



ALEXANDRIA & CAIRO

UMAYYAD ROUTE



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الهيئة العامة للتخطيط الاقتصادي والتعاون الاقتصادي
La Direction Générale du Plan et de la Coopération Économique

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Index

Introduction

Umayyad Project (ENPI)	7
Egypt	9
The Umayyad Route in Egypt	22
Umayyad and modern arab food. Gastronomy in Egypt	26

Itinerary

Alexandria	38
Cairo	74



Umayyad Project (ENPI)

The Umayyad Route seeks to publicize the profound human, cultural, artistic and scientific relationship between East and West and the way in which the Greco-Roman legacy was passed on to Europe through al-Andalus. This route was the path along which the Arabs came to the Iberian Peninsular and Europe, but it was also a channel for the transfer of knowledge and perfectly illustrates the close collaboration between the two cultures. Of these multiple contacts the most important things that have survived the wear and tear of history are a common cultural and artistic background, a shared history and heritage. This is the *raison d'être* of these routes, which seek to forge links and strengthen the relations between the different peoples they encompass, united by a common past.

The Umayyad Route retraces part of the journey followed by the dynasty founded by Muawiya ibn Abi Sufian from its capital in Damascus and its subsequent expansion along the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the Iberian Peninsula. The route begins therefore in the Near East before heading off along the Mediterranean across North Africa. It follows the path by which Arab civilization came to Europe and which gave rise to the Caliphate of Cordoba, where the Hispano-Muslim civilization flourished for several centuries. The itinerary starts at its easternmost point in Jordan and Lebanon, passing through Egypt and Tunisia, with a stopover in Sicily, and ends up in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal).

Egypt

According to the Greek geographer Herodotus, “Egypt is a gift of the Nile”. The river’s mighty waters form an uninterrupted oasis, a long strip of intensely green lands encircled to the west by the Libyan Desert and to the east by the Arabian Desert. North of Cairo, the Nile divides into various branches that fan out forming the fertile Nile Delta, which drains into the Mediterranean. Apart from a few oases scattered about the desert, almost all life in this North African country is concentrated in the Nile valley, which has truly astonishing heritage in terms of its agriculture, cities and society amassed over five thousand years of history.

The Pyramids, the Temples of Karnak, the Tombs of the Kings... The banks of the Nile have given rise to countless wonders and to a civilization of granite-like endurance that continues to fascinate. Ancient Egypt first entered history around 3100 BC when the peoples that had settled on the banks of the Nile created hieroglyphic script, developed agriculture and numerous techniques for working the land, irrigation and construction. Lower and Upper Egypt eventually united forming the first nation-state within clearly defined frontiers under the supreme authority of Pharaohs. This ancient land was ruled by 31 dynasties for almost three millennia. Traditionally the history of Ancient Egypt is divided into three great periods or “Empires”: Old, Middle and New, separated by intermediate periods characterized by instability and foreign invasions.

Satellite image showing the Nile as it flows through Egypt



Tomb of Unas
Ankh. Saqqara
Pyramids

The first millennium BC was a period of decline and of foreign domination with Libyans, Ethiopians, Kushites, Assyrians and Persians successively conquering the country. In 332 BC the conquests by the Macedonian Alexander the Great marked the beginning of a prosperous Hellenistic period in the land of the Pharaohs. **Alexandria**, the new capital founded by Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, would become a brilliant beacon of culture, thanks to its Museion and its famous Library, which was built to house all knowledge and to encourage philosophy and the sciences to flourish. Today the Alexandria of the Ptolemies has lost its famous lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, but the tombs of Ankhshenes, the

Egypt, description by Herodotus, 5th century BC

“For anyone who sees Egypt, without having heard a word about it before, must perceive, if he has only common powers of observation, that the Egypt to which the Greeks go in their ships is an acquired country, the gift of the river...

[...] From the coast inland as far as Heliopolis –just about the same distance as along the road from the altar of the Twelve Gods in Athens to the temple of Olympian Zeus at Pisa- the country is broad and flat, with much swamp and mud. In point of fact these two distances –from Heliopolis to the sea, and from Athens to Pisa- are not exactly the same, but very nearly.

[...] Southward of Heliopolis the country narrows. It is confined on the one side by the range of the Arabian mountains which run north and south and then continue without a break in the direction of the Arabian Gulf. In these mountains are the quarries where the stone was cut for the pyramids of Memphis. This is the point where the range changes its direction and bends away towards the Arabian Gulf. I learnt that its greatest length from east to west is two months' journey, and that towards the eastern limit frankincense is produced.”

The bent pyramid
at Dahshur





Temple of Isis
in Philae

catacombs of Kom el-Shukafa and the fascinating Greco-Roman Museum continue to highlight the cosmopolitan nature of the Mediterranean city in the Ptolemaic period. This period is also characterized by an interesting fusion between Hellenistic elements and others inherited from the pharaonic Egypt, such as the creation of a new cult to the God Serapis and the birth of a new language and script: Coptic. The deep-rooted nature of the ancient local culture obliged even Imperial Rome, the oppressive occupier of the country from the first century BC, to prudently respect the beliefs of the Egyptians and their priests, by allowing them to build magnificent new temples on the banks of the River at **Dandarah, Esna, Kom Ombo and Philae**. The ancient Egyptian and Ptolemaic civilization finally succumbed to the unstoppable spread of Christianity, which began with the preaching of St Mark in Alexandria and in the

The Nile by Ibn Battuta, 14th century

“The Egyptian Nile surpasses all rivers of the earth in sweetness of taste, length of course, and utility. No other river in the world can show such a continuous series of towns and villages along its banks, or a basin so intensely cultivated. Its course is from south to north, contrary to all the other [great] rivers. One extraordinary thing about it is that it begins to rise in the extreme hot weather, at the time when rivers generally diminish and dry up, and begins to subside just when rivers begin to increase and overflow. The river Indus resembles it in this feature. The Nile is one of the five great rivers of the world, which are the Nile, Euphrates, Tigris, Syr Darya and Amu Darya; [...] Some distance below Cairo the Nile divides into three streams, none of which can be crossed except by boat, winter or summer. The inhabitants of every township have canals led off the Nile; these are filled when the river is in flood and carry the water over the fields.”



Alexandria by Pliny the Elder, 1st century

“With the greatest justice, we may lavish our praises upon Alexandria, built by Alexander the Great on the shores of the Egyptian Sea, upon the soil of Africa, at twelve miles’ distance from the Canopic Mouth and near Lake Mariout; the spot having previously borne the name of Rhacotes. The plan of this city was designed by the architect Dinocrates, who is memorable for the genius which he displayed in many ways. Building the city upon a wide space of ground fifteen miles in circumference, he formed it in the circular shape of a Macedonian scallop, uneven at the edge, giving it an angular projection on the right and left; while at the same time he devoted one-fifth part of the site to the royal palace. Lake Mariout, which lies on the south side of the city, is connected by a canal which joins it to the Canopic mouth, and serves for the purposes of communication with the interior.”

Alexandria



Bab al-Futuh,
Cairo



fourth century AD the country was absorbed into the Byzantine Empire.

The Arab conquest of 639-640 AD brought Egypt into the Islamic realm. General Amr Ibn al-As founded a camp city called **Fustat** to house the conquering armies and govern the country from a strategic position to the south of the Delta.

5,000 years of civilization have contributed to the cultural heritage of Egypt and to building the strength and independence of its citizens. The country's history is a continuous sequence of invasions, eras of glory, battles and victories. From the 7th century onwards,

Nilometer on the
island of Rhoda,
Cairo





Old harbor
of Alexandria

it was ruled by numerous dynasties and foreign powers: the Umayyads, Tulunids, Abbasids, Fatimids, Ayyubids, Mamelukes, Ottomans, and finally the French and the British... In 1922, the country won its independence from the United Kingdom. Testaments to the past include the Great Pyramids at Giza, the temples at Luxor, Abu Simbel and Saint Catherine's monastery. The cities of Alexandria and Cairo are shining examples of the Islamic era, with outstanding monuments such as the Islamic district in Old Cairo, and the El-Qala'a district in Alexandria.

Cairo's Islamic quarter starts with al-Azhar street and the Qalawun complex, one of the city's most famous monuments, which stretches from Bab al-Futuh in the north to Bab Zuweila in the south (the old gates of Cairo during the Umayyad dynasty and later under the Mamelukes). People like to visit the capital's medieval markets such as Khan El-Khalili. The Museum of Islamic Arts in Cairo is considered one of the greatest of its kind, with exceptional collections and a main façade adorned with decorations and recesses inspired by Islamic architecture. It has pieces from all the different periods starting with the Umayyad dynasty. Cairo also has plenty of modern attractions including cinemas, theatres, shopping malls, an opera house and visitors can also enjoy oriental music and dance shows. Another attractive option is a stroll along the

Nile Promenade, which has excellent views of the river, while the Egyptian museums and the Pyramids of Giza transport you back in time to the ancient lands of the Pharaohs.

