opinion as to how long before. And Egypt was renowned in the ancient world for her medicine and surgery, knowledge of the latter being probably largely gleaned from the preparation of bodies for mummification. Imhotep, the architect of the Step Pyramid, was a celebrated physician, and was later identified by the Greeks with Aesculapius, their god of medicine.

The centralisation of authority under the king continued during the Fifth Dynasty, though there were signs of the increasing power of the provincial nobles. The royal monuments were fewer and smaller, and the noblemen's tombs more elaborately decorated, many of them with beautifully painted carved pictures showing scenes from daily life. Probably the massive works of the Pyramid Age had drained the royal resources, which were further reduced by endowments* for temples and a system of grants of land to the nobles. During the Sixth Dynasty this process got out of hand; and after the reign of Pepi II, which is reputed to have lasted for 94 years (the longest reign in history), the central government collapsed. For several centuries, until about 2050 B.C, there was civil war and confusion.

*These gifts and endowments are recorded in the "Old Kingdom Annals" inscribed on stone during the Fifth Dynasty. The Annals gave a list of the Kings of Egypt as far back as the late pre-dynastic period. Only fragments of the stone have survived; the largest fragment is in the Palermo museum in Sicily, and is known as the Palermo Stone.

Chapter 5. The First Intermediate Period (Seventh to Tenth Dynasties).

Little is known of the kings of the Seventh and Eighth Dynasties. They are thought to have continued to rule from Memphis, but their rule was only nominal. The nobles of the south were independent, and the delta itself appears to have been overrun by Asian nomads. The social order of the Old Kingdom had completely collapsed.

Perhaps about 2150 B.C. the princes of Heracleopolis seized the last vestige of authority from the Memphite Pharaoh and established the Ninth Dynasty. The Tenth Dynasty was also Heracleopolitan, but soon the princes of Thebes became paramount in the south; and, after a period in which Egypt was divided between the rulers of Heracleopolis and Thebes, the latter triumphed and established, about 2050 B.C, the Eleventh (Theban) Dynasty over all Egypt. Order in the country was restored, and the authority of the Pharaoh over all the nobles gradually regained.

Two trends during this 'Intermediate Period' of confusion are of interest. One was the emergence of Osiris to a position challenging Re as the "great god". During the Fifth Dynasty the worship of Re, as the ancestor of the Pharaohs, had become the state cult, with Heliopolis the main religious centre. By the end of the Tenth Dynasty pilgrimages went less to Heliopolis and more to Abydos, where Osiris is believed to have his principal tomb. And the worship of Osiris brought with it ideas of justice and mercy, and the belief that the actions of all on earth will be judged after death.

The other trend in this period was the increasing importance of the army, which had not hitherto played an important part in Egyptian life. This hardly surprising result of a period of civil wars gave the new Theban Pharaohs the means to extend Egyptian power into the surrounding lands.

Chapter 6. The Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties (The Middle Kingdom).

The Theban prince who founded the Eleventh Dynasty was Mentuhotep I, who reigned for about forty years shortly before 2000 B.C. He expelled the Asians from the delta, re-opened sea-borne trade with Asia, initiated the conquest of Nubia to protect the trade route to the south, and laid the foundation of a new prosperity. After the short reigns of two further Mentuhoteps, the Twelfth Dynasty was founded, about 1990 B.C, by Amenemhet I, who is thought to have been vizier to, and perhaps related to, Mentuhotep III.

The "Middle Kingdom" (Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties, about 2050 to 1780 B.C.) was a feudal age. The Pharaohs were still absolute rulers, had a large standing army, and were buried in massive tombs (now made of mud-brick, so that they did not survive like the pyramids of the Old Kingdom); but the nobles (nomarchs) lived like princes in their provinces (nomes), had their own troops, and their tombs were large and elaborate. This state of affairs was changed by the forceful Senusret III, the most illustrious Pharaoh of the Twelfth Dynasty, who reigned from about 1880 to 1845 B.C. He abolished the office of nomarch, and administered the provinces direct from the royal residence through a vast bureaucracy - which was partly instrumental in giving rise to a new middle class.

Senusret III also conducted many foreign campaigns. He completed the conquest of Nubia as far as the Second Cataract and protected the frontier with a series of forts. Further up the Nile, near the Third Cataract, he set up a trading post for the commerce in Nubian gold, ivory, ebony, precious stones - and slaves. He also ended the hitherto peaceful relations with the Asians of the Sinai peninsula, where Egyptian mining operations were now protected by the army; and with his army he advanced into Palestine, which became a source of slaves for wealthy Egyptian households.

Senusret's son and successor, Amenemhet III, had a long and comparatively uneventful reign, about 1845-1800 B.C. His claims to fame are the barrage and canal construction works near Fayum (the Twelfth Dynasty capital) by which a very large area was opened to agriculture, and the building at Fayum of the vast mortuary temple known as the Labyrinth. According to Herodotus the Labyrinth, which was probably used as a royal palace and administrative centre as well - and which is totally destroyed - had 3,000 rooms.

The Twelfth Dynasty was a time of great prosperity. Trade flourished - with Nubia, Punt (on the southern shore of the Red Sea), Syria, Palestine and Crete. It was also a golden age of the arts and crafts, particularly jewellery and sculpture, and of literature. Egyptian literary works of this period, such as the "Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor", were the inspiration of some of the much later "Arabian Nights" stories, which have endured in nursery tales of modern times.

But after about 1800 B.C. the central authority of the Pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom weakened and collapsed, as had that of the Old Kingdom some 400 years earlier. A second period of confusion followed, known as the "Second Intermediate Period", during which Egypt came for the first time under foreign rule.

Chapter 7. The Second Intermediate Period (about 1780-1561 B.C.): The Hyksos.

The history of the first part of the Second Intermediate Period the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Dynasties - is obscure. But during this period Asiatic invaders, known as the Hyksos, infiltrated into the delta, where they made their capital at Avaris about 1730 B.C. They then extended their control over the rest of a disorganised and disunited Egypt, where they ruled as the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Dynasties from about 1720 to 1570 B.C.

It is not clear who the Hyksos were. It is thought that they were Semites from Palestine or Syria, perhaps migrating to Egypt because of the invasion of south-eastern Asia by the Aryan tribes. They are known as the Shepherd Kings. They appear to have conquered Egypt without a fight. And they certainly made no attempt to destroy Egyptian civilisation. Instead they respected Egyptian customs and beliefs, adopted Egyptian culture - including the Egyptian god Set - and ruled as Pharaohs. For administration they employed the Egyptian scribes, the mainstay of the bureaucracy, who seem to have served them faithfully. It seems (from the probable dates) to have been during the Hyksos Sixteenth Dynasty that the Hebrews took refuge in Egypt, where they remained until led back to Canaan by Moses some 400 years later.

In this age of confusion, the Thirteenth and Fourteenth (Egyptian) Dynasties, about which practically nothing is known, overlapped with the Hyksos Dynasties, and with the Theban Seventeenth Dynasty. These Theban princes started a war of liberation, and for a time Egypt was divided between them and the Hyksos. Kamose, the last king of the Seventeenth Dynasty, extended Theban authority northwards nearly to the delta; and the eviction of the Hyksos was virtually concluded by his successor Ahmose founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty in 1567 B.C, by his capture of the Hyksos capital Avaris.

The Hyksos interlude had a profound effect on the Egyptian people and their history. It was a great blow to their self-satisfaction. Previously they had regarded themselves as a race apart, superior to all their neighbours. They now realised that the peoples of western Asia were not to be despised, and cultural links with them were henceforth encouraged. And in the practical world of warfare they learned much from the Hyksos, who introduced into Egypt the horse and the chariot and more effective weapons. In the war of liberation Thebes recruited mercenary troops from Nubia; and the Egyptian army of the Eighteenth Dynasty - the first 250 years of the "New Kingdom" or "Empire" - with its up-to-date equipment and mercenaries, became a force which extended Egyptian power to the Sudan in the south and far to the north in western Asia.

Chapter 8. The "New Kingdom" or "Empire" : Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties (c.1567-1085 B.C.)

Under the early Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt became essentially a military state. Nubia was conquered as far as the Fourth Cataract, and by the conquest of Palestine and Syria Egypt gained an empire in Asia stretching to the Euphrates. Close contact was made with the peoples of western Asia - Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Phoenicians - and with the Cretans and the Mycenaean Greeks of the eastern Mediterranean.*

The most celebrated of these warrior Pharaohs was Thothmes III, who reigned from about 1483 to 1450 B.C. One of the first great generals of history, Thothmes III - an able administrator as well as Egypt's greatest soldier - cemented the conquest of Palestine by his victory at Megiddo (C-1479 B.C.).

Just before the accession of Thothmes III there had been a peaceful interlude in these wars of expansion. During Thothmes' infancy his aunt and stepmother, the queen-dowager Hatshepsut, had been made regent, and had seized the throne herself, assuming the functions and dress of a male Pharaoh and ruling as such for some twenty years - the first Empress in known history. She devoted herself to peaceful projects and the encouragement of the arts. At Karnak** one of the great obelisks erected in her reign still stands. It was carved from a single piece of granite, and is nearly a hundred feet high. And commemorated in the carvings in her terraced temple in Thebes are many religious and topical scenes, including a naval expedition to the land of Punt to bring back incense and other exotic products of the African interior. After Hatshepsut's death Thothmes set about the obliteration of records of the reign of a woman, but many monuments survived.

During the hundred years from the time of Thothmes III Egypt enjoyed the fruits of conquest, in material luxuries from foreign trade, and in artistic achievement enriched by contact with foreign cultures, particularly the Minoan art of the Cretan civilization. This period of prosperity and cultural refinement reached its peak in the reign of Amenhotep III (the Magnificent), renowned for his wealth and splendour. Of his massive funerary temple in Thebes there still remain two huge statues of the seated King, known as the Colossi of Memnon.

Amenhotep III was succeeded by Amenhotep IV (about 1375-1358 B.C), a remarkable young Pharaoh who tried to substitute a monotheistic religion for the traditional many gods of Egypt. By this time Amun (or Amen), originally the local god of Thebes, had taken the place of Re (or combined with him as Amun-Re) as the supreme deity, and to him was dedicated the great temple at Karnak. Amenhotep IV changed his name, which meant "Amen is satisfied", to Ikhnaton, meaning "pleasing to Aton", the name he gave to the disc of the sun whose sole worship he tried to impose on the nation. He forsook Thebes and built a new capital 250 miles to the north Akhetaton, now known as Amarna. Here he is reputed to have lived an idyllic existence with his favourite wife, the beautiful Nefertiti, and their six daughters. During his reign Egypt's Asian empire dwindled away - whether or not through Ikhnaton's neglect seems to be disputable.

Ikhnaton's new religion did not survive after his (perhaps violent) death. His son-in-law Tutankhaton, who became Pharaoh at about the age of twelve, abandoned Akhetaton, probably under pressure from the powerful priests of Amun, in whose hands he was a puppet. He returned the court to Thebes and changed his name to Tutankhamun. He died after a brief and undistinguished reign of nine years (c.1361-1352 B.C.), but he has recently achieved everlasting fame by the discovery in 1922 of his tomb in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings at Thebes, practically unscathed by robbers – the only ancient royal Egyptian tomb so far found to have escaped their depredations. His tomb, after over 3000 years, still contained his solid gold coffin and was packed with its precious furniture.

Horemheb, a soldier and the last Pharaoh of the illustrious Eighteenth Dynasty, fully restored the cult of Amun and brought order to a long neglected administration. He also started to try to regain Egypt's lost Asian empire, a task which was pursued energetically by Seti I and Ramses II of the Nineteenth Dynasty. Some fifty years of warfare with the Hittites ended with Ramses' victory at Kadesh in Syria, after which a treaty of peace and alliance restored southern Palestine to Egypt. Ramses II, who reigned for nearly seventy years (about 1300-1230 B.C.), then devoted himself to great building and artistic projects, of which the most famous is the majestic temple hewn into the rock face at Abu Simbel in Nubia. (When the Aswan high dam was built in 1960-70 the temple was cut out of the rock and re-assembled on a near-by cliff, to save it from inundation.)

Ramses II's successors of the Nineteenth*** (until about 1200 B.C) and Twentieth (1200-1085) Dynasties were under constant pressure from the Libyans and from "the peoples of the sea" - from the Mediterranean and Aegean islands. Corruption and inefficiency contributed to a gradual decline of the Pharaohs' authority. In Asia Egyptian rule became purely nominal. In Egypt the Pharaohs were unable to check the rising strength of the priests of Amun. The Twentieth Dynasty ended in 1085 B.C. with the priests and the nobles striving with each other for power. So ended the glorious period of the Empire.

*The port in the Lebanon from which Egypt imported her cedar wood was Byblos, and from here papyrus was exported to Greece. Hence the early Greek name "Byblos" for a papyrus book - the derivation of the word "Bible".

**The present-day towns Karnak and Luxor are on the site of ancient Thebes, the great city and capital of the Empire.

***It was probably towards the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty, when Merneptah was Pharaoh, that Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Chapter 9. - The Decline of the Empire.

By 1085 B.C. the great days of Egypt were over. Except for an interlude in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. the seven and a half centuries from 1085 B.C, to the conquest by Alexander the Great was a period of internal disunity and foreign Nomination.

The approximate chronology of this period is as follows

- 1085 - 945. Twenty first Dynasty - divided rule.
- 944 - 715. Twenty second to Twenty fourth Dynasties - divided rule and Libyan control.
- 715 - 664. Twenty fifth (Ethiopian) Dynasty.
- 664 - 525. Twenty sixth (Egyptian - Saite) Dynasty. Renaissance of Egyptian culture and power.
- 525 - 404. Twenty seventh (Persian) Dynasty.
- 404 - 343. Twenty eighth to Thirtieth Dynasties. Some degree of independence from Persia.
- 343 - 332. Thirty first (Persian) Dynasty.
- 332 B.C. Conquest by Alexander the Great.

