History

The history of Egypt is as rich as the land, as varied as the landscape, as lively as the character of its people. And it is as long as the Nile, longer than most in the world. While much of Europe was still wrapped in animal skins and wielding clubs, Egyptians enjoyed a sophisticated life, dedicated to maintaining order in the universe and to making the most of their one great commodity, the Nile.

THE NILE

The Nation's Gift

The Greek historian Herodotus observed that Egypt was the gift of the Nile and although it might now be a cliché, it also happens to be true. Ancient Egyptians called it simply *iteru,* the river. Without the Nile, Egypt as we know it would not exist.

The exact history is obscure, but many thousands of years ago the climate of North Africa changed dramatically. Patterns of rainfall also changed and Egypt, formerly a rich savannah, became increasingly dry. The social consequences were dramatic. People in this part of Africa lived as nomads, hunting, gathering and moving across the region with the seasons. But when their pastures turned to desert, there was only one place for them to go: the Nile.

Rainfall in east and central Africa ensured that the Nile in Egypt rose each summer; this happened some time towards the end of June in Aswan. The waters would reach their height around the Cairo area in September. In most years, this surge of water flooded the valley and left the countryside hidden. As the rains eased, the river level started to drop and water drained off the land, leaving behind a layer of rich silt washed down from the hills of Africa.

Egyptians learned that if they planted seed on this fertile land, they could grow a good crop. As more people settled along the valley, it became more important to make the best use of the annual floodwater, or there would not be enough food for the following year. A social order evolved to organise the workforce to make the most of this 'gift', an order that had farmers at the bottom, bureaucrats and governors in the middle and, at the top of this pyramid, the pharaoh.

Egyptian legend credited all this social development to the good king Osiris, who, so the story went, taught Egyptians how to farm, how to make best use of the Nile and how to live a good, civil life. The myth harks back to an idealised past, but also ties in with what we know of the emergence of kingship: one of the earliest attributions of kingship, the pre-dynastic Scorpion Macehead, found in Hierakonpolis around 3000 BC, shows an

The Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt by William J Murnane is one of the best overall books on the lifestyle and monuments of the Pharaonic period, with illustrations and descriptions of the major temples and tombs.

Egyptians called the vast areas of barren desert *deshret* (red land) and the narrow banks of the Nile *kemet* (black land).

TIMELINE

c 250,000 BC

Earliest human traces in Egypt. The valley is surrounded by savannah that provides ample food for groups of hunter-gatherers until climate change turns lush countryside to desert and forces settlement along the fertile Nile.

c 3100 BC

Legend credits a pharaoh named Narmer with uniting the people between the Mediterranean and the first Cataract at Aswan. Memphis emerges as the first capital of a united Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt.

2650–2323 BC

This period of great pyramid building at Giza and Saqqara suggests that for at least part of each year, presumably when the Nile flooded, a substantial workforce was available for civic projects.

irrigation ritual. Which suggests that even right back in early times, making use of the river's gift was a key part of the role of the leader.

Source Stories

The rise of the Nile was a matter of continual wonder for ancient Egyptians, as it was right up to the 19th century, when European explorers settled the question of the source. There is no evidence that ancient Egyptians knew where this lifeline came from. In the absence of facts, they made up stories.

One of the least convincing of all Egyptian myths concerning the rise of the Nile places the river's source in Aswan, beneath the First Cataract. From here, the story went, the river flowed north to the Mediterranean and south into Africa.

The river's life-giving force was revered as a god, Hapy. He is an unusual deity in that, contrary to the usual slim outline of most gods, Hapy is usually portrayed as a pot-bellied man with hanging breasts and a headdress of papyrus. Hapy was celebrated at a feast each year when the Nile rose. In later images, he is often shown tying papyrus and lotus plants together, a reminder that the Nile bound people together.

But the most enduring and endearing of all Egyptian myths concerning the river is devoted to the figure of Isis, the mourning wife. Wherever the river originated, the annual rising of the Nile was explained as being tears shed by the mother goddess at the loss of the good king Osiris.

Matters of Fact

Wherever it came from, the Nile was the beginning and end for most Egyptians. They were born beside it and had their first post-natal bath in its waters. It sustained them throughout their lives, made possible the vegetables in the fields, the chickens, cows, ducks and fish on their plates, and filled their drinking vessels when they were thirsty. When it was very hot or at the end of a day's work, it was the Nile that provided relief, a place to bathe. Later, when they died, if they had the funds, their body would be taken along the river to the cult centre at Abydos. And it was water from the Nile that the embalmers used when they prepared the body for burial. But burial was a moment of total separation from this life-source for, if you were lucky, you were buried away from the damp, where the dry sands and rocks of the desert would preserve your remains throughout eternity.

The clothing identified among the treasures of Tutankhamun's tomb ranges from gold-encrusted tunics to neatly folded underwear, several pairs of socks and 47 pairs of flip-flop type sandals.