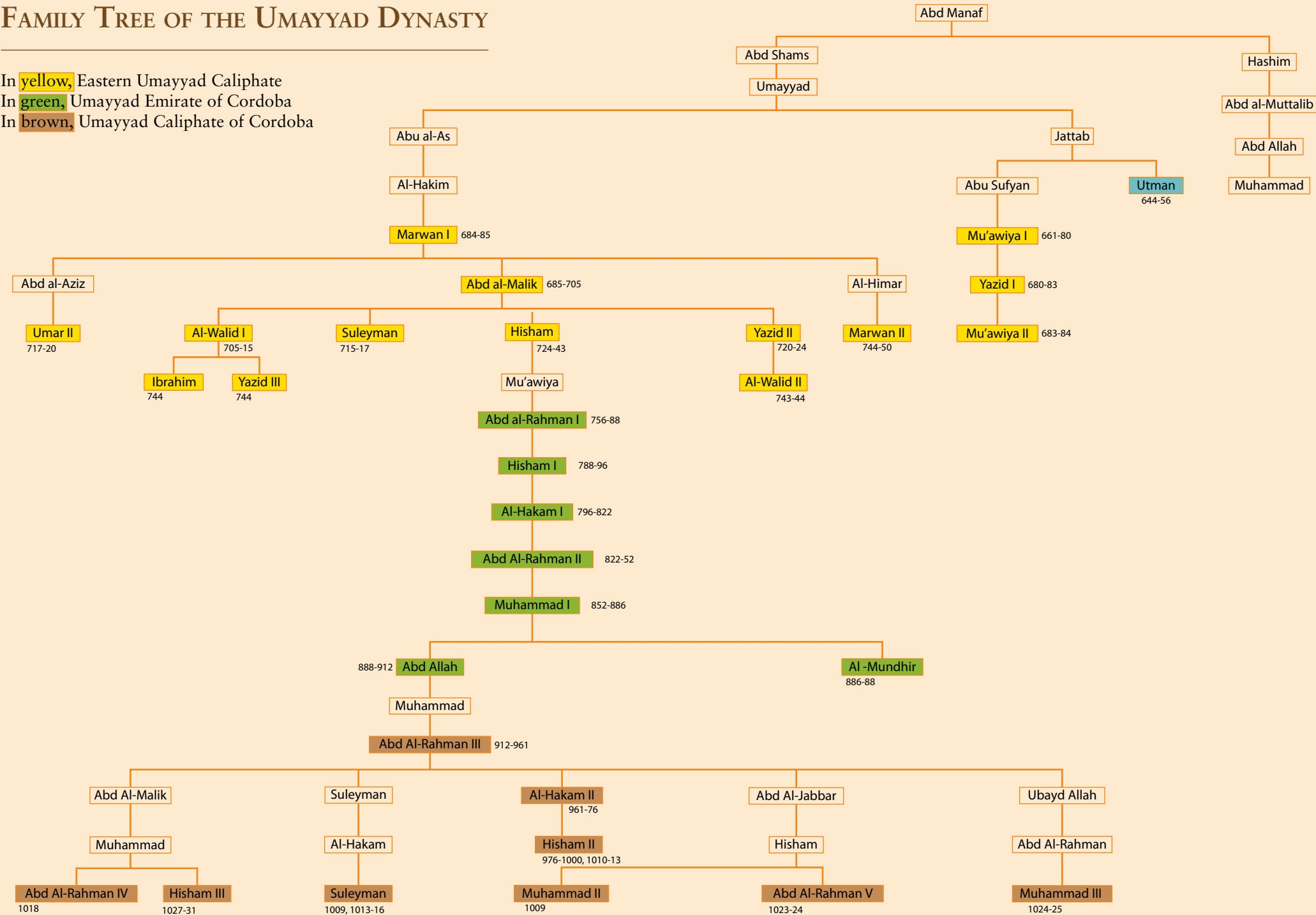
The Alexandrian coastline extends no less than 70 km from the north-western side of the Nile Delta to Lake Mariout in the east. The coast is dotted with beautiful bays and harbours, such as Abu-Qir and the crescent-shaped Eastern Harbour, which is overlooked by the majestic Qaitbey Fortress. The Corniche in Alexandria is a treat in both summer and winter. Starting at Ras El Tin and stretching all the way to Montazah, it enjoys spectacular views of the White Mediterranean. The Corniche was built in the 1930s and further developments were made to it in the early 1990s. Beaches stretch along the coast from Maamoura in the east all the way to the Agamy beach west of Alexandria. The Al-Qala'a district of Alexandria includes the fort of Qaitbey, the National Museum and the Library of Alexandria, which was one of the largest libraries in the ancient world. The library has various rare collections of books and historical objects offering a mixture of history and legend and highlighting the enormous wealth of Egyptian history in all the different eras.

Stanley bridge,
Alexandria



FAMILY TREE OF THE Umayyad Dynasty

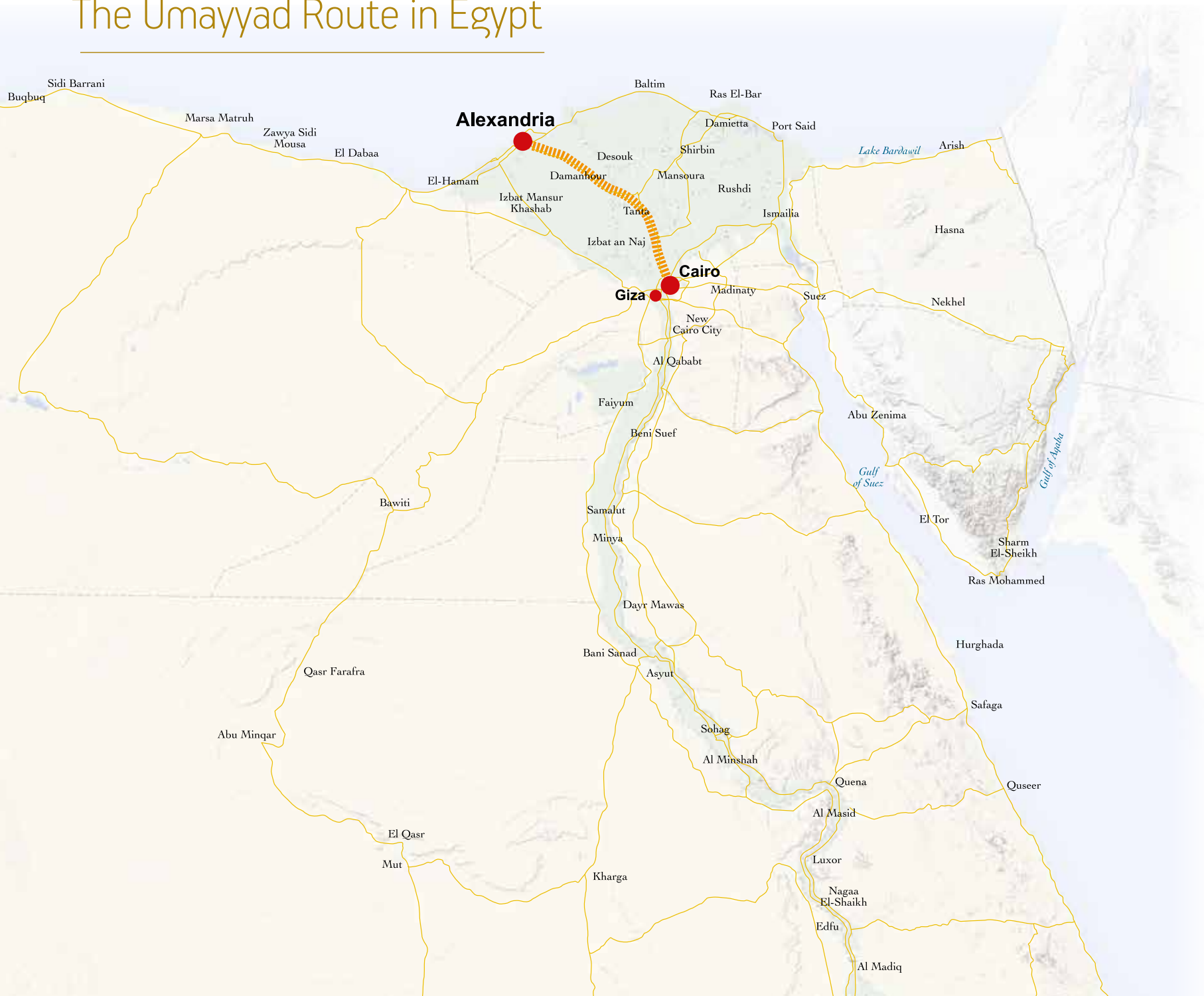
In **yellow**, Eastern Umayyad Caliphate
In **green**, Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba
In **brown**, Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba



UMAYYAD ROUTE



The Umayyad Route in Egypt





UMAYYAD AND MODERN ARAB FOOD

GASTRONOMY IN EGYPT

Umayyad and Modern Arab Food. Gastronomy in Egypt

There are a wide variety of Arab dishes to satisfy the palette of every gourmet. Many modern dishes date back to early Islam when the most famous dish was *Tharid*, a favourite of the Prophet. In its simplest form, *Tharid* is bread crumbs soaked with meat broth, and is eaten with the hand. Many different recipes have been suggested over the years including some from the Umayyad era. Rather than going into detailed recipes of Umayyad or contemporary Abbasid food, it would perhaps be better to describe the general characteristics of recipes from these periods, noting that many of the sweet and sour dishes are no longer cooked in the Arab World. Today sugar sweetened meats are most popular in the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Here are some common ingredients of Umayyad dishes:

Spices used in the traditional cuisine of Egypt



- a. Meat, especially lamb, goat, chicken and fish was the main protein source in the Umayyad diet.
- b. Meat was often prepared in sweet and sour recipes. Honey, sugar, and fruit, both dried and fresh, were used generously to enhance the taste. Common examples were oranges, figs, dates, pomegranates, raisins and apricots. Lemon juice was also used.
- c. Various spices were also used.
- d. Copious amounts of nuts were also added to main dishes. In particular almonds, pistachios, pine nuts and occasionally hazelnuts were used to impart a delicious taste. This was also the case for desserts.
- e. There were many sweet dishes in this period. Honeyed pastries and dates with almonds were very common. Sugar syrup perfumed with rose water or *Ma' Zahr* (lemon blossom extract) was often used as a substitute for honey. One example, Lauzeenaj, is the precursor of modern Baklava (a fine-leaved pastry with pistachio filling and sugar syrup). Milk and rice puddings were also eaten with honey.

These three books offer an interesting history of Umayyad and Abbasid food and a wide selection of recipes:

- a. Lilia Zaouali, *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World. A Concise History with 174 Recipes*, Berkeley and LA, University of California Press, 2007.
- b. Nawal Nasrallah, *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and History of the Iraqi Cuisine*, Sheffield, Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013.
- c. David Waines, *In a Caliph's Kitchen, Medieval Arabic Cooking for the Modern Gourmet*, London, Riad El Rayyes Books Ltd., 1989.



Hummus and
Baba Ganouche

These and perhaps other titles dealing with Ottoman cuisine offer the curious tourist an opportunity to sample some Umayyad or Islamic dishes.

In general, typical Egyptian food is cheap, varied and plentiful and there are restaurants that cater for vegetarians and vegans, as well as fish and meat lovers.

Egyptian food resembles that of other Mediterranean countries but with a few twists and delicacies.

Mezzes

Most Egyptian meals start with a selection of Mezzes. Mezzes are a collection of salads and dips accompanied by pita bread. These include:

1) *Tahina* (Vegetarian)

Tahina is a paste made from sesame seeds.

2) *Hummus* (Vegetarian)

Hummus is widely available in the western world these days although it originates in the Middle East. Unlike the stuff available in European supermarkets which often tastes overwhelmingly of garlic, Egyptian hummus is more subtle and is made by blending chickpeas, olive oil, tahini and a few drops of lemon juice.

3) *Tabouleh* (Vegetarian)

Tabouleh is one of the Middle East's most famous salads. It is made by mixing fresh parsley with tomatoes, cucumber, garlic, bulghar wheat and lemon juice.

4) *Baba Ganouche* (Vegetarian)

A dip/salad made from aubergines and tomatoes.

5) *Zabadi* (Vegetarian)

Similar to the Greek Tzatziki but without garlic, Zabadi is a yoghurt dip mixed with mint and cucumber.

Tabouleh



Other Snacks

1) *Falafel / Tamaaya* (Vegetarian)

Egyptian Falafel is unique. Unlike the Falafel recipes made in other parts of the Middle East which use chickpeas, Egyptians make their falafel by deep frying balls of mashed broad beans. These are then served on their own, or in a pita bread sandwich with salad and hummus.

2) *Foul Mudammas* (Vegetarian)

Pronounced 'Fool', this dish is made from cooking fava beans with cumin, lemon and olive oil until they become a kind of brown mush. They taste much better than they look and are often eaten as a dip at breakfast time, or in a pita bread sandwich with salad. Both Foul and Falafel are widely available from any one of the many 'Foul and Falafel' snack bars in most Egyptian cities.

Falafel



3) *Fetir* (Vegetarian)

These pastry wraps are ubiquitous across the Middle East. They contain a variety of fillings including meat, cheese and all kinds of vegetables. They are usually baked in the oven and fully stuffed.