The Twenty first Dynasty - nobles of Tanis in the delta - strove for authority against the priests of Amun in Thebes. The Twenty second to Twenty fourth Dynasties was a further period of divided rule, during which Libyan chiefs who had been employed in the Egyptian army founded a Libyan dynasty with their capital at Bubastis in the delta. Then came the conquest of Egypt by the Kings of Cush (in Nubia) who ruled as the "Ethiopian" Dynasty. These kings, whose capital was at Napata, were not Ethiopians in the modern sense - they were not from Abyssinia. In those days the land known to the Greeks as Ethiopia included Nubia.

Under the Ethiopian Dynasty there was some revival of prosperity, and of religious cults under the priests of Amun. But in an attempt to extend their realm into Palestine the Ethiopians came into conflict with the military might of Assyria, then at the peak of its power. They were driven back, and in 661 B.C. Ashurbanipal of Assyria conquered Egypt. But Assyrian power, which was soon to be overthrown by the Medes and the Chaldeans, was short lived in Egypt. Psamtik, son of the Governor of Sais (in the delta) appointed by Ashurbanipal, rebelled against the Assyrians and drove them out, and established the Twenty sixth (Saite) Dynasty.

In the Saite period Egypt recovered her status as an independent nation and one of the world's leading civilisations. There was a renaissance of art and architecture, the masterpieces of the Old and Middle Kingdoms being deliberately imitated. Trade revived, and Egypt became once more prosperous. Psamtik I, who reigned from

about 663 to 610 B.C, initiated this revival; and it was carried on by his son Necho, during whose reign (610-595) a Phoenician expedition, commissioned by him, successfully circumnavigated Africa in the course of three years.

Necho also tried to regain Egypt's lost Asian empire. He conquered Judea by his victory over Josiah at Megiddo (609 B.C.), but his army was routed by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon at Carchemish (in Syria) and driven out of Asia. Military ventures by Necho's successors were likewise unsuccessful.

A feature of the Saite Dynasty was the close relationship with the Greek city states and Lydia in Asia Minor. Greek merchants were encouraged to come to Egypt, where a purely Greek city, Naucratis, became the main commercial Centre of the kingdom. Greek mercenaries served in the Pharaoh's army; and one of the last Pharaohs of the dynasty, Amasis, married a Greek princess. Greek scholars studied at the university at Memphis, famous for its medical school. And Egyptian forms and methods had a considerable influence on Greek art and architecture.

The Saite era was brought to an end by the appearance on the world scene in 550 B.C. of a new great power - the Persian Empire, created by Cyrus the Great. Lydia, Chaldean Babylonia, and Egypt combined to oppose him, to no avail. By 546 B.C. Cyrus had conquered Lydia (taking King Croesus prisoner), and in 538 B.C. Babylonia and its dependencies Syria and Palestine submitted to him. Shortly before his death in 529 B.C. Cyrus put his son Cambyses in charge of his plans to conquer Egypt. Cambyses duly achieved this with the defeat of the Pharaoh Psamtik III at Pelusium, at the eastern end of the delta, in 525 B.C. He established the Twenty seventh (Persian) Dynasty in Egypt.

Chapter 10. Persian Rule (525-332 B.C.): Conquest by Alexander the Great.

Cambyses died on his way back to Persia, and was succeeded by Darius the Great. Darius was an enlightened and beneficent ruler of his huge empire. Every region and race was allowed to keep its own religion and customs. In Egypt Darius was crowned King, approved by the Egyptian gods. On the practical side he developed Egyptian agriculture, and commerce flourished. He restored the ancient canal joining the Nile to the Red Sea at Suez (probably first dug during the Middle Kingdom), and he also restored the medical school at Memphis which had fallen into disuse.

From about 500 to 450 B.C. Persia was engrossed in her wars with the Greek city states, and during the whole of the 5th century B.C. there were intermittent rebellions in Egypt. One such rebellion was quelled by Darius's successor Xerxes I; but the subsequent monarchs of this Persian dynasty were weak, and Darius's wise policy towards his subject races was abandoned for one of suppression. (It was during this period that Herodotus visited Egypt). Eventually, in 404 B.C. a rebellion with Greek aid restored virtual independence to Egypt for sixty years - the period of the Twenty eighth to Thirtieth Dynasties.

In 343 B.C. the brutal but effective Persian King Artaxerxes III re-conquered Egypt; but ten years later the decaying Persian Empire fell an easy prey to the new Macedonian leader of Greece, Alexander the Great. In the course of three years Alexander conquered the whole Persian Empire - Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Phoenicia and Egypt as well as Persia itself. Egypt succumbed in 332 B.C, Alexander being welcomed by the Egyptian people as a liberator from Persian tyranny.

Alexander spent about four months in Egypt, before going on to complete his conquest of Persia and then to India. While in Egypt he founded the naval base and commercial port of Alexandria, which rose to a dominant position in the south-eastern Mediterranean; and he found time for a hurried visit to Siwa Oasis, 200 miles into the western desert, where in the Temple of Amun the priests proclaimed his Pharaoh and son of God.

Alexander died in Babylon in 323 B.C. at the age of 32. His Macedonian generals then struggled with each other for shares of his great empire. The bulk of the Asian territory fell to Seleucus, and Egypt was seized by the shrewd and able Ptolemy, who had been one of Alexander's most trusted generals and who appreciated the wealth of Egypt and its ease of defence. He enhanced his prestige by obtaining possession of Alexander's body, which was brought to Egypt and buried at Alexandria, which Ptolemy made his capital in place of Memphis. He founded a dynasty which lasted for three centuries, - the first of a series of foreigners - Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks who successively ruled Egypt for the next 2200 years.

Chapter 11. The Early Ptolemies: Alexandria.

Ptolemy I ruled until 285 B.C. When he abdicated in favour of one of his sons. His administration, and army, were composed of Greeks and Macedonians, but he made no attempt to interfere with Egyptian religion and customs, and he observed the ancient Pharaonic rituals. In religion he established the cult of Serapis, a combination of Osiris and Apis, the sacred bull of Memphis. The great Temple of Serapis in Alexandria - the Serapeum - was devoted to the worship of a trinity of gods - Serapis, Isis, the wife of Osiris, and their child-god Horus.

Alexandria became a magnificent city of marble public buildings; and perhaps Ptolemy Its greatest claim to fame was his foundation there of the Museum and Library, which made the city the principal centre of Hellenic culture. To Alexandria came many of the most talented men in Greece, and, particularly during the 3rd century B.C, there was a great flowering of scientific and mathematical investigation at the Museum. Here, Euclid (about 300 B.C.) evolved his system of geometry; Herophilus founded a school of medicine and made great advances in the study of anatomy; Aristarchus (about 275 B.C.) worked out that the earth revolved round the sun, rather than vice-versa*; Eratosthenes (about 235 B.C.) calculated with remarkable accuracy the circumference of the earth and produced the first map of the world containing lines Of latitude and longitude; Apollonius (about 220 B.C.) worked out the theory of conic sections; and the great mathematician and physicist Archimedes of Syracuse (c.287-212 B.C.) visited and kept in close touch with Alexandria.

The Library achieved even more enduring renown than the Museum. Here were collected, copied and catalogued all literary works of value. The immense task of cataloguing was undertaken by the poet Callimarchus (c,310-240 B.C.) when he was head of the Library. Writings were for the first time divided into "books", depending on the length of the papyrus rolls. The Library in due course contained some 700,000 books. The language of this Alexandrian culture was Greek, now also generally spoken by educated Egyptians; and it became so much the accepted language of literature that the large Jewish community in Alexandria (there were more Jews there than in Jerusalem) translated their scriptures into Greek - the Septuagint.

The Library carried on its work for many centuries, but unfortunately eventually suffered total destruction. The cause of this calamity seems to be uncertain. It is thought that it was partially destroyed in civil wars in the 3rd century A.D; and a section of it (the "daughter" library) by the Christians about A.D. 390 and some say that the final destruction was the work of the Arabs in the 7th century A.D. though this is very controversial.

In the reign of Ptolemy II (285-246 B.C.) Alexandria continued to gain in splendour, and in commercial prosperity. On the island of Pharos guarding the entrance to the harbour was built an immense and magnificent stone lighthouse, nearly 400 feet high - one of the Wonders of the Ancient World. It stood until the 14th century A.D. when it was destroyed by an earthquake.

Ptolemy II, like his father, encouraged all intellectual pursuits. It was during his reign that the Egyptian Manetho (see Chapter 2) wrote, in Greek, his History of Egypt.

Ptolemy II also adopted the Pharaonic custom of marriage to a sister, a custom continued by his successors. In Egypt inheritance was through the female, so the practice of sister-marriage kept the throne within the direct line of descent.

For the first 150 years of the Ptolemaic Dynasty there were many wars with the Seleucid Empire, whose capital was Antioch in Syria. Ptolemy III, who reigned from 246 to 221 B.C, acquired the coasts of Syria and southern Asia Minor. In his reign the zenith of Ptolemaic fortunes was reached, with Egypt the dominant naval power in the eastern Mediterranean. But most of the later Ptolemies were weak and inefficient, and the strength of Egypt declined.

*Aristarchus's theory was unfortunately rejected by the later great astronomers Hipparchus (2nd century B.C.) and Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.), both of whom worked at Alexandria. Their belief that the sun went round the earth survived until the time of Copernicus (16th century A.D.) and Galileo (17th century).

Chapter 12. The Later Ptolemies: The Advent of Rome.

Ptolemy IV (221-203 B.C.), a debauchee, lost much of the Syrian coast to the Seleucids, but recovered most of his losses by a victory at Raphia in 217 B.C. In this campaign Egyptian troops were for the first time used in the Ptolemaic armies.

The Egyptians had been fairly contented under the able rule of the first three Ptolemies, but they became restive under this alien rule when it became weak and ineffective. *Ptolemy V (203-181), who came to the throne as a young boy, had to deal with native rebellions and at the same time attacks by the Seleucids, as a result of which he lost all Egypt's possessions except Cyprus.

The story of the rest of the Ptolemaic dynasty (Ptolemy VI - XIII) is one of domestic strife and struggles between rivals for the throne, and of the increasing influence of Rome in Egyptian affairs. After the successful conclusion of her struggle with the Carthaginian Hannibal in 201 B.C, Rome turned her attention eastwards. By 190 B.C. she had inflicted crushing defeats on Macedon and on the Seleucids, and had extended her domains far into Asia Minor; and in 168 B.C. Roman intervention prevented the successful conclusion of a Seleucid invasion of Egypt, with which Rome had always been friendly. After that, though the Ptolemies still ruled, Egypt became virtually a Roman dependency. One the later Ptolemies bequeathed Cyprus to Rome, and the Romans claimed that another had bequeathed his kingdom to them. The Romans regarded Egypt as an attractive colony and as a useful source of grain - Egyptian agriculture had remained unimpaired by her troubles.

By the middle of the 1st century B.C. the Seleucid Empire had disintegrated. Rome had taken over Syria, and Pompey had taken Roman rule as far as the Euphrates, where she was confronted by the Parthian Empire of Persia.

*The famous "Rosetta Stone" dates from the reign of Ptolemy V. It was accidentally found at Rosetta in the Nile delta in 1799 by one of Napoleon's men when digging trenches, and the inscriptions on it were later (1822) deciphered by the French Egyptologist Champollion. The inscriptions were a record of a decree by the Egyptian priests honouring Ptolemy V. The decree was written in Greek, the language of government, and was repeated in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs used by the priesthood, and in the simplified form of Egyptian writing known as demotic - for the benefit of Egyptians who knew no Greek. This triplification enabled the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing to be at last deciphered in modern times. The stone was captured from the French by the British, and is in the British Museum.

Chapter 13. Cleopatra.

In 51 B.C. the throne of Egypt was jointly inherited by the ten year old Ptolemy XII and his seventeen year old sister and wife Cleopatra VII (there were six previous Queens of Egypt named Cleopatra). Charming and seductive, Cleopatra was also a clever, ambitious, and highly educated woman - she spoke several languages, including Egyptian, which none of her ancestors had bothered to learn. She wanted to rule alone, probably not only from personal ambition but for patriotic reasons as well - to restore to Egypt some degree of independence from Rome by winning over the Roman leaders, and indeed to share in the central power in Rome in partnership with one of them.

At this time there was political conflict within Rome itself, culminating in a military struggle between the two great generals, Pompey and Julius Caesar. In 48 B.C. Pompey was defeated and fled to Egypt, where he was murdered by one of his own centurions. Caesar pursued him, unaware of the murder until he landed in Alexandria. Meanwhile Cleopatra had tried to get rid of her brother, but instead had been ousted herself - to Egyptians Ptolemy XII was Pharaoh. Cleopatra then succeeded in getting the support of Caesar, who was involved in some fighting against Egyptian resistance, in the course of which Ptolemy disappeared - perhaps murdered. With Caesar's help Cleopatra became queen again, marrying her younger brother Ptolemy XIII.

Caesar, fascinated by Cleopatra's charm, remained in Egypt for some months with her, and she bore a son Caesarion, whom she averred to be Caesar's. She followed Caesar to Rome and during the next three years (47-44 B.C.) lived there as his mistress. After Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C. she visited Rome no more. She now ruled Egypt in association with her infant son Caesarion, Ptolemy XIII having died, reputedly poisoned by order of Cleopatra.

Cleopatra took no part in the Roman civil wars following Caesar's murder, but resumed her intrigues in 41 B.C. when she met Mark Antony, one of the triumvirate now ruling Rome (the others being Octavian, Caesar's great nephew and heir, and Lepidus.) She charmed Antony as she had Caesar - the romance has been immortalised by Shakespeare. She bore Antony twins, and later a third child.

Antony spent a year in Egypt, and returned there in 36 B.C. after being disastrously defeated in a campaign against the Parthians. He now married Cleopatra, although already married to Octavian's Sister. With Cleopatra he ruled Rome's eastern possessions for the next five years, living in Alexandria and Antioch (in Syria) in oriental splendour.

Meanwhile Octavian consolidated his position in Rome and her western provinces. He then had little difficulty in persuading the Senate, disturbed by the tales of eastern grandeur and by Antony's reputed gifts of Roman provinces to Cleopatra's sons, to declare war on Cleopatra. Antony's and Cleopatra's forces met those of Octavian at Actium, on the west coast of Greece, in 31 B.C. A naval battle was fought, with the land forces as spectators. Before the battle was over, Cleopatra in her royal galley fled, followed by Antony, whose army then surrendered to Octavian.

In the following year Octavian landed in Egypt, and took possession of the country with little opposition. Antony, hearing an erroneous rumour of Cleopatra's death, committed suicide. Cleopatra, unable to charm Octavian, also took her own life rather than be taken to Rome as a captive. Caesarion was put to death by Octavian's orders.

So ended the 300 year rule of the Ptolemies, who, though Greek, had identified themselves with Egyptian tradition. Egypt now became a province of the Roman Empire, of which Octavian was the first Emperor - Augustus.

Note. The "Cleopatra's Needles" now standing in London and New York were obelisks originally erected in Heliopolis by Thothmes III (see Chapter 8) in the 15th century B.C. They were moved to Alexandria by Augustus about 14 A.D, so have no real connection with Cleopatra. They were presented to the British and American nations late in the 19th century.

Chapter 14. Egypt under the Roman, and then Byzantine, Empire: Christianity : The Coptic Church.

Egypt was part of the Roman Empire, or of its successor the Byzantine Empire, from 30 B.C. until the Arab conquest in A.D. 642, except for a short period early in the 7th century, when it was conquered by Persia. Until the reign of the Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 284-305) Egypt was ruled from Rome; and after A.D. 330 from Constantinople, the Emperor Constantine the Great's new capital on the Bosphorus, built on the site of the old Greek town Byzantium.

For over six centuries Egypt was protected from external threats - except for periodical attacks from her southern neighbours by the shield of Rome or Byzantium, and her people were free to carry on their trade and agricultural pursuits in peace. Augustus improved the irrigation, commerce developed, and for a time Egypt was quite prosperous. But Roman policy, though not deliberately oppressive, was to exploit Egypt's agricultural wealth for the benefit of Rome. Egypt became the main granary of the Empire. Taxation bore heavily on the people; and the system, introduced by the Romans, under which selected individuals were responsible for tax collection and personally liable for default, ruined many of the urban middle class and superior peasantry. In good times the people were fairly content. In bad times - when the Nile inundation failed or when assailed by the plague - there was no margin of safety, and misery and revolt followed.

Politically, though one of a large number of Roman provinces, Egypt from the first had a peculiar status. It was treated by Augustus as his personal domain, and the Roman Senate had no power there. It was ruled through a Roman Prefect by an absentee Emperor, who was an absolute King of Egypt as the Pharaohs had been. Later, the Organisation was gradually assimilated to that in the rest of the empire; but, with the founding of the Eastern Roman Byzantine Empire, the product of Diocletian and Constantine, the Egyptian concept of absolute divine rule was extended to the whole of the East. The Byzantine Empire was an oriental despotism.

In the early centuries of Roman rule Alexandria flourished. It was the main port for the export of grain to Italy, and was still a great centre of Greek learning; but it diminished in importance and prestige as the great city of the eastern Mediterranean after the founding of Constantinople. It was also for several centuries a great centre of theological discussion and controversy - one of the first of the many theologians and philosophers of Alexandria was the Jew Philo, early in the first century A.D. Some time in that century, too, Christianity reached Alexandria, and from there spread southwards through Egypt to Nubia and Abyssinia.

Religious controversy in Alexandria was not confined to discussion. The city mob, notorious for its turbulence, gave the government endless trouble. In the 1st century A.D. it had many battles with the Jews, who were thought to be getting preferential treatment from the Romans. Early in the 2nd century the Jews were nearly exterminated.

Before their adoption of Christianity the Romans worshipped many gods, and indeed imported others from various parts of their empire. From Egypt came the cult of

Osiris and Isis - most of the larger cities throughout the empire had their temples of Isis. With the coming of Christianity there was a long period - over 300 years - before it was legally recognised as a religion which could be practised in the empire. Alone of all religious sects the Christians would not pay divine homage -to the emperor, as was expected of all Roman citizens, and so Christianity was regarded by most emperors before Constantine the Great as a subversive movement. There were several general persecutions of Christians, notably under the Emperor Decius in the middle of the 3rd century and under Diocletian at the beginning of the 4th century.

In Egypt, where by the 3rd century Christianity was widespread, many Egyptian Christians chose a martyr's death rather than renounce their faith, and many took refuge in monasteries in the desert. It was at this time that Egypt made her principal contribution to ecclesiastical history as the first centre of Christian monasticism. The first recorded hermit is thought to have been St. Paul of Thebes, of whom little is known, but who is reputed to have taken refuge in this way, about A.D. 250, from the persecution ordered by the Emperor Decius. But the generally accepted founder of Christian monasticism is St. Antony of Egypt (about A.D. 250-350), who in his younger days sought solitude in the desert, and who later founded a monastic order.

With the adoption of Christianity by Constantine the Great (about A.D. 312) and its acceptance as a legal religion, it became predominant in Egypt, though worship of the old gods did not entirely die out for another two hundred years or so. During the 4th century temples were everywhere converted to churches - and the mob in Alexandria became Christian. Those Egyptians who still worshipped their ancient gods went in terror of the hordes of fierce Christian monks. About A.D.390 these Christians destroyed the great temple of Serapis - the Serapeum - in Alexandria in a battle with the pagans*; and in A.D.415 they murdered the Greek woman professor of philosophy Hypatia, denouncing her as a pagan enchantress.

Before this (about A.D.310) the first great controversy within the Christian Church - the Arian heresy - originated in Alexandria. The priest Arius denied the complete divinity of Christ, asserting that He was less than God. This belief became very popular, but was strongly opposed by the Church of Constantinople. Constantine called a council at Nicaea (in Asia Minor) in A.D.325, at which Arianism was condemned as heretical and the orthodox dogma of the Trinity confirmed. Arianism nevertheless lingered on until the Emperor Theodosius (in A.D.380) ordered the whole empire to submit to the dogmas of Nicaea.

In the 5th century a second great religious controversy arose. The Egyptian Christians asserted that Christ had one nature - the doctrine called Monophysism - as opposed to the orthodox view that Christ was both God and man. Monophysism was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon in A.D.451; but the breach was not healed, and the bulk of Egyptian Christians remained Monophysites, causing a split in the Church which has remained to the present time.

These Egyptian Monophysites called themselves Copts. They set up their own Patriarch at Alexandria, in opposition to the Greek Patriarch of Alexandria appointed by Constantinople, and the movement was partly nationalistic, hostile to Byzantium and hostile to the Greeks in Egypt. It led to a decline of Greek culture in Egypt, and to a revival of the ancient Egyptian language. In the form of Coptic - ancient Egyptian with an admixture of Greek - it became, and still is, the ritual language of the Coptic Church.

(The Abyssinian Christians followed the Egyptian lead, and now form the Majority of the adherents of the Coptic Church, as only comparatively small number of Egyptian Copts resisted conversion to Islam after the Arab conquest. Their descendants now number not much more than a million, perhaps 4% - 5% of the Egyptian population.)

Throughout the whole period of Roman and Byzantine rule in Egypt the Empire was in conflict with Persia, in a series of wars which had no decisive result. In 616, after a great resurgence of vigour in the Persian Empire under Chosroes I of the Sassanian dynasty, his grandson Chosroes II drove the Byzantines from most of Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor - and conquered Egypt. Ten years later the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius reversed this process by a series of victories over the Persians and recovered Egypt. Both the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires were exhausted by their constant wars, an exhaustion which made them vulnerable to the coming onslaught of Islam.

Before that onslaught came Heraclius tried to settle the doctrinal dispute with the Copts by offering a compromise solution, called Monothelism. But the Egyptians were obdurate, and there followed ten years of persecution by Cyrus, the Emperor's envoy and Orthodox Patriarch, in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Copts to accept Monothelism or Orthodoxy.

So when the Arab invasion came, in A.D.639, their conquest of Egypt was made easier by the Egyptians' lack of enthusiasm for the cause of the Byzantine Empire. Though not positively welcoming the Arabs - whose new religion was strange to Egypt - the Egyptians' attitude was negative. They thought that new masters were not likely to be worse than the old Greco-Romans. Resistance to the Arabs came almost entirely from the Greek forces of the Empire.

* It seems probable that it was in this fighting that the 'daughter library' (see Chapter 11) was burnt.

Chapter 15. The Arab Conquest.

Until the end of the 6th century Arabia (except for the fertile Yemen in the South) was a land of nomadic tribes, fighting with each other, trading on the caravan routes, with no semblance of political unity, and polytheistic in religion. A hundred years later these desert Arabs, unified and disciplined by the new faith preached by Mohamed, had conquered in the name of Islam Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, some of Turkestan and India, Egypt, northern Africa and Spain.

This extraordinary transformation does not seem to have been initially due to any fanatical desire to spread the new religion; in fact the Arabs made no great effort to convert the peoples they conquered. Their original motive seems to have been merely plunder. But the weakness of their main adversaries - the Byzantine and Persian Empires - was such that their raids led to easy conquests; and, having found this, the Arabs then set about extending, holding and administering these conquests.

The conquest of Egypt took place between A.D.639 and A.D.642, in the time of 'Umar, the second Caliph, as the Moslem rulers were called. The Arabs had already taken Syria from Byzantium, and Persia was being overrun, when Amr Ibn al-As, one of the ablest Arab commanders, obtained 'Umar's rather reluctant permission to invade Egypt with a small force of 4,000 men.

Amr captured Pelusium in December 639- With 5,000 reinforcements from Syria he defeated the Greek forces at Heliopolis in July 640, and then laid siege to the great fortress of Babylon (at the southern end of modern Cairo). Babylon fell in April 641, and after being held up by the Greeks at the many irrigation channels, Amr and his army appeared before Alexandria. The city held out for many months, but in 642 the Emperor Constans 11 (Heraclius died in 641) sent Cyrus to make peace with the Arabs. The Greeks were given a year to depart, and Alexandria was transferred to the Moslems. The Arabs now controlled all Egypt, and later a treaty with the Nubians settled Egypt's southern boundary at Aswan.

Amr wanted to make Alexandria his capital, but 'Umar decided that the Arab forces were more at home in the desert. A town of tents at Al Fustat, which had been the Arab camp for the siege of Babylon, became the capital.

On the fall of Alexandria there was no pillaging, and the Copts were allowed to continue their Christian worship. But soon many Egyptians, disillusioned with the doctrinal arguments in the Christian Church, gratified by Amr's conciliatory attitude, and attracted by the simple tenets of the Moslem faith, were converted to Islam. (In Mohammedanism there is no priesthood and there are no theological complications; and all believers are equal before God, whatever their race, colour or worldly status. Like Christianity it is uncompromisingly monotheistic. Moslems believe in one God only (Allah), and in the teaching of the prophet Mohammed as laid down in the Koran.) Egypt's ready acquiescence in the new order was a tribute to the wise administration and tolerance of the early Moslem leaders.

As part of the Arab empire Egypt now occupied a more important position, geographically and politically, than she had as an outlying province of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. Under the Arabs Egypt was the base for the extension of their rule along the coast of North Africa and into Spain.

Chapter 16. Early Islam.

At first the Arabs in Egypt were not allowed by their rulers to settle on the land. Their activities were confined to the collection of tribute and the maintenance of garrisons. But they took Egyptian wives, and later the phase of "foreign occupation" changed to one of colonisation and assimilation with the native population. The use of the Arabic language steadily gained ground, and Egypt's integration into the Arab empire was sealed at the beginning of the 8th century when Arabic became the official language of the country.

Similarly Islam became the predominant religion. Although the Arabs did not forcibly convert the Egyptian Copts, their policy of gradual exclusion of Christians from state employment, and the higher taxation of non-Moslems, contributed to the adoption of Islam by large numbers of Egyptians.

For over 300 years from the Arab conquest (642-969) Egypt was ruled by Governors appointed by the Caliphate, though for such of the last hundred years of this period these Governors established independent dynasties. Until the middle of the 8th century the Caliphs were the Ummayyad family, ruling from Damascus. Then came the Abbasid Caliphs, who founded a new capital at Baghdad.

The move of the Caliph to Baghdad made supervision of Egypt more difficult; and even in the great days of the Arab empire under the Caliphs Harun-al-Rashid (786-809) and Mamun (813-833), when the Abbasid power was at its height, there was little political authority over Egypt, where civil turmoil often prevailed and there were risings of the Copts against the burden of taxation. In 832 the suppression of a serious revolt of both Copts and Arabs was followed by a massacre of the Copts and the replacement of Arabs in higher-positions by foreign mercenaries.

This importation of foreign mercenaries was one of the causes of a gradual disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate throughout the 9th and 10th centuries. A high proportion of the mercenaries were Turks. During the expansion of Islam into central Asia the Arabs had come into contact with the warlike nomadic Turkish tribes, and had brought many Turks into the Arab empire as slaves. They had then increasingly employed them as soldiers, under their own officers; and the influence of these Turks over the Caliphs grew, until in the 10th century the Caliphs were puppets of the Turkish generals.

Another cause of the decline of Abbasid power was that the fervour accompanying the original expansion of Islam had now spent itself. The Caliphs had become luxury-loving emperors, and, though Harun-al-Rashid and Mamun gave a great impetus to the study of the arts and sciences, which led to the golden age of Arabic learning, the religious zeal which had bound together the various parts of the Caliphate was now lacking. In the 8th and 9th centuries the western provinces of the Caliphate broke away, first Spain and North Africa, and then, in 868, Egypt. The independence of Egypt was proclaimed by Ahmed Ibn Tulun, the Turkish Governor appointed by the Caliph in Baghdad.

Ibn Tulun, son of a slave, was a professional soldier, and also a highly intelligent man with a university education. Near Al-Fustat, the Arab capital, which had become

a great commercial centre, he built a magnificent palace and a great mosque, which still survives almost intact as one of the finest examples of early Islamic architecture. Under Ibn Tulun some of Egypt's former glory and prosperity was restored; and in 877 he added Syria to his domains, thus initiating an association between Egypt and Syria which lasted until the Ottoman conquest over six centuries later.