Main Courses

1) *Mixed Grill*

Egyptians love to eat meat, and although most meals are accompanied by an assortment of salad and vegetables, few Egyptians are actually vegetarians. Barbequed skewers of lamb, beef and chicken are usually available on any Egyptian menu.

2) *Seafood*

With long coastlines on both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, it is no surprise that Egypt has an abundance of outstanding fish and seafood dishes. Especially when dining in one of the coastal resorts, seafood lovers will not be disappointed by the large and very affordable selection.



3) Kosheri - Vegetarian

Kosheri is a largely unknown and underrated Egyptian speciality. A vegetarian's delight, this dish is a mix of pasta, lentils, chick peas and bulghar wheat topped with a spicy tomato sauce. Kosheri is available from numerous, specialist Kosheri restaurants whose menus have only three options: small, medium or large.

4) Fatta

This is a simple dish containing rice, soup, tomato sauce, bread and pieces of beef or lamb meat. It is traditional for most Egyptian families, especially during Eid al-Adha (religious festival) and is usually prepared to celebrate special occasions when a lot of guests are invited, such as the birth of a new baby, marriage or pregnancy. Fatta is a mixture of meat that is boiled with spices and then layered with bread and rice.

5) Hamam Mahshi

This is Egyptian-style stuffed pigeon, which is filled with cooked Freekeh mixture (cracked wheat). This delicious dish takes a bit of work to prepare but is definitely worth the time and effort. The pigeons are boiled and fried in hot oil after being stuffed with the freekeh.

6) Dawood Basha

Koftet Dawood Basha is meatballs that are flavored and cooked in tomato-herb sauce and usually served with white rice. The meat is either beef or lamb, and spices can (baharat) be added for people who like spicy food. It is a very quick and tasty dish for those who like easy cooking.

Drinks

1) Karkadé

This is a very pleasant red drink, made from the flower of the Hibiscus. It is widely used in Egypt and the rest of Africa for treating cardiac and nerve diseases and has been described as a diuretic. It is usually served hot as tea, but is also very popular served cold like fruit juice.

2) Sobia

This cold sweet drink is made by soaking powdered rice overnight, then mixing it with coconut milk, sugar and some other ingredients, before chilling and serving cold. It is one of the most popular drinks during the holy month of Ramadan and is often sold on the streets.

3) Kharoub

Cardob, popularly known as Locust beans, is a refreshing cold drink, which is very popular in juice shops and from street vendors. Not only does it taste good but it also has health benefits, as it is full of fiber, protein and antioxidants and stops people getting thirsty or hungry. This is why it is so popular during Ramadan, as it keeps people going during the long hours of fasting.

Desserts

1) Umm Ali

This is an Egyptian-style bread pudding. It is a scrumptious dessert that contains puff pastry and condensed milk. This very sweet, creamy pudding can be served hot or cold with nuts and coconuts.

2) Roz be-laban

This is a mixture of rice and milk (rice pudding) that results in a sweet creamy desert. The rice is usually cooked entirely with milk till it becomes thick. Coconut and nuts can be added on top of the mixture and sugar should be added before cooking. After leaving it in the fridge for a few hours, it turns cold and smooth, ready to be eaten.

3) Basbousa

Traditional Egyptian sweet, thought to be of Turkish origin. It is made of cooked semolina covered with syrup. The mixture is usually made with cream and coconut and then baked in the oven before adding the syrup and serving with nuts. The name Basbousa is commonly used in Cairo, whereas in Alexandria, it is known as *hareesa*.

4) Lokmat El-Kady

Sometimes known as Awama or Zalabia, it is a very traditional sweet in Egypt, especially in the old district of Cairo. It is like small, round, fried doughnuts with a sugar syrup coating.

Abd al-Latif al-Bagdadi's description of the gastronomy in Egypt (around year 1200)

“... In Egypt they extract oil from the seeds of the radish, the turnip and the lettuce and use it for cooking. They also make soap from these oils; the soap made in Egypt is soft, red, yellow and green. This soap appears to have some relation with the sweetmeat *sapouniyyeh* from which it takes its name.

As for Egyptian stews, the normal or sour stews have nothing in particular, with very little difference from those used elsewhere; their sweet stews however are quite unusual, in that they cook a chicken with all sorts of sweet substances. This is how they prepare this ancient Egyptian Food: they boil a fowl, put it in a julep, then throw in some crushed hazelnuts or pistachio nuts, poppy or purslane seeds, or rose hips, and cook the whole thing until it sets. Then add spices and remove it from the fire...

There is also a huge selection of sweetmeats, which would need their own special book to describe them. Some are used as cures for certain ailments, and are given to people who are dieting and to the sick and convalescent when they fancy something sweet to eat. Examples include pumpkin *khabis*, carrot *khabis*, a sweet called *wardiyyeh*, which uses roses, another called *zindjebiliyyeh* which is made of ginger, pastilles of aloe wood and of lemon, of musk, and many others.”



ITINERARY

UMAYYAD ROUTE

Alexandria



- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Ras El Tin Palace | 10. Pompey's Pillar | 19. Terbanah Mosque |
| 2. Anfushi Necropolis | 11. Catacombs of Kom El Shukafa | 20. Coptic Cathedral |
| 3. Abu el Abbas el Mursi Mosque | 12. Mustafa Kamal Necropolis | 21. Cavafy's Museum |
| 4. Qaitbey Fort (Citadel) | 13. Al-Shatby Necropolis | 22. The Royal Jewellery Museum |
| 5. El Silsilah Fort | 14. Cisterns of Alexandria | 23. Mahmoud Said Museum |
| 6. The Alexandrian Library | 15. Attarine Mosque | 24. Alexandria National Museum |
| 7. Graeco-Roman Museum | 16. The Mosque of Imam Busiri | 25. Alexandria Opera House |
| 8. Roman Amphitheatre | 17. Nabi Daniel Mosque | 26. Montazah Palace and Gardens |
| 9. Museum of Fine Arts | 18. Al-Shurbagy Mosque | |

Alexandria is named after Alexander the Great, who founded the city in 331 BC and made it his capital. From a small port town, it grew to become one of the greatest centres of knowledge and science in the Greek World and one of its grandest and most important metropolises, attracting scholars, scientists, philosophers, mathematicians, artists and historians. In Alexandria today, there is culture, history, the sea and all the attractions of a great, influential city. Those seeking a holiday with an array of things to do can begin with the historical sites erected during the Ancient Egyptian, Roman, Greek and Islamic periods.

Alexandria is famous for its two ancient wonders: the Old Library and the Lighthouse. The Old Library was the greatest in the ancient world, where scholars from



Aerial
view of
Alexandria



View of Alexandria in the
Civitates Orbis Terrarum,
16th century

Cornelius de Bruyn, View
of Pompey's Pillar
with Alexandria in the
background, 1681

all over the eastern Mediterranean flocked to study, soon turning the city into an important cosmopolitan centre. Unfortunately, the library was destroyed in a fire, in which many books and scrolls were reduced to ashes with the consequent loss of culture and

knowledge. Recently, however, in a move to revive the Old Library of Alexandria, a new library (Bibliotheca Alexandrina) was built on the Mediterranean shore during the 1990s.

The Lighthouse was an architectural masterpiece commissioned by Ptolemy I Soter I around 297 BC. It was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and consisted of a three-tier stone tower, with a broad spiral ramp inside leading up to a platform where fires were lit at night. The flames were reflected far out to sea by metal mirrors, as the tower was 120 metres high. Above the fires there was a huge statue in honour of Poseidon, the Sea God. By the 10th century, the lighthouse had been severely damaged by earthquakes and subsidence, and finally collapsed during an earthquake in the 14th century. Stones from its ruins were used by Sultan Qaitbey to build the Citadel of Qaitbey in the 1480's.

Before the arrival of Islam, Alexandria was part of the Byzantine Empire and played a crucial role in maintaining imperial control over the region. It was also of great economic importance as a major Mediterranean port. In 634 AD, the Muslim leader Umar became the Caliph and inherited a diverse and rapidly expanding Islamic empire. Throughout the early 640s, he set his

The old library of Alexandria by Ammianus Marcellinus, 4th century

“In this city there were two libraries of incalculable value and according to the trustworthy testimony of ancient records, about seven hundred thousand volumes that had been deposited there thanks to the enormous efforts of the Ptolemaic Kings went up in flames in the Alexandrian war, when the city was sacked in the time of the dictator Caesar.”



sights on the economically desirable province of Egypt and its capital city, Alexandria. After their troops were destroyed in battle, the Byzantine officers at last surrendered to Umar and handed the city over to the Muslims.

Although perhaps not at its peak, Alexandria was still a pleasant city when it was conquered by the Arabs in 642 AD. In these first years of Islam, the Caliphs generally respected the population of the conquered cities.

The Pearl of the Mediterranean, Alexandria, still retains its Mediterranean ambience, combining old European colonial houses, traditional cafes and Greco-Roman monuments. The Catacombs of Kom el-Shukafa, the underwater ruins of Montazah and Maamoura and the city's vibrant arts scene make Alexandria a great sightseeing destination. Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi Mosque and the Coptic Cathedral of St Mark are also worth a visit.

Coast of Alexandria,
J.N. Bellin, 1764



Interior of the
Citadel

Citadel of
Qaitbey

Visits

Fort Qaitbey / Citadel of Qaitbey

The Fort was built in the 1480's by Sultan Qaitbey, on the site of Alexandria's famous lighthouse, one of the ancient city's best-known monuments, and many of the original blocks were used in its construction. The founder of the Citadel was the Mameluke Sultan Qaitbey, who ruled over Egypt and Syria between 1468 and 1496 AD. The Citadel overlooks the Eastern Harbour in the same way as the Ras el-Tin Palace overlooks the Western.

The fort is also the home of the Naval Museum, which houses a collection of interesting artefacts from the wars fought out near the city. You can see relics from Roman sea battles, from the Napoleonic wars when the fort was bombarded, as well as from more recent battles in which it fell to the British. There is also an interesting collection of sea creatures and dioramas.



Description of the Lighthouse of Alexandria by Ibn al-Shaykh (12th century)

“Between the Lighthouse of Alexandria and the city there is a distance of nearly a mile or more. The city is to the south of the Lighthouse. This is located on a small island amidst water, and from here, a road above the water has been built to reach the shore [...]. So, when the tide is high, water covers this walkway, although the sea is always calm there, because of the island and the rocks that surround this place. This means that a pedestrian can cross the path even then, walking with the water lapping around his ankles or thereabouts. And when the water recedes, you can cross the path dry. This means that when the level of the sea rises, so do the waters in this passage. The Lighthouse looms up at the far end of the island. [...] It was built there with the sole purpose of acting as a guide for sailors approaching the city by sea: to which end a fire is lit in its highest part, so that the sailors do not lose their way.”



The Serapeum and 'Pompey's Pillar'

A major restoration project of the site of Pompey's Pillar in Alexandria was completed by the Supreme Council of Antiquities. It is now an impressive open museum and one of the finest archaeological examples of the Greco-Roman Period in Egyptian history. Pompey's Pillar itself stands at the top of a hill in the oldest part of the city of Alexandria. Once the site of an ancient Egyptian village called Rhakotis, the area became known during Ptolemaic times as the "Alexandria Acropolis." Pompey's Pillar remains its primary landmark at an impressive height of approximately 27 meters. It is made of red granite, quarried and transported from Aswan in Upper Egypt, and is flanked by two sphinx statues. Contrary to popular belief,

The "Pillar of Columns" (Pompey's Pillar), according to Ibn Battuta. Year 1326

“Another of the marvellous things in this city is the awe-inspiring marble column in its outskirts which they call the "Pillar of Columns." It is a single block, skilfully carved, erected on a plinth of square stones like enormous platforms, and no one knows how it was erected there nor for certain who erected it.”

Pompey's Pillar



the pillar did not belong to the great Roman leader, Pompey, but was erected during the Greco-Roman period by the people of Alexandria to honor the Emperor Diocletian. An inscription on the pillar reads: "To the right and good emperor, the protector god of Alexandria, Diocletian, who has never been beaten. Therefore Postumus constructed this pillar." Legend has it, however, that when Pompey was defeated by Julius Caesar and escaped Rome for Egypt, only to be killed in Alexandria.

Pompey's pillar stands in the center of the temple hall of the Serapeum, the principal temple of the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis, personified by the sacred Apis bull. The foundations of this temple survive, along with bilingual texts, dating construction of the temple to Ptolemy III. The Serapeum also housed an underground library, contemporary to the ancient library of Alexandria. This crypt-like structure, approximately 75 meters in length, running beneath the grounds of Pompey's pillar, is still well-preserved, with niches in the walls once reserved for papyri scrolls. The library is accessed from a staircase leading from the top of the hill to the lower-level ground.

Kom el-Shukafa catacombs

The famed catacombs of Kom el-Shukafa are five minutes away from Pompey's Pillar. Initially they were built for a wealthy family who practised a fusion of Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman religions; the catacombs of Kom el-Shukafa contained over 300 mummies. Many are decorated with bearded serpents with the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, the hovering solar disc above the archway and customary funerary deities together with Greco-Roman motifs. The catacombs are a monumental testament to the enduring myths of Ancient Egypt despite centuries of Greek and Roman rule. Kom el-Shukafa means literally "piles of shreds".



Kom el-Shukafa
catacombs



Above and below,
Kom el-Shukafa
catacombs



Al-Shatby Necropolis

The Al-Shatby Necropolis is situated in the Al Shatby area of Alexandria, directly opposite the Collège Saint Marc. The Shatby tombs date back to the fourth century BC (360 BC) and were discovered accidentally in 1904. They are considered to be the oldest tombs in Alexandria and look like an old Greek house, with a doorway that opens into a corridor and two chambers. Two burial methods were used in these tombs: the first was to lay out the body on a funerary bed (as in the main tomb), and the second consisted of *loculi* cut into the walls as burial niches and closed off with slabs.

Vessels and jars containing human ashes were found in one of the excavated tombs. The façade of the tomb consists of a number of short columns that are connected with screen walls. These are decorated with false doors that symbolized the threshold between the worlds of the living and the dead through which the spirit of the deceased could come and go.

The complex is surrounded by a pathway of flowers, shrubbery and remnants of Greco-Roman funerary monuments, giving the tombs a marvellous setting.



Mustafa Kamal
Necropolis

Mustafa Kamal Necropolis

The Mustafa Kamal Necropolis is located in El-Moaskar El-Romani Street, in the Rushdie district of Alexandria. It has four subterranean tombs that date back to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC.

The first and most impressive tomb comprises several chambers that are accessed by a stairway that leads to *loculi* arranged around a central open courtyard. In the middle of this courtyard there is an altar with three doorways behind it that lead to a large corridor. This courtyard is famous for its Doric columns with clearly visible decorations, including a small sphinx on a plinth and a painted frieze depicting ladies and horsemen in a libation scene. Passing the courtyard, there is a doorway to the western room, which has a list of names on the walls in Greek. It is thought that these are the names of visitors or of people buried



Above and below,
Mustafa Kamal
Necropolis



inside this room. There is a painting on the wall of a wheel with an elaborate system for drawing water up into a basin, where it then runs through a ceramic pipe into two small tanks, and then into a larger one.

The second tomb is accessed via stairs that lead to the central courtyard and to a number of other rooms. These rooms also have some fascinating pieces, including a pair of benches that were used for prayers, an offering table made out of limestone, and a sarcophagus with pictures of dancers, flowers and chariots in lovely colours. Another room was used as an annex where funeral banquets were prepared.

The bright colours and the relief inscriptions in the Mustafa Kamal Necropolis illustrate the daily lives of the dead.

Necropolis of Anfushi

During the Ptolemaic period (4th-1st century BC), the Greeks preferred to be cremated after death, but later on, they gave up the practice of cremation and started to embalm bodies, as the Egyptians once had done.

In Alexandria there were two large burial grounds located to the east and the west of the city; the necropolis of Anfushi was in the western one (near the site of the Ras el-Tin Palace today) and dates back to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. The necropolis was discovered between 1901 and 1921.

The Anfushi tombs are decorated in a blend of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic styles. There are five tombs in this area, two of which attract most attention due to their spectacular decoration.

The tombs consist of a series of corridors and rooms with niches carved out of the rock. The layout is quite complicated, especially because they were not made

City gates of Alexandria following al-Abdari's description

“Their uprights and lintels, despite the extraordinary size of the gates, are made of hewn stone of wonderful beauty and solidity. Every door-post is formed of a single stone as is every lintel and step. There is nothing more astonishing than the collection of these stones in view of their immense size. The passage of time has not affected them or left any trace on them; they remain still in all their freshness and beauty. As for the panels of the gates, they are tremendously strong, clad inside and out with iron of the most delicate, most beautiful and most solid workmanship possible.”

View of
Alexandria



for a single person or even a family, but for a whole corporation.

Tomb 1 has a staircase cut into the rock that leads to an open courtyard. The wall around the entrance is covered with a thin layer of plaster. On the east side of the courtyard we can see two rooms with an Egyptian-style cornice above the entrance. The burial chamber is small and low, with a granite sarcophagus at the far end. The wall of the northern part is decorated in “inlaid style”, (imitation of alabaster slabs and rectangular blocks in equal layers).

Tomb 2 is similar to Tomb 1 and is also decorated in the Egyptian style. It consists of a staircase that leads to an open courtyard with burial chambers on its sides. On the wall facing the entrance there is a typical Egyptian scene of purification of the dead showing the deceased person with Osiris, Horus and Isis. Another scene on the right shows the deceased person and Horus standing in front of Osiris, who is sitting on his throne while a jackal stands at his feet.

In the third tomb, the left-hand burial chamber contains a large sarcophagus of pink Aswan granite.

The remains of the fourth tomb have a different design from the others, with a ramp leading to an open courtyard with two doors. The first door leads to a room that was used for funeral banquets (*triclinium*) and has three *loculi* (burial openings). The second door leads to two rooms carved into the rock that were also used for funeral banquets. They also have various *loculi*.

The Anfushi tombs have a characteristic decoration of geometric motifs in black, white, blue and red squares, lozenges and octagons.



Roman Amphitheatre

The Roman Amphitheatre in Alexandria was probably built in the fourth century AD. It is located in the heart of the city in what is now Kom El-Dikaa and has a diameter of about 33 metres. Although it was partially destroyed during the earthquake that hit Alexandria in the 6th century AD, it still has a clearly defined shape that testifies to its original splendour. The amphitheatre was discovered by chance in 1960 during the excavations in search of the tomb of Alexander the Great. Evidence and traces of engravings show that it was used in three eras (Roman, Byzantium and early Islamic). For example, the Byzantine Celtic cross inside a circle found in one of the holes at the entrance symbolizes Christianity and Christ.

The architectural design of this amphitheatre is unique, in that it has an open-air site with raised seating, in a U-shape with thirteen rows of marble seats. The seats are numbered in Roman numbers and letters from the bottom up to facilitate the seating plan in a theatre that

Roman
Amphitheatre

The open air
archaeological museum
in the centre of the
modern Alexandria

had a capacity of 600 spectators. The steps and the rows of the amphitheatre are built on top of a thick white limestone wall and are surrounded by another wall. There were five boxes for local VIPs, only two of which survive in good condition. These boxes are covered with domes supported by various pillars to protect the spectators from the changing weather and to amplify the sound in the theatre.

There is an orchestra pit in the centre, and at the western entrance there are two halls adorned with mosaics with geometrical designs. During the Roman Empire, the theatre had two adjoining rooms at the north and south ends where the spectators would wait before coming in. The theatre was used for a variety of purposes including celebrations, poetry competitions, and gladiator combats. It was also a venue for lectures and conferences. Its unique design with the domes and the orchestra pit meant that it was also an excellent musical auditorium. Today it is considered one of the important tourist attractions in Alexandria and is used for holding national and international cultural and musical events.



Alexandria in the 10th century by Ibn Hawqal

“Alexandria is a considerable town, built on the sea-side: the houses, and other edifices, are of marble. And out in the sea there is a *minareh*, or watch-tower, of hard stone and very lofty; it contains about three hundred houses.”



Harbord of
Alexandria

Description of Alexandria in the 10th century by al-Muqaddasi

“Alexandria is a handsome town of the shore on the Grecian sea, possessing an impregnable fortress. It is a noble city, abounding in pious and devout men. The inhabitants obtain their supply of drinking-water from the Nile, which reaches them in the season of its flood through an aqueduct filling their cisterns. The town resembles Syria in its climate and customs; it receives a copious supply of rain, and collects together the products of diverse climes. The surrounding district is very fertile, and produces excellent fruits and fine grapes. The town itself is agreeable and clean; and the buildings are of marine stone. There are marble quarries also. It possesses two mosques. [...] All the towns in this district are pleasant, and round about them grow the carob and olives and almonds, and their fields are dependant only on rain. Near Alexandria the Nile discharges itself into the Sea of Rum. The city was founded by Alexander, and a strange story is told in connection with its foundation.”



Statue of Saad Zaghlul,
located on the site of
the Caesareum Temple

Caesareum Temple

This temple was located in what is today Saad Zaghloul Square, one of the busiest squares in Alexandria. It was constructed during the reign of Queen Cleopatra VII (1st century BC) in honour of Julius Caesar, but she died before it was finished. Augustus or, as he later became known Emperor Octavian, continued the construction after her death. Once finished, Octavian dedicated the temple to himself, establishing a cult for his worship there.

Unfortunately the building is in ruins and nothing remains of the original construction. The temple once had two red granite obelisks adorning the main entrance and façade, called Cleopatra's needles. The first of these two obelisks was relocated to London in 1877, where it was placed on the banks of the River

Thames. The second was shipped to New York and now stands in Central Park.

The first obelisk bears the name of Emperor Octavian III while the second has the names of Set I and Ramses XI inscribed on its sides. It seems that this obelisk was brought from Al Matareya to decorate the temple façade twenty years after Cleopatra's death. The philosopher Hypatia was murdered on the steps of this temple in March 415 AD.