But the dynasty which Ibn Tulun founded (the Tulunids), and which depended on a military caste of Turks and Negroes (Arabs were no longer enrolled), decayed after his death; and in 905 Egypt reverted for thirty years to the authority of the Baghdad Caliphate. From 935 to 969 another dynasty of Turkish Baghdad-appointed Governors (the Ikhshidids) ruled Egypt and Syria. Then a disorganised Egypt, weakened by internal dissension and brought near to collapse by the extortion of her rulers and by their incompetence in economic affairs, fell to new invaders the Shi'a Moslem Fatimids, Caliphs of Tunis.

Chapter 17. The Fatimids.

Soon after the establishment of the original Arab Caliphate, on the death of Mohammed, dissension had broken out in the Arab world between two rival Moslem sects - the Sunnis, who formed the majority, and the Shi'a, who held that the head (Imam) of the Moslems must be a descendant of 'Ali, Mohamed's cousin and son-in-law (and after whose assassination in 661 the Umayyads had secured the Caliphate.) This split still exists. The main stronghold of Shi'ism became, and still is, Persia; but one of the break-away Caliphates set up in North Africa on the disintegration of the Abbasid empire was seized in 908 by the Isma'ilis, an extremist Shi'a group. They established a dynasty known as the Fatimids, claiming descent from Fatima, Mohamed's daughter and 'Ali's wife. By 966 they ruled the whole of North Africa west of Egypt, and also Sicily.

The Fatimids made several raids on Egypt, their conquest of which was thwarted by the waterless desert they had to cross. But in 969 their general Jawhar solved this problem by supplying his army from an accompanying fleet. He invaded Egypt and defeated the Ikhshidids. Adjacent to al-Fustat he founded a new town, called al-Kahira (meaning "the Victorious") - modern Cairo. Here he housed his troops and started the building of a palace for the Caliph and a great mosque - the Mosque of al-Ashar. The Fatimid Caliph then transferred his seat of government to Cairo, al-Fustat remaining the chief commercial centre. (Alexandria had now sunk into comparative unimportance.)

The Fatimids ruled Egypt for two hundred years (969-1171). Before the end of the 10th century they conquered Syria and western Arabia. Cairo became the capital of a Caliphate which soon eclipsed the waning power of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, and became the centre of Moslem culture. The Mosque of al-Azhar was made into a university, to become the most famous centre of Islamic learning. Commerce was diverted from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, and Egypt in the middle of the 11th century was described by a Persian traveller as the only peaceful and prosperous part of eastern Islam. The Fatimid Caliphs lived in luxury and devoted themselves to the arts and architecture, adorning Cairo with numerous buildings, many of them designed by Persian or other foreign architects.

Meanwhile the Abbasid Caliphate had fragmented, and its economic decline had been accelerated by the depredations of a great wave of Turkish immigrants. In 1055 it was reduced to a nominal existence only when Baghdad was taken by the invading Seljuk Turks. The Seljuk Turks had settled late in the 10th century in the land east of the Aral Sea. In the 11th century, having overrun northern Persia and Mesopotamia, they went on to destroy the Byzantine power in eastern Asia Minor and to take much of Syria from the Fatimids. But at the end of the century the Seljuk Empire in its turn broke up into a number of small states; and both they and the Fatimids were faced by a new foe from the west - the Crusaders, to whose zeal the mad Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (996-1020) had contributed by his persecution of Christians and destruction of their churches, including (in 1010) the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

From the time of the "Mad Caliph" onwards the authority of the Fatimids gradually dwindled. They had to contend, not only with the Seljuk Turks and the Crusaders,

but with the disapproval and enmity of the Sunni Moslems is general, and also with a revolutionary offshoot of the Isma'ili movement which had originally brought them to power. By the end of the 11th century most of Syria and Palestine, where it had not been lost to the Turks, had fallen to the Crusaders, the holy cities of Arabia (Mecca and Medina) had withdrawn their allegiance, North Africa had been lost by defection to Sunni orthodoxy, and the Normans had taken Sicily. The Fatimids, who had become more attracted to the arts of peace than to those of war, were left with little more than Egypt alone.

In the 12th century the Fatimid dynasty continued to decline, though it survived with some degree of authority over Egypt for another seventy years. During this period the Frankish Christian states set up in Syria after the First Crusade, whose existence depended on the lack of cohesion amongst the neighbouring Moslems, were increasingly threatened by the Moslem Zangi of Mosul and his son Nur-ed-Din, who unified the Moslem forces and re-conquered much of Syria. Both Nur-ed-Din and the Christian King of Jerusalem aimed at controlling Egypt; and after some confused fighting in 1168, in the course of which al-Fustat was burned to the ground, Nur-ed-Din's general Shirquh drove the Crusaders out and became Vizier of Egypt. Shirquh died in 1169 and was succeeded as Vizier by his nephew Saladin, who had been with him on the campaign. After the death of the Fatimid Caliph in 1171, and of the Nur-Ed-Din in 1174, Saladin became undisputed ruler of Egypt and Moslem Syria.

Chapter 18. *Saladin: The Crusades.*

Saladin, a Kurd from the Mosul area, was a great leader and brilliant general. He was also devout, intellectual and chivalrous. He was held in respect and awe by his enemies, and inspired the admiration and loyalty of the Egyptian people, now restored to the orthodox Sunni faith. (Shi'ism, though tolerated by the Egyptians while the Fatimids were strong, had made no lasting impression on them.)

Saladin made many improvements to Cairo, and built there the "Citadel" to make it an impregnable fortress. Under Saladin, too, the Mosque of al-Azhar grew into full prominence as the leading university of Sunni Islam. And he strengthened Egypt's economic position by improving trade relations with the Italian republics, and by his conquest of Yemen in southern Arabia which gained control of the trade route to India.

Saladin's main objective was the recovery of those parts of Syria and Palestine still held by the Crusaders. First he established his authority, by military and diplomatic means, over Moslem Syria and Mesopotamia, which had broken up into many small states on the death of Nur-ed-Din. Then, in 1187, he utterly defeated the Franks at Hittin (near Tiberias in Palestine) and captured Jerusalem, restoring the city to Islam after 88 years in the hands of the Franks.

The fall of Jerusalem sparked off the Third Crusade, led by Richard I of England, Philip II of France and the German Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (who was drowned on the way to the Holy Land.) After quarrelling with Richard, Philip of France abandoned the Crusade and returned home, leaving Richard in sole charge.

After a two-year siege he succeeded in taking the port of Acre; but the Crusaders were exhausted, and in 1192 Richard made a truce with Saladin which confirmed Moslem possession of Syria except for a coastal strip. Jerusalem remained in Moslem hands, but with Christians having the right of access.

In the following year, 1193, Saladin died. His realm was divided among members of his family, the Ayyubids, of whom the most important were the Ayyubid Sultans of Egypt. They had to contend with further Crusades. The first of these - the Fifth Crusade, directed at Egypt itself - took Damietta - at the mouth of the Nile in 1219, but failed in a march on Cairo, and withdrew.

Then came the Sixth Crusade, in 1228, of Frederick II, the brilliantly able Holy Roman Emperor. This was a diplomatic, rather than a military, Crusade. At the time the Sultan al-Kamil of Egypt was at war with his nephew, the ruler in Damascus; and in return for Frederick's support he agreed to the cession of Jerusalem to the Crusaders. But in 1244 Frankish intrigues against the next Sultan, Ayyub, caused him to invite a Turkish force to re-take Jerusalem, which they did. (It then remained in Moslem hands until captured by the British in 1917.)

The loss of Jerusalem provoked the Seventh Crusade, which was led by Louis IX of France against Egypt in 1249. Its course was similar to that of the Fifth Crusade. Once again Damietta was taken, but advancing to Cairo Louis's army was routed and Louis himself taken prisoner (and later ransomed).

The army which defeated Louis consisted predominantly of Turkish Mameluks – freed Turkish slaves. These Mameluks had been brought to Egypt by Saladin to form a well trained and reliable army. They had in fact formed the backbone of the Moslem resistance to the Crusaders, and in Egypt they had steadily gained in power. Their victory over Louis IX coincided with the death of the last effective Ayyubid Sultan, and the control of Egypt passed into their hands. For the second time a Turkish “slave dynasty” was to rule Egypt – the first being the Tulunids in the 9th century. Egypt now remained under Mameluk rule for over two hundred and fifty years – from 1250 to 1517.

Chapter 19. The Bahri (Turkish) Mameluks (1250-1382).

The Mameluks vied with each other for power, each with his private army, constantly recruited by the importation of more slaves. Their loyal adherents were rewarded with fiefs of land, and Egypt became a feudal country with a Mameluk warrior aristocracy, the strongest of whom at any time became Sultan. Until 1382 the Sultans were Turks (the Bahri Mameluks); from 1382 to 1517 they were Circassian (from the Caucasus) in origin (the Burji Mameluks).

The first Mameluk to come to power was Aybak. He married the last Ayyubid Sultan's widow - who for a short time had been the ruler of Egypt, the only female Moslem sovereign in history. A few years later, in 1257, Aybak having tired of her, she instigated his murder - and was then herself murdered by Aybak's previously divorced wife.

On Aybak's death the sultanate was seized by Qutuz, whose great claim to fame is that he saved Egypt from the Mongols. Early in the 13th century the Mongols under Jenghis Khan had conquered the Chin Empire in China, and had then overrun Turkestan, northern Persia, southern Russia, and some of northern India. Jenghis Khan's son and successor, Ogadai Khan, continued this stream of conquest. The Mongol armies marched right across northern Asia and conquered most of Poland, Hungary and Russia - where, on the south-eastern steppes, they left the "Golden Horde" which dominated Russia for the next 200 years. Ogadai's successor, Mangu Khan, appointed his brother Kublai Khan as governor of China, and assigned to another brother Hulagu, the task of exterminating the Caliphate, which still nominally existed in Baghdad. In 1258 Hulagu captured and sacked Baghdad, and went on to destroy the cities of Syria. But his aim to conquer Syria was thwarted by the Mameluk Sultan Qutuz at the Battle of Ayn Jalut in Palestine in 1260. The Mongol advance south-westwards was checked, and Egypt became the main refuge of Moslem culture.

The next and most famous of the early Mameluk Sultans was Baybars, who had led the Mameluk vanguard at Ayn Jalut, and who then quarrelled with Qutuz, killed him, and seized the throne. Baybars was an able and outstandingly successful Sultan. He established an efficient and just administration, and won the loyalty and admiration of the Egyptian people by his charitable foundations at home and his military exploits abroad. In these he was brave and unscrupulous, and by force and trickery created the strongest Egyptian empire since the days of the Pharaohs. He took most of the remaining possessions of the Crusaders in Syria, and sent his armies as far as Armenia in the north and Dongola (in the Sudan) in the south. Command of the Red Sea gave him paramount influence over the holy cities of Arabia. He revived the nominal Abbasid Caliphate by setting up a refugee from Baghdad as a puppet Caliph in Cairo - a Caliph who invested Baybars with the Sultanate to give religious sanction to his rule.

Baybars died in 1277. His successors finally dislodged the Crusaders from Palestine - Acre, their last remaining possession, fell in 1291 - and repelled further attacks by the Mongols. In Dongola the Christian king was dethroned and a Moslem substituted.

These Mameluk Sultans, in spite of their domestic history of violent feuds, were not mere adventurers. They were able politicians, who had friendly agreements with the Golden Horde in Russia and the Turks of Anatolia, and profitable trading arrangements with the Italian republics. In Cairo they lived in oriental splendour, and they were keen patrons of music and architecture.

The late 13th and the 14th century was a great period of mediaeval Egyptian architecture, with many beautiful and elaborately designed new buildings in Cairo. The city's most famous hospital, built at the end of the 13th century, had, as well as cubicles and wards for the patients, dispensaries and treatment rooms, lecture rooms and library; and the patients were entertained with music and comforted by readings from the Koran - with no fees.

This hospital was built in the reign of the Sultan Qalawun, whose family succeeded in holding on to the sultanate for over a century, until 1382. The Mameluk empire was at its peak in the reign of an Nasir, Qalawun's son by a Mongol princess. He reigned from 1294 to 1341, a period of relative peace and prosperity after the defeat in 1303 of the last Mongol invasion of Syria until that of Timur nearly a hundred years later.

After the death of an Nasir, the last forty years of the Bahri Mameluks was a period of misrule and chaos, during which an Nasir's descendants struggled with each other for power; and Egypt's plight was intensified by disastrous visitations of the Black Death in 1348 and 1381, a catastrophe from which it took centuries to recover. In 1382 power was seized by Barkuk, the first of the Burji (Circassian) Mameluk Sultans.

Chapter 20. The Burji (Circassian) Mameluks (1382-1517).

Barkuk restored a position of relative order in the Mameluk empire of Egypt and Syria, but in Syria his work was undone by the final Mongol invasion by Timur, who had already devastated most of western Asia. To punish the Mameluk Sultans for their support of other victims of the Mongol raids, Timur in 1400-1401 defeated the Mameluk armies and sacked Aleppo and Damascus - whose artisans were deported to Samarkand.

In the Burji Mameluk period there was no question of hereditary rule, as there had been in the last century of the Bahri Mameluks. The able and fearless Circassians fought with each other for mastery, and power went to the strongest. The state was saved from disintegration by its elaborate bureaucracy, but during the 15th century there was a political and economic decline. The Mameluks' attempts to squeeze the utmost revenue out of the transit trade by imposing extortionate customs duties lost them the friendly co-operation of European merchants - and provided them with an incentive to find an alternative route to India. After the Portuguese Vasco de Gama's successful rounding of the Cape to India in 1498 the Mameluk trade dwindled and soon collapsed.

Meanwhile a new and powerful force had arisen in the north the Ottoman Turks. They had established themselves in Asia Minor after being driven from Turkestan by one of the earlier Mongol waves. They had then extended their domains into the Balkan peninsula, and in Asia Minor revived after being crushingly defeated by Timur. And in 1453 they captured Constantinople, thus finally ending the Byzantine Empire, which for several centuries had had a dwindling and precarious existence. At the end of the 15th century the three great powers in the Middle East were the Ottoman Turks, the declining Mameluks of Egypt, and the new Persian Empire of the Safavids. Safavid Persia was a militant Shi'a state, and as such was regarded by the Sunni Ottoman as a menace to their security. In 1514 the Ottoman Sultan Selim I invaded Persia - the beginning of some two hundred years of intermittent warfare between Turkey and Persia - and the Shah sought the help of the Mameluk Sultan. The Mameluk did not actually intervene, but the Ottomans and the Mameluks had been unfriendly for some time - and there had been frontier disputes in Syria - so Selim decided to postpone a further attack on Persia, and first remove the Mameluk danger.

The Mameluks had failed to keep up with the advance in military science and the use of firearms, and suffered from the disadvantage in a Syrian campaign that their Syrian subjects hated them. In 1516 the Mameluk army was defeated by Selim near Aleppo. Syria was lost, and in the following year Selim entered the delta and took Cairo. He hanged the last Mameluk Sultan and took the last puppet Abbasid Caliph into captivity.

The Ottoman conquest meant a fundamental change for Egypt. It became a mere province of the Ottoman Empire instead of an independent sultanate; and Syria was detached from it.

Thus ended the rule of the turbulent Mameluks. But, though turbulent, often treacherous and brutal in their feuds, and politically and economically inept, the later Mameluks maintained the splendour and artistic traditions of their predecessors. The reign of Kait Bey (1468-1496) was one of high achievement in architecture, showing great refinement of taste in the building of elegant tombs, mosques and palaces. It was a period in which learning flourished.

The Mameluks as a whole were, indeed, some of the most enlightened rulers of Egypt, not only in the arts and in providing for the welfare of their subjects, but also in many other ways, such as efficient organisation of law and order and postal services, and the building of canals, roads, bridges and aqueducts.

Chapter 21. Egypt under the Ottoman Turks.

Selim I brought order into Egypt's internal affairs, in place of the near anarchy of the Mameluk period; and for a time Egypt was better off financially, no longer having the expense of maintaining a chaotic ruling body of Mameluks, nor of the administration and defence of Syria. But the three centuries of Ottoman rule made little impression on Egypt. The new rulers made no attempt to establish an Ottoman civilisation there, such as in Anatolia; nor did they impose their language on the people, as the Arabs had done.

They despised their Arabic-speaking subjects, as being designed by nature to be an inferior race.

The Mameluks, though no longer the Sultans, were far from being abolished. Their feudal and administrative organisation was little affected, and they remained governors of sub-provinces. There were more Mameluks than Turkish officials, and they maintained their numbers by the continued importation of slaves from the Caucasus and elsewhere. And as time went on the real power in Egypt gradually reverted to the Mameluks, helped by the political and economic decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century. By then there was little to differentiate between Mameluks and Ottomans in Egypt - both were Turks in blood and speech, as distinct from the native Egyptians.

In 1767 a Circassian Mameluk, Ali Bey, seized Cairo and tried to restore the Mameluk Empire; but in 1772 a combination of his former friends turned against him, and he was driven into exile. He died in 1773, perhaps murdered by a rival. Ottoman authority

was restored, but by the end of the century, the Mameluk Beys were once more virtually masters of Egypt, under an Ottoman suzerainty which was little more than nominal. In the 1760s the success of the Mameluks in imposing their will on the Ottoman government encouraged the rise of a third force - nomad Arabs, who set up an independent state in Upper Egypt until subdued by a Mameluk expedition.

In spite of these troubles, the three centuries of Ottoman rule gave Egypt a period of relative tranquillity - but not one of prosperity nor of well-being for the people. The Turks built few roads, hospitals or schools, and paid little attention to the maintenance of irrigation and agriculture. Egypt, once the granary of the Roman Empire with perhaps seven to ten million inhabitants, by the 18th century was barely self-supporting in food, though her population, through plague and famine, had dropped to an estimated 2 ½ million. Many of the farmers, with the failure of irrigation and oppressed by their landowners, abandoned the land for a life of brigandage. Villages died away. And with the loss of Egypt's transit trade the once great city of Alexandria* was reduced to a town of about 10,000 people. The cost of maintaining the armies of the Mameluk Beys brought Egypt in the 18th century back to the same economic exhaustion that it had suffered in the last days of the Mameluk Empire, from which Selim I had temporarily delivered it.

In the world of art, which had been the glory of the Mameluk Empire, the Ottomans made no significant contribution. The Ottoman buildings were mainly utilitarian and undistinguished.

* In the 1st century, at the height of its fame, Alexandria had an estimated free population of some 300,000, with probably a similar or greater number of slaves.

Chapter 22. The Beginning of European Intervention in Egypt : Napoleon.

In the 18th century the European, notably Britain and France, began to take a political and strategic interest in the affairs of Asia and the Middle East. Britain and France first clashed in India, where Britain emerged supreme. Their rivalry was then transferred to Egypt, where France a strong trading position. In the 1770s the British East India Company sent expeditions to Suez, to open a quicker route (by land across the isthmus) from England to India. This alarmed the French, and the two countries competed for the favours of the Mameluks. Then came the French Revolution and the subsequent European Wars.

By 1797 the French revolutionary armies under Napoleon had knocked Austria out of the coalition against them, and were ready to deal with Britain. Deciding that the invasion of England was impracticable, the French government agreed upon an expedition under Napoleon to conquer Egypt, designed as a step towards the conquest of India. Previously France had been unwilling to offend Turkey, her friend in their common hostility to Austria; but now the Ottoman rule in Egypt was only nominal, and France's professed purpose was to overthrow the Mameluks and restore the authority of the Ottoman Sultan. And Napoleon had visions - like Alexander the Great some fifteen centuries earlier - of a vast Asiatic empire. He also envisaged a Suez canal, under French control, to short-circuit the British sea route to India round the Cape.

In the summer of 1798 Napoleon's army of 35,000 men landed near Alexandria and routed the Mameluk army near Cairo in the so-called Battle of the Pyramids. The mediaeval and undisciplined Mameluk cavalry were no match for Napoleon's highly trained fighting machine, equipped with modern artillery. But the French army was then cut off from reinforcements and supplies from France by Nelson's destructive of the French fleet in Aboukir Bay at the "Battle of the Nile". For six months Napoleon stayed in Egypt, living luxuriously in Cairo and re-organising the government though he failed to overcome the native Egyptians' reluctance to accept responsibility and had to continue to employ Turks in executive positions. And he abandoned his plan for a Suez canal (on the erroneous advice of his engineers that, owing to the difference in levels of the two seas, it was impracticable.

In January 1799 Britain, Russia and the Ottoman Empire reached an agreement to expel Napoleon from Egypt. Napoleon thereupon invaded Syria, where an Ottoman army was assembling. He took Jaffa, but was checked at Acre, where the defenders were supported by a British naval squadron. His army now decimated by the plague, he retreated to Egypt. A Turkish army landed at Aboukir in pursuit. Napoleon annihilated it; but, realising that he had no hope of consolidating his conquest of Egypt in the face of British sea power, in August 1799 he slipped away back to France - managing to avoid the British fleet - leaving his army in rather ineffectual occupation of Egypt. Two years later, by agreement with Britain and Turkey, The French army was withdrawn to France.

Little visual evidence was left of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt and his brief sojourn there; but it had far-reaching in stimulating European interest in Egyptian affairs and her ancient culture. As well as his army, he took with him a large body of scholars,

artists and scientists, who studied Egypt's antiquities, languages, and all aspects of Egyptian life. The result of their labours was published in Paris in 1809 to 1828 – the "Description de l'Egypt", a veritable encyclopaedia of Egypt in twenty volumes. This inspired the study of Egyptology – and also helped to keep Egypt in a prominent place in the foreign policies of Britain and France. (The importance of the "Rosetta Stone", found by one of Napoleon's men, in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, has already been mentioned – see Chapter 12.)

Chapter 23. Mohammed Ali.

In 1803, two years after the repatriation of the French army, the British forces also withdrew from Egypt, leaving the Turks and the Mameluks to fight it out for supremacy. But the victory went to neither. Instead, it went to an Albanian, Mohammed Ali, the commander of an Albanian* contingent of the Turkish army. After supporting first one side and then the other, Mohammed Ali achieved the mastery of Egypt by a coup d'état in 1805, and was reluctantly recognised by the Ottoman Sultan as Pasha (Governor). He was content to acquiesce in the nominal suzerainty of the Sultan, provided that in practice he was the independent ruler of Egypt - and that this rule was hereditary in his family. This ambition he attained. The royal house founded by Mohammed Ali continued to reign as khedives (viceroys) and later as kings (although under British control from 1882 to 1922) until the deposition of King Farouk in 1952.

In 1807 Mohammed Ali repelled a British invasion at Alexandria, undertaken because of a fleeting alliance between Napoleonic France and Turkey. And in 1811 he consolidated his position in Egypt by a massacre of the Mameluks - the entire male Mameluk nobility was entertained at a banquet and then slaughtered. Thus ended five and a half centuries of Mameluk predominance in Egypt.

Mohammed Ali aimed to modernise Egypt and make her a powerful military and industrial state. He reorganised the government on European lines - as Napoleon had started to do - and built up a strong army and a substantial fleet. To do this he turned to western Europe for armaments and technical advice. Britain, whose policy was to maintain the status quo in the Middle East by the preservation of the Ottoman Empire, declined his overtures; so the French became his military and technical advisers. Frenchmen came to Egypt as engineers, factory managers, surveyors and doctors. French educational influence predominated in schools opened by Mohammed Ali; and young Egyptians went to Paris for scientific and technical study.

In campaigns from 1811 to 1818 Mohammed Ali's armies subdued the wild Wahabis of central Arabia, and the eastern coast of the Red Sea came under Egyptian rule. In 1820-1822 his son Hussein conquered the Sudan, mainly in search of gold and slaves. Khartoum was founded in 1823. In 1822-1830 Mohammed Ali assisted the Turks in their efforts to quell a revolt in Greece (the Greek War of Independence), seeking as his reward from the Sultan the governorship of Crete, Syria and Palestine. He took Crete, overran the Morea (Greece south of the Gulf of Corinth), and the Egyptian navy dominated the Aegean. But Britain, France and Russia then stepped in to save Greece from extinction; and an Anglo-French fleet destroyed the Egyptian and Turkish fleets at the Battle of Navarino in 1827.

Having failed to obtain Syria and Palestine as his reward for intervention in Greece, Mohammed Ali decided in 1831 to take them by force. BY 1833 his son Ibrahim Pasha had conquered Syria and advanced far into Anatolia, perhaps with the ultimate aim of over-throwing the Sultan. Alarmed at this threat to the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Britain and France then intervened, and Mohammed Ali was persuaded to withdraw his army from Anatolia. Ibrahim remained in control of Syria for the next seven years.

Mohammed Ali then extended his influence eastwards as far as the Persian Gulf, thus arousing the opposition of Britain, which was consolidating its commercial and strategic interests there. In 1839 Britain annexed Aden, to counter Mohammed Ali's moves in Arabia.

In 1839, also, the Sultan invaded Syria, to avenge the Turkish defeat in the First Syrian War of 1831-33. But his German-trained army was decisively defeated by the French-trained forces of Ibrahim Pasha, and the Ottoman fleet deserted to Alexandria. Britain then persuaded Russia, Austria and Prussia to unite in presenting an ultimatum to Mohammed Ali, who was forced to evacuate Syria and give back the Ottoman fleet. He was, however, confirmed in the hereditary tenure of Egypt.

In economic affairs, Mohammed Ali substantially increased the area under cultivation by irrigation in the Delta, as a result of which the population of Egypt is estimated to have increased by about 75% during his rule; and he laid the foundation of an expanding cotton growing industry. But this boosting of Egypt's agricultural productivity was not aimed at the improvement of the lot of the people, in whom Mohammed Ali was not interested; the purpose was to provide more money to pay for the rapidly growing army and navy. Nearly all the land was taken over by the government, and the farmer-tenants, receiving low prices for their crops, had little incentive to work.

And Mohammed Ali's grandiose schemes for the industrialisation of Egypt ended in failure, as a result of inefficient over-centralisation of management and a low standard of technical skill among the workmen. By the 1840s the great new industrial structure had collapsed entirely. It was, perhaps, too much to expect the rapid transformation of a backward and apathetic peasantry, after centuries of oppression and misrule, into an effective industrial work force. And the alien and ruthless Mohammed Ali was not one to inspire their devotion and enthusiasm.

However, Mohammed Ali made Egypt a force to be reckoned with in international politics; he left the country free from debt; and he began the modernisation - or "westernisation" - of Egypt's administrative and educational systems. He died in 1849, at the age of 80. In his last years he was mentally deranged, and Ibrahim acted as khedive.

*Albania had been part of the Ottoman Empire since the 15th century. It was largely Moslem.

Chapter 24. The Khedive Ismail (1863-1879): Financial Collapse: Anglo-French Control,

Ibrahim died in 1848 and was succeeded as Khedive by Abbas I, a grandson of Mohammed Ali. Abbas was assassinated in 1851, and Mohammed Said, Mohammed Ali's youngest son, became Khedive. Mohammed Said was easy-going and friendly to western ideas. He granted a concession to the French diplomat and engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps for the construction of a Suez Canal, a project which Mohammed Ali had opposed because of its international implications. A Suez Canal Company was formed, and work started in 1859, when Port Said (named after the Khedive) was founded. The canal was completed, and opened with much pomp and ceremony*, in 1869 in the reign of Ibrahim's son Ismail (Khedive 1863-1879).

Ismail, who had been educated partly in Paris, was a man of ambitious ideas, determined on the completion of the modernisation of Egypt started by his grandfather Mohammed Ali. But he did not have Mohammed Ali's financial sense. He became Khedive at a time when the American Civil War had cut down the United States' cotton exports and created a huge demand for Egyptian cotton resulting in great temporary prosperity. Carried away by this Ismail raised large foreign loans from European bankers, with which to finance an immense programme of public works - canals, railways, telegraphs, harbours, bridges, and European-style schools.

Ismail also pressed on with the extension of Egyptian rule southwards. The northern Sudan had been under Egyptian control since the conquest in Mohammed Ali's time - and Khartoum was the centre of a flourishing slave trade. In 1870 Ismail commissioned the British explorer Sir Samuel Baker, who had already travelled extensively in the Upper Nile region, to lead an expedition to conquer the southern Sudan and take steps to suppress the slave trade. After Baker's four-year contract expired in 1873 Ismail obtained the services of the British General Gordon to succeed Baker as Governor of the Sudan. Meanwhile Ismail planned to conquer Abyssinia. He seized the Red Sea coast in 1872-74 and occupied Harar in eastern Abyssinia; but the Egyptians were eventually defeated in the Abyssinian highlands.