Today a statue of the great Egyptian politician Saad Zaghloul stands on the site of what was once the Caesareum Temple.

The Cisterns of Alexandria

In 331 BC Alexander the Great conquered Egypt and established a new capital city: Alexandria. The supply of fresh water had always been a problem in the region, but Alexander the Great wanted to build his new city there between a brackish lake and the salty sea.

The cisterns are tanks for collecting water. They were usually built underground out of firebricks and stone to withstand decay from moisture. Construction materials were frequently coated with lime and red-brick dust to prevent water leakage.

Ptolemy ordered a canal to be dug from the Canopic branch (Mahmoudieh Canal) of the River Nile to the gates of the new city, from where the water was brought via a network of channels into underground vaults for storage. This ancient cistern, enlarged during the late Roman and Byzantine periods, is three floors deep and so elaborately constructed that it looks more like a cathedral than a water supply complex.

The maintenance of these cisterns was a perpetual concern, not only during Egypt's Greco-Roman period, but also for the Muslim dynasties. A large number of inscriptions and literary texts refer to the cleaning, widening and repair of these cisterns. In *Description de l'Egypte* the engineers that took part in Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt mention five underground aqueducts and more than 400 cisterns.

In 1869, the astronomer Mahmoud el Falaki was commissioned by Khedive Ismail to draw up a map of the ancient city. He counted up to 700 cisterns located under the streets of Alexandria without indicating whether they were all still in use.

In 1990 only one sole cistern was open to the public: el-Sahrig el-Nabih (named after the Mameluke Supreme Judge Mohamed ben el-Nabih), situated beneath the Shallalat Gardens, next to the al-Salama hospital. It has three square floors (11.75 x 11.75 m).



Bibliotheca Alexandrina

This is the largest reading space in the world with over 2,000 chairs for potential readers. The new library symbolizes the renaissance of Alexandria as a Mediterranean megalopolis. The futuristic disc-like structure was opened in 2002 and aims to become a great cultural centre, going some way to replace the ancient Alexandrian library that was tragically destroyed some 2000 years ago. International aid has been injected into the project, a huge ultra-modern 11-storey structure with a roof made of glass and steel panels, which took ten years to complete. The whole building is covered in scripts and letters in almost all the world's languages to reflect the multi-cultural heritage

Bibliotheca
Alexandrina



Bibliotheca
Alexandrina

and spirit of the library. By the time its collection is complete it will house more than 8 million books. A traditional visit to the Library starts in the main hall where visitors are offered the assistance of multi-lingual guides (Arabic, English, French, Italian and Spanish). The library houses four permanent museums dedicated to Antiquities, Manuscripts, the former Egyptian President Sadat, and the History of Science. A remarkable feature of the library is CULTURAMA, an interactive display of Egypt's cultural heritage: 9 huge computer screens are arranged in a semi-circle to create a display resembling traditional war or history panoramas.



Alexandria in the 14th century. The visit of Ibn Battuta on April 1326 AD.

“At length on April 5th [1326] we reached Alexandria. It is a beautiful city, well-built and fortified with four gates and a magnificent port.”



Alexandria in an engraving by Ali Bey. 19th century

State of the Lighthouse of Alexandria in 1326. Description by Ibn Battuta.

“I went to see the lighthouse on this occasion and found one of its faces in ruins. It is a very high square building, and its door is above the level of the earth. Opposite the door, and of the same height, is a building from which there is a plank bridge to the door; if this is removed there is no means of entrance. Inside the door is a place for the lighthouse-keeper, and within the lighthouse there are many chambers. The breadth of the passage inside is nine spans and that of the wall ten spans; each of the four sides of the lighthouse is 140 spans in breadth. It is situated on a high mound and lies three miles from the city on a long tongue of land which juts out into the sea from close by the city wall, so that the lighthouse cannot be reached by land except from the city. On my return to the West in the year 750 H [1349 AD] I visited the lighthouse again, and found that it had fallen into so ruinous a condition that it was not possible to enter it or climb up to the door. Al-Malik an-Nasir had started to build a similar lighthouse alongside it but was prevented by death from completing the work.”



Mosque of Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi

Mosque of Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi

This beautiful mosque is Alexandria's largest and one of the most important Islamic monuments in the world. It has a cream-coloured façade, four great domes, arabesque designs and a 73-metre high minaret that was rebuilt in 1943.

Built in 1775 to commemorate the life of an Andalusian Sheikh, Ahmed Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi, who was buried on the site, it is one of the most visited mosques on the White Med coast.

The colonnade of elongated arches, the eight monolithic granite columns and the beautiful marble floor are all worthy of mention.



Nabi Daniel Mosque

There are two different accounts as to who the Mosque is named after. In the first, the mosque is named after the Biblical prophet Daniel whose life story is largely based on the Old Testament but also incorporates many aspects of that of Alexander the Great. The Macedonian king founded the city of Alexandria and was buried in a golden sarcophagus on the site of the mosque. Alternatively, the mosque may have been named after Sheikh Mohammed Daniel, a Kurd who came to Alexandria from Mosul in the 15th century. The present Mosque of Nabi Daniel was built at the end of the 18th century on the site of a 4th century Roman temple and restored in 1823 by Mohamed Ali.



Nabi Daniel Mosque

The Mosque of Imam Busiri (Bossari)

“For verily a lover is deaf to those who advise him”, so goes one of the early lines of *Qasidat al-Burda* (the Poem of the Cloak) written by the poet Imam Busiri, who died in 1296 AD. The poem became so famous that it is still recited today by believers from Yemen to Morocco. His tomb and mosque in the Anfushi district of Alexandria have recently been restored and play an important role in the life of the city, attracting visitors from all over the world. The mosque features beautiful mural calligraphy, including 94 verses of *Qasidat al-Burda* inscribed in *Ta’liq* script, as well as verses from the Quran.

Attarine Mosque

The Attarine Mosque is in the centre of the Attarine district, one of the most interesting neighbourhoods in Alexandria. This mosque was originally built on the site of a fourth century church dedicated to Saint Athanasius. With the arrival of Islam, the church was transformed into a mosque that has undergone many further changes over the centuries. Its current good condition is thanks to the Governor of Egypt Abbas II, who ordered its restoration at the beginning of the 20th century.

This district is well known for its famous marketplace, the Al-Attarine souk. This traditional souk is a maze of narrow alleys and pedestrian streets, bursting with all types of shops on both sides of the streets, with shopkeepers selling all kinds of souvenirs and traditional Egyptian artefacts, such as *sheesha* pipes, colourful blown glass products, *gallabiya* tunics, belly-dancing costumes, spices and antiques. The Al-Attarine Souk specializes in antiques.

Souvenirs in
Alexandria



Al-Shurbagy Mosque

The Shurbagy mosque was built in 1758 in the Turkish district of Alexandria, which was first inhabited after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt. Its founder was al-Haj Abd al-Bakki el-Shurbagy, who died in 1763.

There is a marble plaque above the entrance to the prayer hall with a commemorative poem describing the mosque in detail. When it was analysed, some missing original parts were uncovered after newer decorations had been removed. The original minaret was destroyed when the British Mediterranean Fleet bombarded Alexandria on July 1882. The *mihrab* is still decorated with the original Kufic inscriptions.

Just like the Terbana mosque, the al-Shurbagy mosque is built above street level and consists of two floors that are rectangular in shape. The ground floor includes a group of stores, ablution basins and coffee shops. The mosque is located on the first floor and has a decorated wooden ceiling.

Church of the Sacred Heart

Built in 1924, the Church of the Sacred Heart is a Catholic church, primarily attended by Alexandria's Roman Catholic community. The patron saint is St Francis, an Italian monk born in 1181 who also founded the Franciscan religious orders. The church is worth visiting for its breathtaking religious art, with icons, murals, figurines and most of all, exquisite stained glass pieces.

One of the interior walls is decorated with images from the life of Christ while the opposite wall recounts episodes in the life of St Francis. St Clare, who founded the Franciscan Order for Girls, also features prominently in the stained glass windows. There are several altars and a beautiful pulpit engraved with events from the life of St Francis. Swimming angels and a stunning painting of Jesus Christ connect the walls to the beautiful ceiling, which has even more artistic delights.

Terbana Mosque

The Terbana mosque was built in what is now Faransa Street in the Turkish district in 1684 by Haj Ibrahim Terbana, a Moroccan merchant who spent his life in Alexandria.

This mosque was built above street level and has two floors. The entrance gate is built of two-tone bricks. The ground floor is occupied by shops, and the rectangular prayer hall is on the first floor. It covers an area of 350 square meters and has a richly decorated wooden ceiling with colourful reliefs. The ceiling is supported by four rows of arches that rest on eight columns. There is an internal terrace for women's prayers which can be accessed directly from the outside via a staircase.

The Terbana Mosque has two enormous granite columns topped with Corinthian capitals, and other columns that date back to the Greco-Roman period and once belonged to old demolished buildings or stood in public squares.

The *mihrab*, which indicates the direction for praying towards Mecca, is in a corner of the Mosque and is covered with North African style ceramics.

The minarets have three sections. The first is octagonal and has a circular wooden staircase. The second section has a terrace from which the *muezzin* calls the faithful to prayer, while the third section has a base called a *kursy*, a cylinder column called a *badan* and a dome or *khoza*.

The Royal Jewellery Museum

Housed in an exquisitely decorated villa that once belonged to King Farouk's first wife, the Royal Jewellery Museum is a true gem, with a great collection of glitzy artefacts that belonged to the excessive and extravagant Egyptian monarch and his family.



Coptic Cathedral

Although the Coptic Cathedral looks Byzantine, it was built in the 20th century on site of a 4th century church. It has beautiful icons and mosaics that fill the silence of the cathedral with a surreal beauty.

St Mark Coptic Cathedral

The Museum of Fine Arts

The permanent collection includes sculpture, architecture and photography by contemporary Egyptian and foreign artists. The museum, which houses approximately 1,500 pieces, is full of drawings of rural life and surrealist paintings. It was once known as the Hussein Sobhy Museum, after a governor of the city that played an important role in Alexandria's art movement. The building itself dates back to 1954. Every two years it organizes a biennial with art from around the Mediterranean.

The Greco-Roman Museum

With a great collection of art and artefacts that date back to the origins of ancient Alexandria, the Greco-Roman Museum has a neoclassical façade with the name MOYΣEION (museum in Greek). With 27 exhibits that showcase Hellenic statues, busts of Roman emperors, sarcophagi, mummies, Tangara figurines and early Christian artefacts, the museum captures over 2,000 years of Greco-Roman history in Egypt.



Cavafy's Museum

The museum is located on the 2nd floor of an old building, once owned by the Alexandria-raised Greek poet Konstantin Cavafy, who lived there for 25 years before his death in 1933. Since 1992, the poet's apartment has been turned into a museum, housing some of his personal effects, including his old brass bed, some icons on the walls, and the modest table he used as a desk. The most interesting part of the museum is the "bindery", a small room where the poet made his own poetry pamphlets. Many of his books, manuscripts and letters are also on display on tables in the different rooms of the house.