These foreign adventures, together with the cost of the industrial schemes - and of Ismail's self-indulgence and love of pageantry - finally brought financial ruin. By 1875 Ismail's foreign debts were enormous, and he was unable to meet the interest payments. To tide over the crisis he disposed of his shares in the Suez Canal Company - which were bought for Britain by Disraeli. Nevertheless Egypt was soon bankrupt, and after an international investigation her finances were placed under the control of Britain and France.

Meanwhile a nationalist movement was arising among the western-educated young Egyptians, a movement which was stimulated by the Afghan-born philosopher Tamal ud-Din, who lived and taught in Cairo in the 1870s. He preached the liberation of all Islam from European exploitation. The nationalists resented the domination of Egypt by the Christian western powers; and the younger army officers in particular resented the continued predominance of Turko-Circassians in the higher positions. There was widespread discontent, too, among the masses, who bore the brunt of excessive taxation.

In 1879, after a demonstration by army officers, Ismail, in a last effort to regain power, dismissed the ministry led by an Armenian, Nubar Pasha, and which had a British finance minister and a French minister of public works; whereupon Britain and France prevailed upon the Turkish Sultan to depose Ismail in favour of his son Tewfik. Ismail retired into exile. He had brought Egypt to financial collapse; but his public works schemes - though they did little for the people as a whole - had greatly improved Egypt's communications, production and trade. Since the middle of the century the population of the country had increased by about 50%, and Alexandria was once more a thriving port.

With the departure of Ismail the Dual Control of Britain and France was restored with increased powers. But it did not last long. The nationalists, led by an army officer, Ahmed Arabi, forced Tewfik to accept a nationalist government, with Arabi as war minister. Their plans for expanding the army and taking over effective political and military control caused France and (at first reluctantly) Britain to join in an ultimatum forcing the dismissal of the government. At the same time the British Liberal government under Gladstone, which had no wish to extend Britain's commitments in Egypt, invited the Sultan to intervene, and agreed to refer the Egyptian problem to an international conference - which decided nothing. But the dismissal of the nationalist government (in 1882) was followed by Arabi's seizure of the Khedive's palace and by riots, in one of which, in Alexandria, some fifty Europeans were killed; and Arabi began to strengthen the defences of Alexandria against a possible attack by the Anglo-French fleet. When he refused to stop fortifying the city, the British fleet destroyed the defences by bombardment, and occupied the town. France, which had hitherto been the main protagonist in intervention in Egypt, had declined to co-operate, so Britain had acted alone.

Another British force, under General Wolseley, took Ismailia in the Canal zone to protect the Suez Canal; and, advancing from there, routed Arabi's army at Tel el-Kebir. Wolseley went on to occupy Cairo. Arabi was exiled; and the first Egyptian nationalist movement collapsed. The Khedive's authority was restored, but Britain now effectively ruled Egypt - to the dismay of France, which had none of Gladstone's compunction about imperialism, but whose sudden access of timidity had left Britain in sole control. For the next 22 years (until the Anglo-French entente of 1904) France tried to impede the British rule in Egypt.

Gladstone had in fact no intention in perpetuating British control. He promised France and Turkey that the British troops would be withdrawn as soon as order and good government was established. But this policy was thwarted by events in the Sudan.

*Present at the ceremony was Thomas Cook, the pioneer British travel agent. The Khedive appointed his agent for passenger traffic on the Nile. Cook's son developed this traffic, with sight-seeing trips to the wonders of ancient Egypt; and in the late 1870s the first hotel for invalids was built at Luxor followed by others to cater for Europeans and Americans wishing to enjoy the healthy, sunny Egyptian winter climate.

Chapter 25. The Sudan : General Gordon.

General Gordon, during five years as Governor of the Sudan, established firm military control and went far to suppress the slave trade. In 1879, exhausted, and unwilling to continue after the deposition of his employer Ismail, he resigned; and the Sudan reverted to Egyptian misrule and oppression. Then, in 1881, there came a formidable insurrection led by Mohammed Ahmed of Dongola, who claimed to be the Mahdi or Messiah, destined to conquer the world for Mohammedanism. An Egyptian army under Colonel Hicks, an Englishman in the Egyptian service, was sent in 1883 to suppress the Mahdi and his fanatical followers - and was totally wiped out.

The British Liberal government could not ignore the threat to Egypt now presented by the Mahdi; but, reluctant to become permanently involved in Egypt, it was even more reluctant to extend that involvement into the Sudan. It therefore persuaded the Egyptian government to abandon the Sudan, and sent General Gordon there with the perilous task of evacuating the scattered Egyptian garrisons.

Gordon, courageous, zealous and deeply religious, but vacillating in his decisions and confident of his ability to put things right, was temperamentally unsuited to so uninspiring a task as evacuation; and soon after his arrival in Khartoum in February 1884 he began to devote himself more to trying to arrange for the future settlement of the country and the welfare of its people. His ideas were rejected by the Mahdi who, joined by the tribes round Khartoum, besieged the city and its garrison of the dispirited Egyptian troops. Inspired by Gordon, they held out for ten months. But in January 1885 Khartoum fell. Gordon and the garrison and many of the inhabitants were massacred. A relief force sent from England after months of procrastination by the government arrived two days too late.

The failure to save Khartoum and the popular hero Gordon had far-reaching effects on British policy. Apart from causing the fall of the liberal government, a surge of emotion throughout the country demanded retribution for Gordon's death, the liberation of the Sudan from barbarism, and the restoration of Britain's military prestige. Any British withdrawal from Egypt was indefinitely postponed.

Chapter 26. British Control of Egypt.

British control of Egypt lasted for forty years, from 1882 to 1922. For twenty four of those years, until his retirement in 1907, Sir Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer) was the British Consul-General - and virtual ruler of Egypt. There was a constitution, with a legislative council and general assembly; but the Khedive and the prime minister had to accept the 'advice' of the Consul-General, and each Egyptian minister had his British adviser, and each provincial governor his British inspector. The British officials had direct access to the Consul-General, and neither the legislative council nor the general assembly had any real power. The Egyptians gave this regime their passive co-operation, except for an interlude after the accession as Khedive in 1892 of the young Abbas II, who unsuccessfully tried to shake off Lord Cromer's dominance.

Lord Cromer re-organised the finances of the country, revised the taxation, and developed the economy, making Egypt solvent and prosperous. The completion of the Delta Barrage and the extension of perennial irrigation in the 1890s increased the agricultural area by a fifth, and in 1902 the Aswan Dam, the great storage reservoir on the Nile, was completed. Cromer also abolished the ancient custom of compulsory unpaid labour, thus giving the peasants the elementary rights of free men. But, though he did not rule out eventual self-government for Egypt, he was convinced that the Egyptian educated classes had not yet the efficiency and integrity required for responsible positions in the administration. He was therefore unsympathetic to a revived nationalist movement which grew up among the largely French-educated upper and middle classes. In 1895 the Nationalist Party was founded by a young law student, Mustafa Kemal, on his return from Paris.

Meanwhile the fanatical followers of the Mahdi had continued to dominate the Sudan. The Mahdi died in 1885, and was succeeded by the Khalifa Abdullah, against whom a British-officered Egyptian army defended the southern frontier of Egypt for the next ten years. To end this nuisance, and to deliver the Sudanese from the tyranny of the Khalifa (during whose rule the population of the country had halved), and to safeguard Egypt's water supply, the British government decided on the re-conquest of the Sudan. After careful preparation and a systematic advance of Egyptian and British forces, this was achieved in 1896-98 by General (later Lord) Kitchener, the British commander of the Egyptian army. At Omdurman in 1898 he routed the forces of the Khalifa, who was later killed. Khartoum was occupied, and in 1899 the Sudan came under the joint control of Britain and Egypt.

The conquest of the Sudan was followed by the "Fashoda incident". A party of French explorers, who had marched across Africa from the western Congo, reached Fashoda on the Nile and raised the French flag there. This caused a crisis which nearly brought Britain and France to war. The French withdrew, but relations between the two countries were further embittered. These relations, however, soon improved and in 1904 the Anglo-

French Entente was concluded, which settled their various colonial disputes. In return for acknowledging France's special position in Morocco, Britain's position in Egypt was recognised - and France's long harassment of British activities there ceased. A result of the Entente was that Britain now agreed as being in full force the "Suez Canal Convention", which had been signed in 1888 by Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Austria, Spain, Italy and Holland. The convention declared the canal open to merchant and war vessels of all countries in times of peace and

war, subject to the Sultan and the Khedive being free to take such measures as they might find necessary for the security of Egypt. Until 1904 Britain had reserved application of the convention in so far as it might hinder her freedom of action during the occupation of Egypt by her forces.

The Anglo-French Entente was a set-back for the Egyptian nationalists, who suffered a further blow with the death in 1908 of their leader Mustafa Kemal. But the movement went on; and the British Liberal government, which returned to power in 1906, instructed Sir Eldon Gorst, who succeeded Lord Cromer as Consul-General in 1907, to introduce reforms aimed at giving the Egyptians more responsibility for policy and the administration. Nationalist agitation, however, increased culminating in the assassination in 1910 of the prime minister, a Copt.* And in 1911, on the death of Sir Eldon Gorst, the British government decided that a forceful character was needed to deal with the situation, and appointed Kitchener.

Kitchener took firm measures against Nationalist agitation; but he also tried to satisfy Egyptian aspirations by setting up a new legislative assembly, largely elected, which provided adequate representation for the agricultural population - whose well-being he sought to improve by further irrigation measures, including raising the height of the Aswan Dam. Under Kitchener the country was quiescent, with Nationalist discontent driven underground.

On the outbreak of the First World War Kitchener left Egypt to become Secretary of State for War, and any further constitutional reforms were deferred for the duration of the war. On the entry of Turkey into the war on the side of Germany, Britain declared Egypt a British Protectorate, thereby ending the nominal suzerainty of the Turkish Sultan. The Khedive Abbas II, who was suspected of anti-British intrigues, was deposed, and his uncle Hussein Kamil proclaimed Sultan of Egypt.

British forces, including troops from Australia, New Zealand and India, were concentrated in Egypt for the defence of the Suez Canal, on which the Turks made unsuccessful attacks across the Sinai peninsula in 1915 and 1916. The build-up of British forces in Egypt continued, reaching quarter of a million men in 1916, and Egypt became a base for Britain's Middle East campaigns, which resulted in the defeat of Turkey in 1918.

During the War martial law in Egypt prevented overt political agitation. But the Nationalist Party (the Wafd) grew greatly in strength, due to discontent with the establishment of the Protectorate - which seemed to make self-government more remote - and with British measures for the prosecution of the war which caused hard-ship to the people. In particular, thousands of fellahin (peasants) were conscripted on a six months basis for a Labour Corps, and their draught animals requisitioned for a Transport Corps for the Palestine campaign. Their resentment was the greater because, under the British, they had acquired a degree of personal liberty and lost some of their traditional patient endurance of oppression.

Immediately after the armistice in November 1918 Sa'd Zaghlul, leader of the Wafd, informed the British High Commissioner that the Egyptian people wanted complete independence. He, and the Prime Minister, requested that a delegation be permitted to put Egypt's case before the Peace Conference. On Britain's refusal to allow Zaghlul to be included in the delegation, the Prime Minister resigned, and riots broke out. The British deported Zaghlul to Malta, with other Nationalist leaders, whereupon there was more widespread rioting and the administration was paralysed by extensive damage to communications. Lord Allenby, victor of the Palestine

campaign, was appointed High Commissioner and restored order. He then adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Nationalists. Zaghlul was released and allowed to represent Egypt's case at the Peace Conference - where, largely owing to his intransigence, the British Protectorate of Egypt was confirmed.

Meanwhile the British government set up a Commission under Lord Milner to consider the future government of Egypt. The Commission recommended a treaty of alliance, under which Egypt's independence would be recognised subject to certain reservations to protect British interests. Negotiations on this basis broke down, mainly on the question of the location of British troops to protect the Canal. But, at Allenby's instigation, the British government in February 1922 made a unilateral declaration, ending the Protectorate and proclaiming Egypt an independent sovereign state reserving - pending subsequent agreement - four points: the security of Britain's imperial communications, the defence of Egypt against foreign aggression or interference, the protection of foreign residents, and the future of the Sudan.

This declaration ended British rule in Egypt, which became a kingdom. Fuad I, who had succeeded his brother Hussein Kamil in 1917 as Sultan, became king. But Britain, through the reserved points, retained control of Egypt's foreign affairs - and continued to intervene in her internal to the extent necessary to maintain the four reservations. Negotiations went on for thirty years before the last British troops left and Egypt became completely independent.

*During the British occupation there had never been an Egyptian Moslem prime minister. They had been an Armenian, a Turkish Jew, and two Turkish Moslems.

Chapter 27. Negotiations for Egyptian Independence: The Second World War.

From 1923 to 1936 Egyptian politics were dominated by the Wafd, under the leadership of Zaghlul until his death in 1927, and then under Nahas; but there were periodical assertions of authority by King Fuad, who inherited the autocratic spirit of his ancestors and had little liking for the position of a constitutional monarch. During this period negotiations for a treaty with Britain kept breaking down owing, on the one hand, to the Wafd's insistence on complete independence and the withdrawal of all British troops, and on the other hand to Britain's determination to keep troops for the defence of the Canal, and to maintain her position in the Sudan. (In 1924, after Nationalist anti-British riots, Sir Lee Stack, British commander of the Egyptian army and Governor-General of the Sudan, was murdered in Cairo. A consequent British ultimatum insisted, among other things, on the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from the Sudan, where they had been inciting Sudanese troops to mutiny.)

Meanwhile a new threat to Egypt was arising. The Italians, already established in Libya, Eritrea and Somaliland, embarked in 1935, under Mussolini's ambitious rule, on the invasion of Ethiopia. This made an Anglo-Egyptian settlement urgent; and in 1936 (soon after the completion of the Italian conquest of Ethiopia) Nahas's government at last succeeded in negotiating a treaty with Britain, both sides making concessions. The treaty was to stand for twenty years. The main provisions were :- (1) a close military alliance, with Britain to be given all facilities in the event of any threatened international emergency; (2) British forces in Egypt in peace time to be limited to 10,000 men restricted to the Canal zone; and Alexandria to be available for use by the British Navy for 8 years; (3) Egyptian troops, officials and immigrants to be re-admitted to the Sudan, where it was agreed that the primary purpose of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium was the welfare of the Sudanese, and that British or Egyptian officials would be appointed only if suitably qualified Sudanese were not available. After the ratification of the Treaty Egypt became a member of the League of Nations (1937).

The few years between the signing of this treaty and the beginning of the Second World War saw a temporary eclipse of the Wafd. Its unity had been largely based on the demand for independence. Now that a settlement with Britain had been agreed, internal dissension weakened the Party; and the young King Farouk, who had succeeded his father in 1936 at the age of 16 and at first attained widespread popularity, was hostile to the Wafd.

On the outbreak of the Second World War Egypt broke off diplomatic relations with Germany; and though she did not declare war her army co-operated with the British in the defence of Egypt. In June 1940 Italy entered the war on the side of Germany, and proceeded to invade Egypt from Libya, and British Somaliland from Italian East Africa. The latter invasion was at first successful, but a counter-offensive by British Empire forces

conquered all Italian East Africa during the winter. The attack from Libya was also repulsed by the British, who went on to drive the Italians out of Cyrenaica; but in February 1941 a German force under General Rommel rescued the Italians, and for the next two years a fluctuating struggle continued in the Western Desert.

Meanwhile the policy of the Egyptian government varied in accordance with Britain's fortunes in the war; and King Farouk, who appeared to have leanings towards the Axis powers, was un-co-operative. Early in 1942, when Britain's fortunes were at their lowest ebb, she decided that a more resolute and co-operative government in Egypt was essential; and she forced Farouk, on the threat of deposition, to recall Nahas to the premiership. This apparently rather odd decision, in view of Nahas's traditional opposition to Britain on the question of independence, turned out to be a sound one. Nahas had signed the 1936 treaty, and stood for an alliance with Britain as well as independence; and in the event he loyally supported the British war effort. His co-operation was indeed soon tested by Rommel's invasion of Egypt in July 1942. The German forces advanced to within 40 miles of Alexandria, and a German conquest of Egypt seemed imminent. But, under Nahas's leadership, the country remained calm, and Axis propaganda failed to enlist Egyptian aid in the form of sabotage. Rommel's advance was checked; and in November 1942 Egyptian territory was freed of the enemy after the British victory at El Alamein. So far as Egypt was concerned the war was over.

In February 1945, owing to an Allied decision that attendance at the Peace Conference would be confined to those countries which had declared war on the Axis powers, Egypt declared war on Germany and Japan. She then became one of the original members of the United Nations, where she used her enhanced status to try to gain international support for her renewed demands for the withdrawal of British troops from Egyptian territory.

Chapter 28. Egypt Becomes an Independent Republic.

After the War a major new problem entered Middle East politics with the creation of Israel. A United Nations'-proposal for the division of Palestine, which had been a British mandate since the First World War, into Jewish and Arab states was accepted by the Jews but rejected by the Arabs. So, on Britain's withdrawal from the mandate in 1948, the Jews proclaimed the independent state of Israel, whereupon the armies of Egypt and the other surrounding Arab states invaded Palestine. After nine months of fighting the result was a triumph for Israel, which vastly increased its territory at the expense of its adversaries.

Meanwhile Egyptian attempts to re-negotiate the 1936 Treaty with Britain made little progress. The big stumbling block was the Sudan, which Egypt wanted to rule - to which Britain, backed by the United Nations Security Council, would not agree. In 1950 Nahas, who had fallen from power in 1944, became prime minister again; and in 1951 he made a unilateral declaration abrogating the 1936 Treaty - an action which was rejected by Britain with the support of the United States and France.

Nahas was now collaborating with his old enemy King Farouk. But the dissolute and playboy king had lost all his popularity, and there was widespread corruption in the government. In July 1952 Farouk was forced to abdicate and retire to exile after a successful coup d'état by some army officers. Their nominal leader was General Neguib, but the real driving force behind the coup was Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser. For a year the infant Fuad II was king, but in July 1953 Egypt was proclaimed a republic, with General Neguib as president and prime minister.

Negotiations with Britain were resumed by the new masters of Egypt, and the deadlock over the Sudan was resolved by the attitude of Neguib who - himself half Sudanese - recognised the Sudan's right to self-government. In 1953 an agreement was reached between Britain and Egypt providing for the independence of the Sudan within three years, an agreement which was fulfilled on 1st January 1956 when the Sudan became a republic.

Early in 1954 a clash of personalities in the ruling military junta resulted in the concentration of all authority in the hands of Colonel Nasser, as prime minister; and later in that year he concluded an agreement with Britain ending the 1936 Treaty and providing for the withdrawal of all British troops from Egypt within two years - with the right to return in the event of aggression against an Arab state or Turkey. The last British troops left early in 1956; and in that year also Nasser became president.

So, after some 2,500 years of rule by Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks, Circassians, Albanians and Britons, Egypt was at last ruled once more by Egyptians.

Chapter 29. Foreign Affairs under Nasser's Rule.

The foreign policies of the various Arab states in the post-Second World War years varied according to the regime in power at any particular time. Though united in their enmity to Israel, they did not all readily fall in with Nasser's desire to be the leader of an Arab league. His interventionist policy was apt to annoy the other states, and his left wing attitude offended the remaining traditional regimes, of whom Iraq was the leader. Nasser was affronted when Iraq in 1955 signed the Baghdad Pact with Britain, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan - though Iraq withdrew later when the King was killed in a military coup and Iraq became a republic.

In the wider field of foreign relations the most notable development in Egypt was the greatly increased influence of Soviet Russia. A strong Soviet military mission advised the Egyptian armed forces, and most of Egypt's armaments were provided by the Communist countries. The Soviet Union was easily the leading nation in Egypt's foreign trade.

Worried by this Soviet infiltration, the United States and Britain in 1956 withdrew their offer of financial support for the building of the projected Aswan High Dam. (This new dam, some five miles up-stream from the existing Aswan Dam, was planned to maintain the level of the Nile constant throughout the year without flooding, and to provide hydroelectric power for Egyptian industry.) Nasser reacted immediately to this Anglo-American action by announcing the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, a move which was regarded as illegal by the United States and Western Europe but against which no concerted action was taken.

Meanwhile relations between Egypt and Israel, always hostile due to the Arab nations' refusal to recognise Israel's right to exist, had deteriorated further with border disputes, and now with Israel being barred from using the Canal; and in October 1956 the Israelis invaded Sinai. Britain and France then intervened to protect the Canal taking Port Said by an airborne operation. But pressure from the United Nations - supported by both the United States and the Soviet Union - forced all three invaders to withdraw. This diplomatic success for Nasser outweighed Egypt's defeats at the hands of Israel, and Egyptian prestige in the Arab world soared. This prestige, and Egypt's determination not to let Soviet Russia acquire the domination in the middle East previously held by Britain and France, led to a union in 1958 between Egypt and Syria, where the Communist Party had been growing in influence.

The union, known as the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.), was joined by the Yemen in the same year. But the union was short-lived. In 1961, after a military coup in Syria - where there was some resentment at Egypt's domination - the union was dissolved (though Egypt retained the name U.A.R.)*

During the 1960s Egypt became heavily involved in a civil war in the Yemen in which the royalists, supported by Saudi Arabia, were opposed by the Egyptian-supported revolutionary republicans, who eventually won. This struggle absorbed much of the Egyptian race - and it also complicated Britain's arrangements for giving independence to the Southern Yemen (Aden and neighbouring sheikhdoms). The last British troops left Aden in 1967, and the Southern Yemen - like the Yemen (or northern Yemen) - became a republic.

Nasser's political activities were not confined to the Middle East. He made a bid for the leadership of African nationalism, in conjunction with President Nkrumah of the newly independent Ghana; but this activity faded after Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966,

In 1967 enmity with Israel once more reached a climax. Tension on the Syria-Israel border, including the infiltration of terrorists from Syria into Israel, was bringing a further Arab-Israeli war nearer; and Egypt as Syria's ally, moved troops to the frontier and blockaded Eilat, the Israeli port on the Gulf of Akaba. Israel thereupon launched a full-scale attack on Egypt, Syria and Jordan, and in six days scored an overwhelming victory. Egypt lost the whole of the Sinai peninsula to Israel. A cease-fire was organised by the United Nations, but a virtual state of war continued to exist along the Suez Canal, which had been blocked by the Egyptians during the hostilities, and which remained blocked.

The Arab states had now three times been humiliated by Israel on the battlefield - in 1948, 1956 and 1967 - but they continued to reject any permanent settlement involving Israel's continued existence and occupation of Palestine.

President Nasser himself survived the humiliation of the "6 Day War". He offered to resign, but by popular acclamation remained in office. Three years later, in 1970, he died suddenly of a heart attack.

*The name "Egypt" was resumed in 1971.

Chapter 30. Modern Egypt under Nasser.

Under Nasser's regime the President was the head of state and the head of government. He appointed all ministers. The National Assembly was elected by universal suffrage, but only one political party was allowed, the Arab Socialist Union.

Nasser introduced a programme of sweeping socialist measures, including nationalisation of the banks and much of industry. But Islamic conservatism was resistant to revolutionary socialism and Communism made little headway. The government, indeed, though strongly socialist, was anti-Communist. The Soviet Union, nevertheless, stood by its undertaking to help finance the Aswan High Dam, an undertaking given after the withdrawal of the Anglo- American offer in 1956.

The dam, started in 1960, was opened in 1964, and finally completed in 1970. It was designed to add about a quarter to Egypt's cultivable area an addition made urgent by the rapidly rising population. The population in 1970 was estimated to be about 34 million, 99% of whom lived in about 4% of the land area - the ten to twenty mile wide fertile strip on either side of the Nile and in the Delta.

Nasser always expressed interest in the condition of the people, and attempted to expand industry in order to lessen Egypt's dependence on agriculture. But 80% to 90% of the manual workers were still engaged on the land. Cotton remained the chief export. The tourist industry in recent years has been hit by the wars with Israel. (Over half a million foreigners visited Egypt in 1965, 60,000 of them Americans, but the numbers have since then dropped.)

The vast majority of the people are Moslems, though there are still between a million and 1 ½ million Copts. There is no religious discrimination. The University of al-Azhar, founded in 970 (see Chapter 17), is still the world's chief centre of Islamic and Arabic learning. There are now four other universities as well : Cairo University, founded 1908; Alexandria, founded 1942; Heliopolis, founded 1950; and Asyut, founded 1957. All education is free, and since the 1930s primary schooling has officially been compulsory; but due to shortage of teachers and schools this has not been enforced. About 70% of the people are still (in 1970) illiterate.

Cairo, with a population of 3 ½ million in 1960, and estimated at over 4 million in 1970, remains pre-eminent as Egypt's capital and leading city. It is the largest city in Africa and in the Arab world, and is the main trading and distributing centre of the Near East and North Africa. Alexandria, the only other very large city, with a population in 1960 of 1 ½ million, has recovered much of its old importance as Egypt's chief port.

Appendix. Population and Chief Towns.

(The figures are estimates for 1970.)

Population of Egypt – about 34 million.

Inhabitants per square mile - All Egypt - under 90.
Nile valley and Delta - between 2,000 and 2,500.
(For comparison - England about 900, Scotland 170.)

Religions - The great majority - Sunni Moslem. About 1,350,000 Copts.

Chief Towns.

| | | |
|------------|---|---|
| Cairo | About 4,200,000 | The capital since about 973- |
| Alexandria | 1,800,000 | The chief port. Capital of Egypt for nearly 1,000 years (from the Ptolemies till the Arab conquest). |
| Gizeh | 250,000 in 1960. | Dormitory town for Cairo on the opposite (West) bank of the Nile. Near the Great Pyramids and Sphinx. |
| Port Said | 244,000 | |
| Suez | 203,000 in 1960. | All largely evacuated later owing to the Israeli advance to the Canal. |
| Ismailia | 111,000 | |
| Asyut | 122,000 in 1960, probably over 200,000 in 1970. | Ancient Greek-Egyptian city. Modern university. |

No other towns over 200,000.

Historical cities or ruins

| | | |
|------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Fayum | Probably about 150,000 in 1970. | Site of Twelfth Dynasty capital. |
| Luxor | on the site of ancient Thebes, capital of the "Empire", about 1570-1085 B.C. | Luxor a small modern town. |
| Karnak | | |
| Memphis | Ruined city 10 miles south of Cairo. Capital of Egypt for over 1,000 years (third millenium B.C. and at later times). | |
| Abydos | Ruins. First Dynasty tombs. Near Thinis, the original First Dynasty capital. | |
| Heliopolis | Suburb of Cairo to the north-east. Ancient centre of the worship of Re. | |
| Al Fustat | Just south of Cairo. Site of the capital from the Arab conquest till the building of Cairo. | |

CHRONOLOGY.

- 5th millenium B.C. Settled civilisations in the Nile valley.
- 5th & 4th millenia Kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. B.C.
Badarian culture.
Amratian
Gerzean
- c. 3200/3000 B.C. Unification of Egypt by Menes.
- c. 3200/3000 to c. 2700 B.C
First and Second Dynasties (Archaic Egypt). Capital - Thinis,
then Memphis.
Narmur and Aha the first two kings of the First Dynasty.
- c. 2700 to c. 2200 B.C
Third to Sixth Dynasties (The Old Kingdom). Capital -
Memphis.
Zoser the first or second king in the Third Dynasty. The Step
Pyramid.
- c. 2650-2500 B.C. The Fourth Dynasty (the Pyramid Age). Pharaohs – Snefru,
Cheops Chephren, Mycerinus: The Great Pyramids and
Sphinx at Gizeh
- c. 2500-2350 B.C. The Fifth Dynasty. Compilation of the "Old Kingdom Annals".
- c. 2350 - 2200 B.C. The Sixth Dynasty. Pharaoh Pepi II. (the longest reign in
history).
- c. 2200 - c. 2050/ 2000 B.C
Seventh to Tenth Dynasties (the First Intermediate Period).
Civil war and confusion.
- c. 2050 B.C. Princes of Thebes established authority over all Egypt.
- c. 2050/2000 – 1780 B.C.
Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties (The Middle Kingdom).
Eleventh Dynasty founded by Mentuhotep I.
- c. 1880-1845 B.C. Senusret III of the Twelfth Dynasty. Conquest of Nubia as far
as the Second Cataract.
- c. 1845-1800 B.C. Amenemhet III. Irrigation works and construction of the
Labyrinth at Payum (the Twelfth Dynasty capital).
- c 1780-1567 B.C. Thirteenth to Seventeenth Dynasties (the Second Intermediate
Period).