Alexandria National
Museum

Alexandria National Museum

Located close to the city centre, the Alexandria National Museum nicely sums up the history of Alexandria on the three floors of the now renovated Italianate style al-Saad Bassili Pasha Palace. The Museum has over 1,800 artefacts from the four main ages of Egypt: Ancient, Greco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic. There is also an array of more modern items such as royal jewels and an interesting collection of antique coins.

Mahmoud Said Museum

This museum takes you back in time to the 40's and 50's, the golden days of 20th century Egypt and a time when, after retiring from his duties as a judge, Mahmud Said (1897-1964) started to paint Egypt as he saw it, mixing echoes from the past with modern techniques such as cubism and social realism. Housed in the artist's beautiful Italian-style villa, the museum has about 40 of Said's paintings on display.

Detail of the
Alexandria Opera
House



Alexandria Opera House

The "Sayed Darwish Theatre" was opened in 1921 during the reign of Sultan Fuad I and was designed by the French architect George Baroque, who was inspired by the Vienna State Opera and the Odeon Theatre in Paris. It was originally called the "Muhammad Ali Theater", but was later renamed in honour of Sayed Darwish due to his pioneering role in Arab music.

The Theatre was refurbished in 2004 and today features performances by the orchestras, opera and ballet companies from the Cairo Opera House, together with the different Arabic music ensembles and the modern dance group. There are also visiting companies and recitals by local and foreign performers, Cultural Weeks, and Arab and international festivals.



Montazah Palace

Montazah Palace and Gardens

On the east side of the Corniche waterfront, there are fantastic beaches and the Montazah Palace and gardens. There are many places to walk and enjoy the greenery, the old Salamlek hotel in all its splendour, a great shore line and the mansions of the well-to-do. An additional Royal palace, known as the Haramlik Palace, was commissioned by King Fuad and designed by Ernesto Verruchi. It was built in the Montazah Palace gardens in 1932 by King Fuad although the first stone had been laid in 1892 by Khedive Abbas II. The Montazah Palace and Gardens are very attractive places where you can enjoy breathtaking views of the Mediterranean Sea in wonderful leafy surroundings with roses and other flowers. The area has a 5-star hotel, many restaurants, a beautiful sea view and a water-sports club.



Gardens of the Montazah Palace



Montazah Palace

Surroundings

Abu Qir wrecks and the sunken cities of Abu Qir

Abu Qir is a village situated on a point some 23 km northeast of Alexandria. It has excellent fish restaurants, inherited from its time as a fishing village.

In the sea nearby, archaeologists have been exploring the sunken cities of Heracleion and Canopus since 1992. Besides being a prominent religious centre, the city of Heracleion was the main trading point on the Mediterranean in the 6th century. When they started diving this site, archaeologists discovered the ruins of the temple of Heracleion, a city dedicated to Amun and Heracles-Khonsu. They also found giant statues of gods, Ptolemaic kings and their consorts, pottery, jewellery and numerous wrecked wooden ships.

Legend has it that Canopus is where the Goddess Isis found the last part of Osiris's savaged body. Ancient Egyptians believed that Osiris was murdered by his jealous brother Seth, who scattered the dismembered parts of his body all over Egypt. According to Egyptian

mythology, Isis succeeded in finding the scattered pieces and placed them in a vase that was kept at Canopus. The site, which has hundreds of Greco-Roman amphorae, attests to the extensive trade connections between Egypt and the Roman Empire.

Archaeological dives to the site of the Sunken Cities of Abu-Qir can be arranged through the Montazah diving centre in Alexandria.

Abu Qir is also the site of one of the most famous sea battles in history, between the British Royal Navy under Lord Nelson and the Napoleonic French fleet. Nelson won, so enabling the British to break the French hold on Egypt, allowing the Ottoman commander, Muhammad Ali to establish his dynasty a few years later. The French lost eleven ships and the British two. The French flagship *L'Orient* was found in the 1990s by the underwater archaeologist Franck Goddio, 8 km offshore in 11 meters of water. They also discovered the *Serieuse* and the *Artemise*.

Taposiris

Taposiris Magna (today called Abusir) is a Ptolemaic city and temple located 45 kilometres west of Alexandria. It is one of the Greco-Roman sites on the north coast. It was founded in around 280-270 BC by the Pharaoh Ptolem II Philadelphus on the northern shore of Lake Mariout. This ancient city, which the ancient Egyptians called Per Usiri meaning the Dwelling of Osiris, is claimed to be the site of Osiris' tomb. As its name suggests, the temple of Taposiris was one of the religious centres for worshipping Osiris, the God of Resurrection, and his wife, the Goddess Isis, the Great Mother of Ancient Egyptian mythology. The temple established around 278 BC has a mixture of Egyptian and Greek architecture.



Lighthouse of
Taposiris

In the fourth century, most of the temple was destroyed and a church was built on the ruins. During the Arab invasion of Egypt, the site was used as a fortress.

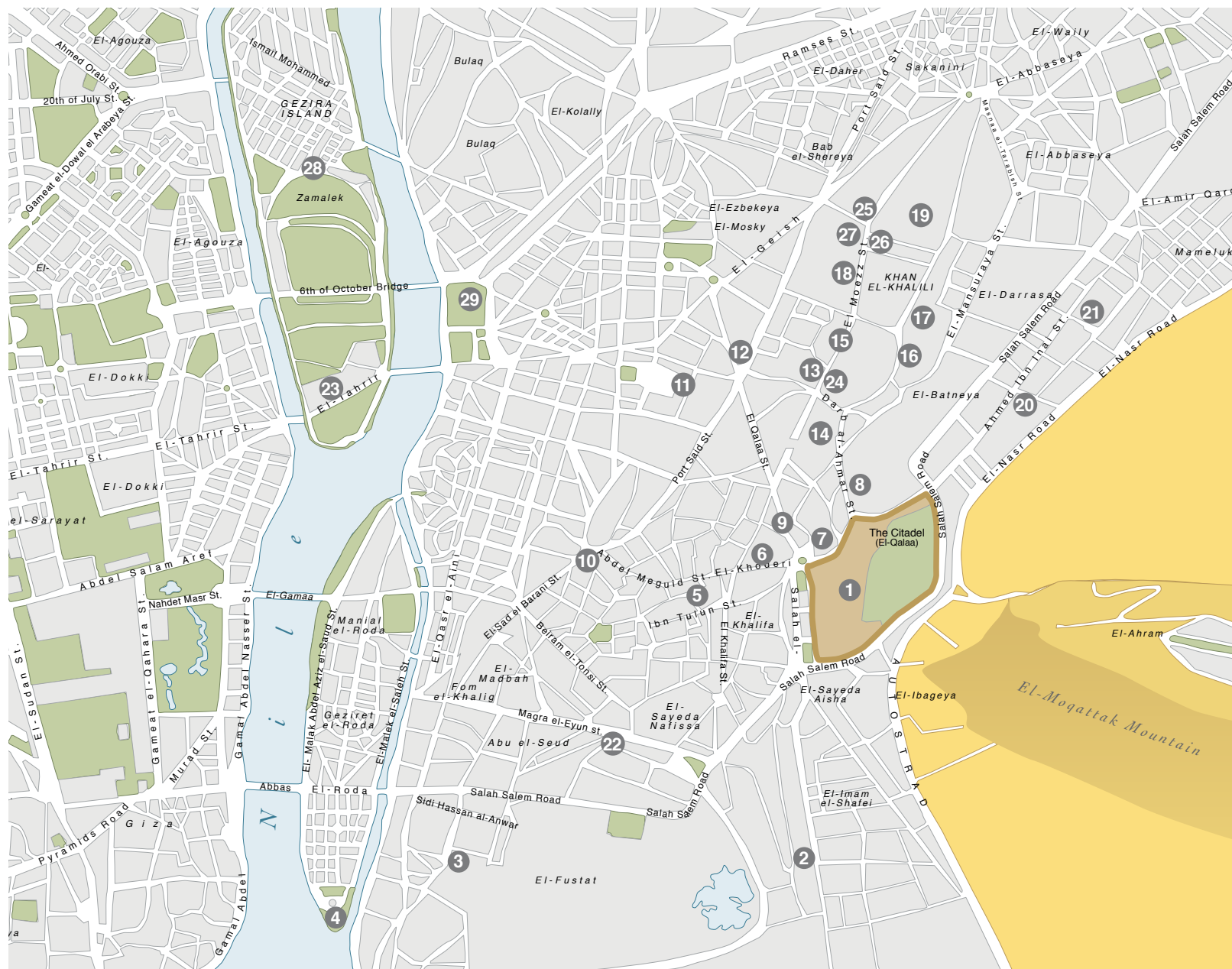
St Mena Monastery

The Coptic monastery of St Mena is located approximately 50 km southwest of Alexandria in the small town of Abu-Mina. It honours the Egyptian born Roman Legionnaire, St Mena, who is believed to have been martyred in the early 4th century when the Roman Empire was persecuting Christians.

A modern monastery has been built of marble and Aswan granite on the site of an ancient church, where the Saint's remains are believed to be buried.

Cairo

1. Citadel of Cairo
2. Mausoleum of Imam el Shafei
3. Mosque of Amr Ibn el-As
4. Nilometer
5. Mosque of Ibn Tulun
6. Madrasa of Sultan Hassan
7. Madrasa of Qanybay Amir Akhur
8. Mosque of Aqsunsur (Blue Mosque)
9. Mosque of El-Rifai
10. Mosque of Sayeda Zeinab
11. Abdin Palace (Qasr el-Gumhureya)
12. Museum of Islamic Art
13. Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Sheikh Mosque
14. Mosque of El-Maridani
15. Al-Ghuri Complex
16. Mosque of el-Azhar
17. Mosque of Sayedna el-Husseyin
18. Al-Qalawun Complex
19. Wakala of Qaitbey
20. Mosque of Sultan Qaytbay
21. Khanqah of Sultan Farag Ibn Barquq
22. El-Ghuri Aqueduct
23. Opera House
24. Bab Zuweila
25. Bab el-Futuh
26. Al-Aqmar Mosque
27. Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar Mosque
28. Museum of Islamic Ceramics
29. Egyptian Museum



Cairo today is the fruit of the juxtaposition of different towns, settlements and villages that have succeeded one another or merged over the course of many centuries. Any search for the original roots of Cairo takes us outside the city to the south along the West bank, initially following an old irrigation channel. About 15 km further on, the paradise-like landscape of the Nile Valley takes over. It is flat, intensely green and dotted with date palms and adobe houses. In the midst of these high grasses lies the colossal statue of Ramses, practically the only relic remaining in situ of **Memphis**, the first capital of the Pharaohs founded by Narmer in the year 3100 BC, which flourished for six centuries. This splendour can still be appreciated today at nearby Saqqara, where the stepped pyramids of the necropolis stand alone in a desert plateau far away from the hustle and bustle of tourism.

Matariyya, a Delta village gobbled up by the city is the site of the ancient city of **Heliopolis**, dedicated to the Sun King Ra or Oun when Memphis went into decline around 2500 BC. Of this city governed by priests, the first great centre of scientific teaching in history, all that remains amidst ugly bare-brick buildings is an obelisk erected by Sesostris I.