- c. 1720-1570 B.C. Hyksos rule.
- c. 1600 B.C. The Hebrews took refuge in Egypt.
- c. 1567 B.C. Foundation of the Eighteenth (Theban) Dynasty.
- c. 1567-1085 B.C. Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties (The New Kingdom, or Empire). Capital - Thebes.
- c. 1504-1483 B.C. Queen Hatshepsut.
- c. 1483-1450 B.C. Thothmes III.
- c. 1479 B.C. Conquest of Palestine.
- c. 1411-1375 B.C. Amenhotep III (the Magnificent). Construction of the Colossi of Memnon.
- c. 1375-1360 B.C. Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) - monotheistic religion.
- c. 1360-1350 B.C. Tutankhamun.
- c. 1350-1315 B.C. Horemheb.
- c. 1300-1230 B.C. Rameses II.
- c. 1270 B.C. Battle of Kadesh - end of wars with the Hittites. Building of temple at Abu Simbel.
- c. 1230-1085 B.C. Decline of the Pharaohs' authority.
- c. 1200 B.C. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.
- c. 1085-332 B.C. Twenty First to Thirty First Dynasties. Internal disunity and foreign domination.
- c. 1085-945 B.C. Twenty First Dynasty - divided rule.
- c. 945-715 B.C. Twenty Second to Twenty Fourth Dynasties divided rule and Libyan control (capital Bubastia).
- c. 715 B.C. Conquest of Egypt by the King of Cush.
- c. 715-664 B.C. Twenty Fifth (Ethiopian) Dynasty (capital Napata).
- c. 670-660 B.C. Conquest of Egypt by Ashurbanipal of Assyria.
- c. 660-650 B.C. Psamtik drove out the Assyrians and established the Twenty Sixth (Saite) Dynasty.
- c. 650-525 B.C. Saite (Egyptian) Dynasty. (capital Sais). Renaissance of Egyptian culture and power.

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| c. 610-595 B.C. | Pharaoh Necho. Circumnavigation of Africa. |
| 609 B.C. | Necho conquered Judea, defeating Josiah at Megiddo. |
| 605 B.C. | Necho defeated by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon at Carchemish. Egyptians driven out of Asia. |
| 525 B.C. | Egypt conquered by Cambyses of Persia. |
| 525-404 B.C. | Twenty Seventh (Persian) Dynasty. |
| c. 450 B.C. | Herodotus visited Egypt. |
| 404-343 B.C. | Twenty Eighth to Thirtieth Dynasties. Some degree of Independence from Persia. |
| 343 B.C. | Re-conquest of Egypt by Artaxerxes III of Persia. |
| 343-332 B.C. | Thirty First (Persian) Dynasty. |
| 332 B.C. | Egypt conquered by Alexander the Great. |
| 331 B.C. | Foundation of Alexandria. |
| 305-30 B.C. | The rule of the Ptolemies. (Capital - Alexandria) |
| 305-285 B.C. | Ptolemy I. Foundation of the Museum and Library at Alexandria. |
| 3rd century B.C. | Great flowering of scientific and mathematical research at the Museum. |
| 285-246 B. C. | Ptolemy II. Building of the Pharos lighthouse. Manetho wrote his History of Egypt. |
| 246-221 B.C. | Ptolemy III. Zenith of Ptolemaic power. Egypt the dominant power in the eastern Mediterranean. |
| 221-51 B.C. | Ptolemy IV to Ptolemy XI. Decline of Egypt, and increasing influence of Rome. |
| 51 B.C. | Cleopatra and her brother inherited the throne. |
| 48-47 B.C. | Julius Caesar in Egypt with Cleopatra. |
| 41-40 B.C. 36-31 B.C. | Mark Antony in Egypt with Cleopatra. |
| 31 B.C. | Antony and Cleopatra defeated by Octavian at the naval Battle of Actium. |
| 30 B.C. suicide. | Octavian took possession of Egypt. Cleopatra committed suicide. |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 30 B.C. - A.D. 642 | Egypt-part of the Roman (later Byzantine) Empire. |
| First three centuries A.D. | Egypt ruled from Rome. |
| 1st century A.D. | Christianity reached Egypt. |
| 2nd century A.D. | The Jews in Egypt nearly exterminated. |
| A.D. 250 | Persecution of Christians by the Emperor Decius. |
| c. A.D. 300 | Christian monasticism founded by St. Antony of Egypt. |
| A.D. 305 | Persecution of Christians by the Emperor Diocletian. |
| c. A.D. 310 | The Arian heresy originated in Alexandria. |
| c. A.D.312 | Christianity adopted by the Emperor Constantine. |
| A.D.330-642 | Egypt ruled from Constantinople. |
| 4th century. | Christianity became predominant in Egypt. |
| 5th century. | Monophysism in Egypt. Split in the Christian Church. Egyptian Christians (Copts) remained monophysites. |
| A.D. 616 | Egypt conquered by Choaroes II of Persia. |
| A.D.627 | Egypt recovered by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. |
| 639-642 | Egypt conquered by the Arabs. |
| 642-969 | Egypt ruled by Governors appointed by the Caliphate. (The Caliph in Damascus till the middle of the 8th century then in Baghdad.) Al Fustat the capital of Egypt. |
| Early 8th century | Arabic became the official language of Egypt, and Mohammedanism the predominant religion. |
| 868 | The Turkish Governor Ibn Tulun proclaimed the independence of Egypt. |
| 877 | Ibn Tulun added Syria to his domains. |
| 905 | Egypt reverted to the authority of the Caliphate. |
| 935-969 | The Turkish Ikhahidids ruled Egypt and Syria. |
| 969 | Egypt conquered by the Fatimids of Tunis. Foundation of Cairo. |
| 969-1171 | Egypt ruled by the Fatimids (capital Cairo). Egypt became the centre of Moslem culture, based on the Mosque (later university) of al-Azhar in Cairo. |

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| 1010 | The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem destroyed by the Fatimid "mad Caliph". |
| 11th century | Most of Syria and Palestine lost to the Turks or the Crusaders. |
| 1168 | Egypt invaded by the Moslem army of Nur-ed-Din of Mosul, and by the Crusaders. |
| 1171 | Saladin became ruler of Egypt, and later of Moslem Syria. |
| 1171-1250 | Egypt ruled by Saladin and his successors (the Ayyubids). |
| 1187 | Saladin defeated the Crusaders at Hittin, and captured Jerusalem. |
| 1189-1192 | The Third Crusade - truce between Saladin and Richard I of England. |
| 1193 | Death of Saladin. |
| 1219 | Failure of the Fifth Crusade, against Egypt. |
| 1249-1250 | The Seventh Crusade, led by Louis IX of France against Egypt defeated by the Turkish Mameluks. Control of Egypt passed to the Mameluks. |
| 1250-1517 | Egypt ruled by the Mameluks. |
| 1250-1382 | The Bahri (Turkish) Mameluks |
| 1260 | The Mongol advance checked by the victory of the Mameluks Qutuz and Baybars at Ayn Jalut. |
| 1260-1277 | Baybars Sultan of Egypt. Extension of Egyptian control throughout Syria, and into the Sudan. |
| 1291 | The Crusaders dislodged from Acre, their last possession in Palestine. |
| 1294-1341 | an Nasir Sultan. Zenith of the Mameluk empire. |
| 1341-1382 | Decline of the Bahri Mameluks. |
| 1382-1517 | The Burji (Circassian) Mameluks. |
| 1400-1401 | Timur the Mongol raided Syria. |
| 1468-1496 | Kait Bey Sultan. High achievement in the arts and architecture, and learning flourished. |
| 15th century 1453. | Rise of the Ottoman Turks, who captured Constantinople in 1453. |

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| 1516 | The Ottoman Sultan Selim I defeated the Mameluk army near Aleppo and conquered Syria. |
| 1517 | Selim conquered Egypt. |
| 1517-1805 | Turkish rule. Gradual reversion of power to the Mameluka. Economic decline and great reduction in population. 18th century British and French trade rivalry in Egypt. |
| End of the 18 th Century | |
| | The Mameluk Beys masters of Egypt. Ottoman sovereignty 18th century nominal only. |
| 1798 | Napoleon invaded Egypt and routed the Mameluk army at the 'Battle of the Pyramids'. The French fleet destroyed by the British at the 'Battle of the Nile'. |
| 1799 | Discovery of the "Rosetta Stone". |
| (1809-21) | (Publication in Paris of "Description de l'Egypt".) |
| 1799 | Napoleon left Egypt. |
| 1801 | The French army evacuated Egypt. |
| 1803 | British forces withdrawn from Egypt. |
| 1805 | Mohammed Ali became Governor of Egypt. |
| 1805-1882 | Mohammed Ali and his successors. |
| 1805-1848 | Mohammed Ali. French influence in Egypt. |
| 1811 | Massacre of the Mameluks. |
| 1820-1822 | Conquest of the Sudan. |
| 1822-1830 | Mohammed Ali helped the Turkish Sultan in the War of Greek independence. |
| 1827 | Egyptian and Turkish fleets defeated by Anglo-French fleet at Navarino. |
| 1831-1833 | Conquest of Syria. |
| 1839 | The Turks defeated in the second Syrian Year, but Mohammed Ali forced by the European powers to evacuate Syria. |
| 1840s | Collapse of Mohammed Ali's schemes for industrialisation. |
| 1854-1863 | Khedive Mohammed Said. |

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| 1863-1879 | Khedive Ismail. |
| 1869 | Opening of the Suez Canal. |
| 1870-1873 | Sir Samuel Baker in the Sudan. |
| 1872-1874 | Unsuccessful invasion of Abyssinia. |
| 1875 | Ismail sold his Suez Canal Company shares to Britain |
| 1870s | Jamal ud-Din taught in Cairo. Rise of Egyptian nationalist movement. |
| 1874-1879 | General Gordon Governor of the Sudan. |
| 1876-1882 | Anglo-French Dual Control of Egypt. |
| 1879 | Ismail deposed. |
| 1879-1892 | Khedive Tewfik. |
| 1881 | Insurrection of the Mahdi in the Sudan. |
| 1882 | Ahmed Arabi and the Nationalists seized control in Egypt. British bombardment of Alexandria. General Wolseley defeated Arabi's forces at Tel el-Kebir and entered Cairo. Britain took control of Egypt. |
| 1882 - 1922 | British rule in Egypt, |
| 1883-1907 | Sir Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer) Consul-General. |
| 1883 | Egyptian force under Col. Hicks wiped out by the Mahdi in the Sudan. |
| 1884 | General Gordon sent to evacuate the Sudan garrisons. |
| 1885 | Fall of Khartoum, General Gordon and the garrison massacred |
| 1895 | Nationalist Party founded by Mustafa Kemal. |
| 1896-1898 | Re-conquest of the Sudan by General Kitchener - Battle of Omdurman. |
| 1899 | The Sudan became a Condominium under the Joint control of Britain and Egypt. |
| 1902 | The Aswan Dam completed. |
| 1908 | Mustafa Kemal died. |
| 1910 | Nationalist agitation. Assassination of the Prime Minister. |

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| 1911-1914 | Lord Kitchener Consul-General. Political reforms introduced and the Nationalist Party suppressed. |
| 1914-1918 | The First World War. Egypt became a British Protectorate and a base for British campaigns in the Middle East. Growth of the Nationalist Party (Wafd) under Sald Zaghlul. |
| 1919 | Riots. Zaghlul deported. Lord Allenby appointed High Commissioner. |
| 1920 | Milner Commission on the future government of Egypt. |
| 1922 | Unilateral declaration by Britain ending the Protectorate and proclaiming Egypt independent subject to reservations on foreign affairs and the future of the Sudan. |
| 1922-1954 | Semi-independence. |
| 1922-1936 | King Fuad 1. The Wafd dominated Egyptian politics, under Zaghlul and then Nahas. |
| 1936 | Anglo-Egyptian Treaty - military alliance, and British forces restricted to the Canal zone. |
| 1937 | Egypt became a member of the league of Nations. |
| 1936-1952 | King Farouk. |
| 1939-1945 | Second World War. Egypt broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. |
| 1940 | Italian invasion of Egypt repulsed by the British. |
| 1942 | German invasion of Egypt under General Rommel. British victory over Rommel at El Alemein. |
| 1945 | Egypt declared war on Germany and Japan, and became a member of the United Nations. |
| 1948-1949 | First war with Israel. |
| 1951 | Egypt abrogated the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. |
| 1952 | King Farouk forced to abdicate. |
| 1953 | Egypt proclaimed a republic. Agreement with Britain reached on the future of the Sudan. |
| 1954 | Colonel Nasser became Prime Minister. Agreement with Britain reached on the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt. |

- 1956 The Sudan became independent. The last British troops left Egypt. Nasser became President.
- 1956- Independent Egypt.
- 1956 Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. Second war with Israel. Unsuccessful intervention by Britain and France to protect the Canal.
- 1958 Union of Egypt and Syria - the United Arab Republic.
- 1960 The Aswan High Dam started, with Soviet financial assistance.
- 1961 The Union with Syria dissolved.
- 1967 Third war with Israel.- the "Six Day War". Defeat and loss of Sinai to Israel.
- 1970 The Aswan High Dam completed. Death of President Nasser.

Maps: Egypt – Ancient and Medieval

Maps: The Near East - Modern