Pyramids of Dhahshur,
located around 40 km
south Cairo



Cairo. Engraving
contained in
*Civitates Orbis
Terrarum*. 16th
century

The Fortress of Babylon (not to be confused with its namesake in Mesopotamia) was founded on a promontory overlooking the Nile and an ancient canal that connected it with the Red Sea at the end of the dynastic period. It was later reconstructed by the Romans as a strategic stronghold from which they could control their Egyptian grain store. Of this fortress and of the city that surrounded it, various towers and sections of wall survive. Today it is the neighbourhood and sanctuary of the Copts.

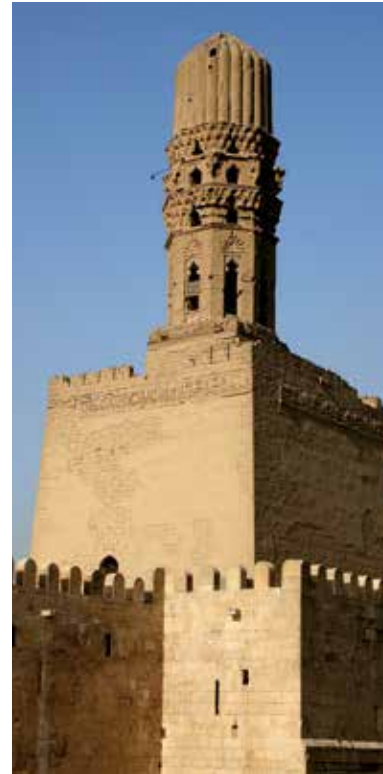
In the year 641 AD general Amr Ibn al-As founded a camp-city, which he called **Fustat**, another ancestor of Cairo, which became an important trading port on the Nile. This marks the beginning of Cairo's Islamic history. From this the Umayyad period, we have the Amr Mosque, the oldest in Africa, whose current appearance bears no relation to the original, due to substantial restoration and reconstruction work over the centuries. The only remains of the original settlement are hidden in the adjacent highly overpopulated district of Istabl 'Antar, where excavations have uncovered the

foundations of houses, passageways and the remains of sophisticated storage and drainage systems, the only survivors of the Fustat of the Umayyads.

Slightly further north, their successors, the Abbasids, founded the city of **al-Askar**. The Nilometer, the oldest Islamic monument in Cairo situated at the southern tip of Rawda Island dates from this period. Under its beautiful conical dome, they calculated the water level in the river during the flood season.

Another dynasty, the Tulunids, rebelled against the Abbasids and proclaimed their independence in 872 AD, founding a new palace city slightly to the north of al-Askar, which they called **al-Qata'i**, with extravagant palaces with harems, gardens, a hippodrome, menagerie... All of this was razed to the ground when the Abbasids reconquered the area three decades later. From this period we have the Ibn Tulun Mosque, a masterpiece of Islamic art, an inscrutable fortress of red brick and stucco, a temple of serenity watched over by the spiral shaped minaret inspired by those at Samarra in Iraq.

Nilometer



Minaret in the mosque of al-Hakim and courtyard of the mosque of Ibn Tulun



To the east is the tall hill on which the **al-Qal'aa** or Citadel shimmers in the sun. This fortress founded in 1176 AD by Saladin was the residence of the Mameluke Sultans and of the Ottoman Viceroy. The Mosque of Muhammad Ali (19th-century), whose domes and arrow-like minarets dominate the Cairo skyline, was built on an esplanade with fantastic views.

The majestic gate of Bab Zuweila takes us into another historic settlement: **al-Qahira**, the victorious, whose name was extended to the whole city. **Al-Qahira** was created by the Fatimids, a Shi'ite dynasty who governed for two centuries (969-1171). Initially it was a large, exclusive Palace complex which was later turned into a huge retail centre by the popular Saladin. The ancient Qasaba Street which crosses it from South to North is a succession of souks.

At the end of the 19th century, a new colonial city was built towards the East on swampy land near the River Nile to house the great hotels, the Opera house where Aida was first performed, cafes, synagogues, churches, palaces and elegant buildings in Italian-style, modernist and art nouveau architecture.



Cairo's description by al-Muqaddasi (c. 1000)

“Al-Fustat is a metropolis in every sense of the word; here together are all the departments of government administration, and it is also the seat of the Commander of the Faithful. It sets apart the Occident from the domain of the Arabs, is of wide extent and its inhabitants many. The region around is well cultivated. Its name is renowned, its glory increased; for truly it is the capital of Egypt. It has superseded Baghdad, and is the glory of Islam, and is the market place for all mankind. It is more sublime than the City of Peace [Baghdad]. It is the storehouse of the Occident, the entrepot of the Orient, and is crowded with people at the time of the Pilgrimage festival. Among the capitals there is none more populous than it, and it abounds in noble and learned men. Its goods of commerce and specialities are remarkable, its markets excellent as is its mode of life. Its baths are the peak of perfection, its bazaars splendid and handsome. Nowhere in the realm of Islam is there a mosque more crowded than here, nor people more handsomely adorned, no shore with greater number of boats.”

Bab al-Futuh, one of the gates built during the Fatimid period, 11th century

Necropolis of Saqqara. The area from Giza to Dahshur has been designated as a World Heritage Site by Unesco in 1979.



Visits

Cairo has a total of 650 Islamic monuments, many of them of the very first order. The metropolis with the highest population in the Arabic world, and indeed in Africa, has an opulent wealth of Islamic art and architecture, left behind by the successive dynasties that embellished it.

Mosque-
University of
al-Azhar





Madrasa of
al-Barquq

All that remains of ancient Fustat from the Umayyad period is the Amr Mosque, the first on African soil. As regards the Tulunids and their settlement *al-Qata'i*, we still have the **Ibn Tulun Mosque** in marvellous condition. From the time of the Abbasids, we have the Nilometer, used for measuring the water level during flooding of the Nile and the Fatimids must be thanked for the foundation of *Al-Qahira*, its illustrious Mosque-University of **al-Azhar** and the al-Hakim Mosque. The city reached the height of its splendour during the Mameluke period (1250-1516), when its skyline bristled with the minarets of majestic mosques and madrasahs (Sultan Hassan, al-Ghuri....) and with the domes of magnificent mausoleums (Qalawun, Qaitbay....). Under Ottoman domination (16th to 19th centuries) Cairo was also regaled with numerous new

features such as the exquisite Palaces and Gardens (Bayt al-Suhaimi) and the *sabil-kuttab* (drinking fountain/elementary school). The imposing Mosque of Muhammad Ali, perched on the summit of the Citadel, symbolized the power of this Governor, the creator of the modern Egyptian state. In total, Islamic monuments of Cairo reproduce the grandeur of the pyramids of Giza, situated just a few kilometres away on the other side of the Nile.

Bab Zuweila

One of the three surviving ancient gates of Cairo, Bab Zuweila is a stunning example of Fatimid architecture and marks the southernmost end of the old Fatimid city.

The gate has two beautifully adorned minarets belonging to the nearby al-Mu'ayyad Mosque, which are open to visitors. If you climb the steep steps, you will be rewarded with one of the best views of Old Cairo. The gate also shares a wall with the mosque and is a must-see sight in Islamic Cairo.

Bab Zuweila



Mosque
of Amr

Mosque of Amr

Built in 642 AD out of palm trunks and fronds, it was the first mosque erected in Egypt and indeed in Africa. The Muslim General Amr Ibn al-‘As decided to build the mosque on the place where he had pitched his tent during his conquest of the area.

The capital of Islamic Egypt al-Fustat developed around this initial site. Approximately 200 of the columns used in the mosque were recycled from older sites, and the broad, quiet spaces offer a peaceful sanctuary from the bustle of Cairo.

The mosque of Amr Ibn al-‘As is part of what is commonly known today as the “Multi-Religious Compound”, an area of Cairo that is home to ancient places of worship from the three monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

Mosque
of Amr

Al-Aqmar Mosque

Al-Aqmar mosque makes up for its size with its architectural and historical significance. Located near the al-Qalawun Complex, al-Aqmar is one of the only remaining Fatimid mosques in Cairo. It was the first mosque in Cairo to have a decorated façade, and the first to follow the line of the street. Visitors should take in the intricate, delicately carved motifs on the walls, façade and minaret of this truly beautiful mosque built in 1125 AD.

Al-Aqmar
Mosque

Nilometer

Located on the lower end of Rhoda Island, the Nilometer was used to measure the level of the river in times past. The structure consists of a measuring device, a graduated column sitting below the water level, reached by steps that wind around the chamber housing the column. If the water dropped below a certain level, Cairenes could expect drought and famine; if it rose too high they could face flood and disasters. The Nilometer is no longer in operation today but is definitely worth a visit.

Built in 861 AD by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil, it is crowned by an interesting pointed dome that was reconstructed after being destroyed by the French.

Nilometer



Nilometer

Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar Mosque

Named after its founder, Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar, one of Mohamed Ali's lieutenants, this beautiful mosque on Al-Mo'ez Street dates back to 1839. It is renowned for its "pencil-like" minaret: a tall, thin structure built in Ottoman style. What makes this mosque appear so elegant is its mixture of Ottoman, Cairene and other unexpected architectural styles; you might even spot some Baroque features on the pillars.

You should also look out for the refined window grilles featuring arabesque patterns. The Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar Mosque also includes a beautiful round *sabil* (water fountain).



Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Sheikh Mosque

Located near Bab Zuweila in Cairo, this is a mosque with an interesting story. The founder, a Mameluke sultan, was imprisoned on this site and endured great suffering. He vowed that if he ever came to power he would transform the prison into a school and mosque where scholars could come to study.

After regaining his freedom, he did just that, turning the prison into one of the most beautiful and expensive mosques and madrasas to be built in Cairo. Marble in a wide array of colours was brought from different locations to adorn the walls, ceiling and floors in awesomely beautiful designs. It was built between 1415 and 1421 AD.

The Mosque's twin minarets rise up above Bab Zuweila to dominate the area. The Sultan and his family are buried here in impressive mausoleums.



Sultan al-Mu'ayyad
Sheikh Mosque



Arrival of Ibn Battuta to Cairo. Year 1326

“I arrived at length at Cairo, mother of cities and seat of Pharaoh the tyrant, mistress of broad regions and fruitful lands, boundless in multitude of buildings, peerless in beauty and splendour, the meeting-place of comer and goer, the halting-place of feeble and mighty, whose throngs surge as the waves of the sea, and can scarce be contained in her for all her size and capacity. [...] On the bank of the Nile opposite Old Cairo is the place known as *The Garden* [now the Island of Roda], which is a pleasure park and promenade, containing many beautiful gardens, for the people of Cairo are given to pleasure and amusements.”

The *Maristan* (hospital), according to Ibn Battuta (14th century)

“As for the Maristan [hospital], which lies ‘between the two castles’ near the mausoleum of Sulta Qala’un, no description is adequate to its beauties. It contains an innumerable quantity of appliances and medicaments, and its daily revenue is put as high as a thousand dinars.”



1

Museum of Islamic Art

The Museum of Islamic Arts in Cairo is considered one of the greatest of its kind, with exceptional collections and a main façade adorned with decorations and recesses inspired by Islamic architecture. It has pieces from all the different periods starting with the Umayyad dynasty. It re-opened in 2010 after eight years of renovation and reorganization of the collection, which has been acquired over the years from various sources: excavations, purchases, gifts and important Islamic monuments in Cairo. It owns an impressive selection of ceramics, textiles, metalwork, carved wood and stone artefacts that illustrate the material culture of Egypt from the 7th to the 19th centuries. The exhibition begins with the Umayyads and continues with the Abbasid/Tulunid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mameluke and Ottoman periods. The second half of the tour includes artefacts from Ottoman Turkey, Persia and al-Andalus, as well as various themed sections.



2



3



4

1. Koran box. Circa 1330. Museum of Islamic Art

2. Bowl with central star, 14th century. Museum of Islamic Art

3. Key. Year 1363-4. Museum of Islamic Art

4. Plaque in the shape of a mihrab. Museum of Islamic Art

Museum of Islamic Ceramics

The Museum of Islamic Ceramics was inaugurated in February 1999. It occupies the ground and first floors of Prince Amr Ibrahim's palace in the National Centre for Arts in the Zamalek district. The palace was built in the first quarter of the 20th century and is known for its impressive Islamic architecture and decoration. The museum houses a rare collection of ceramics obtained from different Islamic countries from East to West, from Iran to Morocco. The collection comprises over three hundred artefacts dating from the 10th to the 19th centuries. In addition to ceramics, the collection also has exhibits of calligraphy, textiles, glassware and tapestries that date back to various Islamic eras.

The Museum consists of 23 rooms surrounding the main hall, which is covered with a beautiful dome adorned with colourful glasswork. The rooms encircle a splendid 19th century fountain. The most important room in the museum is the rectangular Fatimid hall, which has 74 exhibits. The walls in this room are decorated with Turkish ceramics in blue, white, and red, while the ceiling is covered with plant motifs and the motto of the Fatimids, "No conqueror but Allah," is repeatedly inscribed on the walls. Another important hall is the Turkish hall, which has 96 pieces. The two big windows in the hall have Arabesque designs. An equally important hall is the Egyptian hall, which has 39 pieces from the Umayyad, Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke eras and also exhibits pieces from Syria. The ceiling is decorated with geometrical motifs. The collection on the upper floor includes Iranian ceramics, two pieces from al-Andalus, two pieces from Tunisia and two bowls from Iraq. The museum also houses interesting collections of gorgeous colourful plates, tiles and 11th century hand grenades from various Islamic countries.



The Egyptian Museum

The Egyptian Museum

The Egyptian Museum in Cairo contains the world's most extensive collection of pharaonic antiquities. The original collection was established in the late 19th century by Auguste Mariette in the Bulaq District. In 1891 the pieces were moved to the palace of Ismail Pasha in Giza before being transferred in 1902 to the current building at Tahrir Square, the first purpose-built museum edifice in the world.

Designed in the Neoclassical style by Marcel Dourgnon, the Egyptian Museum boasts 107 halls filled with artefacts dating from the prehistoric through to the Roman periods, with the majority of the collection focused on the pharaonic era. The museum has two main floors housing approximately 160,000 objects covering 5,000 years of Egypt's past. The ground floor takes the visitor on a chronological tour through the collections, while the objects on the upper floor are grouped according to tomb or category; exhibits here include the treasures of Tutankhamun, wooden models illustrating daily life, statuettes of divinities, and a rare group of Faiyum Portraits. Many of the royal mummies from the New Kingdom are also on display on the second floor.



Mohamed Ali Mosque



Old picture of the Citadel and the tombs of the Mamelukes

Citadel and Mohamed Ali Mosque

Citadel of Cairo / Qalaat Salah el-Din

The Citadel of Cairo was built in 1176 AD by Salah el-Din (Saladin). It is one of the world's greatest monuments to medieval warfare. Resembling a typical early medieval fortress, with large imposing gateways, towers and high defensive walls, the Citadel is one of Cairo's main attractions and probably its most popular non-pharaonic monument. The prominent fortress houses three mosques (including the impressive Mohamed Ali Mosque), a carriage museum, a military museum and a garden museum. The Citadel is also home to the impressive Gawhara Palace (the Jewel Palace), named after Gawhara Hanem, Mohamed Ali's last wife. Built in 1814, it was his personal residence and administration headquarters. Beautiful gold inscriptions adorn the walls of this majestic Ottoman-influenced palace. One of its most eccentric components is the Watch Hall, where watch-shaped motifs adorn the walls.



Medieval Cairo (Islamic District)

Those visiting Cairo's Islamic District (al-Mu'izz al-Din Street, al-Azhar Street, Darb al-Ahmar Street, al-Saliba Street and Salah al-Din Square) will discover Egypt as it once was during the golden age of Islamic architecture. These medieval streets have been restored and are considered open museums that are wonderful to visit at night.



Al-Ghuri Complex

Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri was a Mameluke sultan who reigned from 1501 to 1516, when he died at the battle of Marj Dabiq near Aleppo. At the battle the Mamelukes were routed by the Ottomans, so bringing their dynasty to its knees. Al-Ghuri spent a fortune building his complex in Cairo, which dates back to 1503. Although he was renowned for his cruelty and



Madrasa of al-Ghuri



Decorative detail in the Madrasa of al-Ghuri



despotism, he was also known for his love of flowers, music, poetry and architecture. His cultural refinement is manifested in the different features of the complex.

The complex stands on both sides of the famous al-Mu'izz Street; the mosque and *madrasa* are on the western side, and the *khanqah* (building where teachers (*sheikh*) can gather with their disciples), mausoleum and *Sabil-Kuttab* are on the eastern side. The *Sabil-Kuttab* had two functions as a public drinking fountain (*sabil*), traditionally built by wealthy people to provide drinking water for the residents of a town, and as a school (*kuttab*) on the first floor. The mausoleum is not the final resting place of the Sultan, whose body was never recovered from the battlefield.

The two parts of the complex are out of line with the street, thus creating an irregular shaped courtyard between the two buildings. The mosque's minaret has four storeys, just like the original minaret of the Aqsunqur mosque (the Blue Mosque). These are the only two known minarets in Cairo that have four storeys instead of the usual three. Since 1995, the complex hosts cultural events in the Khanqah hall, such as Nubian music concerts, Tannoura dance performances and religious recitals.



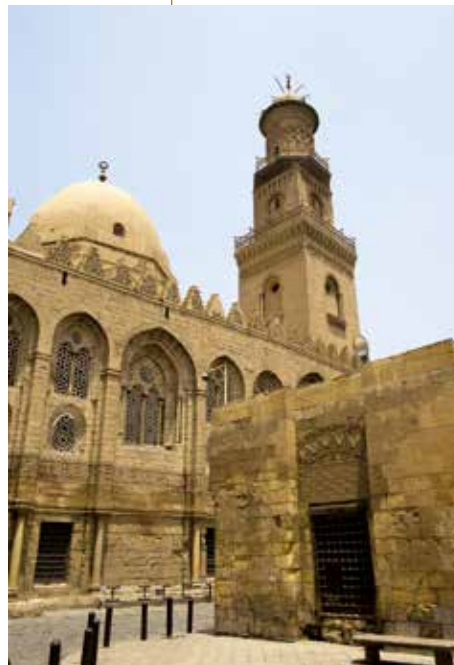
Al-Qalawun complex

Al-Qalawun Complex

Also located on al-Mu'izz Street, the Qalawun complex was built by the Mameluke Sultan al-Nassir in 1304 in honour of his father Qalawun.

The complex houses a mosque, a *madrasa* (school), a *bimaristan* (hospital) and a mausoleum where Sultan Qalawun is buried. It is often described as the second most beautiful mausoleum in the world, behind the Taj Mahal...

Al-Qalawun complex



Mimbar of the Madrasa Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay

Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay Funerary Complex

Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay (1422-1438) completed this religious complex around the year 1425. It is located to the North of Khan el Khalili and the Sultan's other complex in Souq El Nahassin (Market of the Coppersmiths). It included a *madrasa* (school) where students of Islam could study. Ten of these students lived in rooms in the complex.

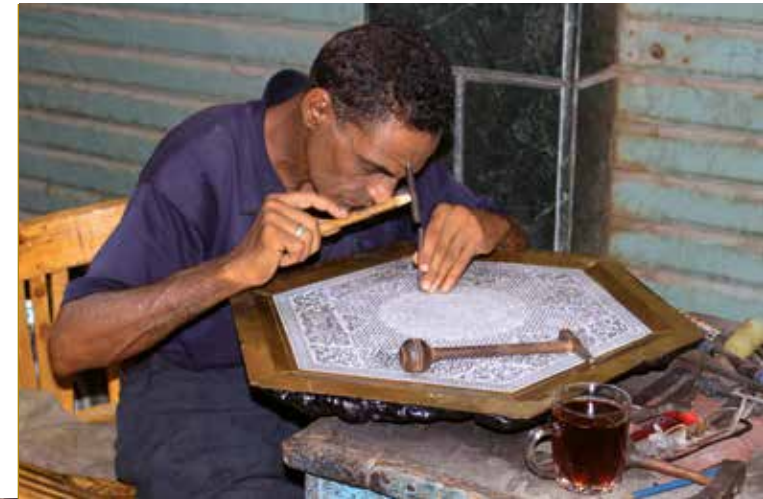
Some of the elements of the complex, such as the prayer hall, are unusual for this period. Notice the pairs of columns and the three arches forming three aisles in the prayer hall, lit up from windows on both the Eastern and Western façade. The sanctuary is also unusual in that although the walls are bare, it has stucco work and stained glass in addition to very impressive coloured marble floors. High above the worshippers in the dome is a beautiful star pattern, below which is the *minbar* (pulpit) with elaborate geometrical decorations in ivory, considered the most beautiful Mameluke *minbar* in Cairo. The Sultan is buried in the mausoleum attached to the prayer hall.

Khan El Khalili Market

No visit to Cairo would be complete without a stop at the Khan El Khalili bazaar, where you will be transported back in time to the traditional Arab souk. Shop owners calling you to their stalls, the scent of spices, the hustle and bustle of trade, and the many beautiful objects that can be purchased, such as statuettes, spices, souvenirs, silver jewellery, t-shirts, *galabiyas*, belly dancing costumes and many other items typical of Egyptian culture and traditions.

Khan El-Khalili market

An artisan working in Khan el-Khalili market



Amir Sarghitmish Madrasa and Mausoleum

Famous for its beautiful lanterns, this small institution is located right next to the Mosque of Ibn Tulun on al-Saliba Street. It was built in 1356 AD and served as a *madrasa*, a mosque, an orphanage and finally a mausoleum, once Amir Sarghitmish had passed away.

Many of the teachers at this *madrasa* came from Persia, hence the use of Persian styles in the architecture and interior features. While on your visit, notice the exotic dome and the red and white coloured masonry on the minaret, as well as the way the mausoleum is oriented towards the street so that passers-by can bless the deceased.

Notes