But not everything about the river was generous for it also brought dangers in many forms: the crocodile, the sudden flood that washed away helpless children and brought the house down on your head, the diseases that thrived in water, and the creatures (among them the mosquito) that carried them. The river also brought the taxman, for it was on the level of flood that the level of tax was set. The formula was simple. Bureaucrats watched the rise of the river on Elephantine Island, where a gauge had been cut along the side

2125–1650 BC

Thebes emerges as capital of Upper Egypt and as the pre-eminent seat of religious power. When the Theban ruler Mentuhotep II defeats his northern rival and establishes the Middle Kingdom, Thebes becomes its capital.

1650–1550 BC

The Hyskos – western Asian tribes settled in northern Egypt – establish control over the Egyptian Nile Valley, ushering in the Second Intermediate Period, a time of great technological and social innovation.

1550–1186 BC

Ahmose, prince of Thebes, defeats the Hyksos c 1532 BC and begins a period of expansion into Nubia and Palestine. Over the next two centuries, Tuthmosis III and his New Kingdom successors expand the empire.

of the rock. Each year's flood was recorded at its height. If the water rose to the level of 14 cubits, there would be enough food to go around. If it rose to 16, there would be an abundance – and abundance meant good taxation. And if there were, say, only eight cubits, then it was time to prepare for the worst because famine would come and many would follow Osiris to the land of spirits beyond the valley.

The river also dictated the rhythm of life and everything started with the beginning of the inundation: New Year fell as the water's rose. This was a time of celebration and also, for some, of relaxation for as the land was covered with water and one needed a boat to travel from one village to the next, farmers found time to catch up on long-neglected chores, fixing tools and working on their houses. This was also the period of the corveé, the labour system by which it is thought many civic projects were built, among them the pyramids, the canal cut through from the Nile to the Red Sea and, in the 19th century, the Suez Canal.

Ramses: The Son of Light by Christian Jacq is the first of a five-volume popular hagiography of the famous pharaoh. The prose is simplistic, but Jacq is an Egyptologist so the basics are accurate.

Old Habits

Even when the old gods were long dead, and roads and railways ran alongside the river, the Nile exerted its magic and its power. In the 18th and 19th centuries it was the way in which foreigners uncovered the mysteries of the past, sailing upriver when the winds blew from the north, and finding themselves face to face with unimaginable splendour. Even then, Egyptians clung to their habits and their dependence on the river. In the 1830s, the British Orientalist Edward Lane recorded that 17 June was still called the Night of the Drop. 'It is believed,' he wrote, 'that a miraculous drop then falls into the Nile; and causes it to rise.' Lane also recorded the custom of creating a figure of a girl, the 'Bride of the Nile', out of mud, which was then washed away as the river rose, an echo of an ancient ceremony in which effigies – and perhaps also young women – were sacrificed to the rising river.

The Complete Pyramids: Solving the Ancient Mysteries by Mark Lehner and Richard H Wilkinson is a readable reference to the famous threesome of Giza and the other 70-plus triangular-sided funerary monuments besides.

Exactly 100 years later, in 1934, the Egyptologist Margaret Murray spent a mid-September night in a Coptic village, celebrating the night of the high Nile, giving thanks 'to the Ruler of the river, no longer Osiris, but Christ; and as of old they pray for a blessing upon their children and their homes.'

This kind of spiritual bond with the river was broken when dams and barrages stopped the annual flood. But Egyptians, whether they live along the river or in one of the new satellite cities in the desert, remain as dependent as ever. Now, instead of praying to the 'Ruler of the river', they put their faith in engineers, who, like kings of old, help them make the most of the water, and in politicians who are currently renegotiating water-sharing agreements with Nile-basin neighbours. But wherever they pin their hopes, they know that as ever their happiness, their very existence, depends on water flowing past Aswan on its way to the Mediterranean.

Cleopatra (1963) is the best known of several screen adaptations of the Ptolemaic queen's life, and best remembered for the on-set affair between Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

1352–1336 BC

Akhenaten establishes a new monotheism and a short-lived capital at Akhetaten. But by the death of his heir, Tutankhamun, in 1327, Thebes is again the capital and power is restored to the priests of Amun.

1294–1279 BC

Seti I restores some of the empire and also initiates a period of neo-conservatism: his temple at Abydos copies styles of the Old Kingdom. He then constructs the finest tomb in the Valley of the Kings.

1279–1213 BC

Seti's son, Ramses II, constructs more buildings than any other pharaoh. He makes Avaris, the old Hyksos capital and his home town, the centre of Egyptian trade, but adds to the glory of Thebes.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE PHARAOHS

This is not a complete listing but it does include the most significant rulers mentioned throughout this book. See also p47 for a Pharaonic Who's Who.

EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD

1st Dynasty	**3100–2890 BC**
including:	
Narmer (Menes)	c 3100 BC
2nd Dynasty	**2890–2686 BC**

OLD KINGDOM

3rd Dynasty	**2686–2613 BC**
including:	
Zoser	2667–2648 BC
Sekhemket	2648–2640 BC
4th Dynasty	**2613–2494 BC**
including:	
Sneferu	2613–2589 BC
Khufu (Cheops)	2589–2566 BC
Djedefra	2566–2558 BC
Khafre (Chephren)	2558–2532 BC
Menkaure (Mycerinus)	2532–2503 BC
Shepseskaf	2503–2498 BC
5th Dynasty	**2494–2345 BC**
including:	
Userkaf	2494–2487 BC
Sahure	2487–2475 BC
Neferirkare	2475–2455 BC
Shepseskare	2455–2448 BC
Raneferef	2448–2445 BC
Nyuserra	2445–2421 BC
Unas	2375–2345 BC
6th Dynasty	**2345–2181 BC**
including:	
Teti	2345–2323 BC
Pepi I	2321–2287 BC
Pepi II	2278–2184 BC
7th–8th Dynasties	**2181–2125 BC**

FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

9th–10th Dynasties	**2160–2025 BC**

MIDDLE KINGDOM

11th Dynasty	**2055–1985 BC**
including:	
Montuhotep II	2055–2004 BC
Montuhotep III	2004–1992 BC

1184–1153 BC

Ramses III provides a stable moment in an unstable century, controlling the Libyans, defeating the 'Sea People', a mix of Mediterranean tribes, and suppressing internal dissent. After his death, power slips from the throne.

1070 BC

By the time of his death, Ramses XI has lost control of much of southern Egypt, the palace and many Theban tombs have been robbed, and central authority has disappeared. The New Kingdom grown old.

945–715 BC

Libyan settlers become increasingly powerful in the Delta, eventually taking power as the 22nd and 23rd dynasties, but the Egyptian Nile is divided among a series of princes.

12th Dynasty	**1985–1795 BC**
including:	
Amenemhat I	1985–1955 BC
Sesostris I	1965–1920 BC
Amenemhat II	1922–1878 BC
Sesostris II	1880–1874 BC
Sesostris III	1874–1855 BC
Amenemhat III	1855–1808 BC
Amenemhat IV	1808–1799 BC
13th–14th Dynasties	**1795–1650 BC**
SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	
15th–17th Dynasties	**1650–1550 BC**
NEW KINGDOM	
18th Dynasty	**1550–1290 BC**
including:	
Ahmose	1550–1525 BC
Amenhotep I	1525–1504 BC
Tuthmosis I	1504–1492 BC
Tuthmosis II	1492–1479 BC
Tuthmosis III	1479–1425 BC
Hatshepsut	1473–1458 BC
Amenhotep II	1427–1400 BC
Tuthmosis IV	1400–1390 BC
Amenhotep III	1390–1352 BC
Akhenaten	1352–1336 BC
Tutankhamun	1336–1327 BC
Horemheb	1323–1295 BC
19th Dynasty	**1295–1186 BC**
including:	
Ramses I	1295–1294 BC
Seti I	1294–1279 BC
Ramses II	1279–1213 BC
Seti II	1200–1194 BC
20th Dynasty	**1186–1069 BC**
including:	
Ramses III	1184–1153 BC
THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	
21st Dynasty	**1069–945 BC**
including:	
Psusennes I	1039–991 BC

663 BC

After a series of diplomatic and military confrontations, Ashurbanipal, King of the Assyrians, attacks Egypt, sacks Thebes and loots the Temple of Amun. Devastated Egypt is ruled by Libyan princes from Sais in the Delta.

610–595 BC

Late Period Pharaoh Necho encourages foreign trade by strengthening ties (and his navy) in the Mediterranean, cutting a canal to the Red Sea and sending an expedition to sail around Africa.

525 BC

The Persian king Cambyses makes Egypt part of his empire and rules as pharaoh, launching an attack against Nubia and then on Siwa, in which his army disappears into the desert.

CHRISTIAN EGYPT

Coptic tradition states that Christianity arrived in Egypt in AD 45 in the form of St Mark. The story goes that St Mark, originally from Cyrene in modern-day Libya, was in Alexandria when his sandal broke. He took it to a cobbler, Ananias, who hurt his hand while working on the sandal and shouted 'O One God', at which St Mark recognised his first convert to the new religion. While there is no way to prove the story, there is no denying the basic truth that Christianity arrived early in Egypt, direct from Palestine.

Coptic Egypt by Christian Cannuyer tells the story from the earliest preachings by Mark the Evangelist in 1st-century-AD Alexandria to 21st-century Christianity in Egypt.

The country had long been open to foreign religious influences and nowhere more so than Alexandria. At the height of their power, ancient Egyptians had exported their religions – Amun of Thebes was known and feared throughout the Mediterranean. And even in times of weakness, the cult of the goddess Isis spread throughout the Roman Empire. But Egyptians were also open to foreign religious ideas. The Persians did little to impose their gods on the country when they sacked Thebes in the 6th century BC and made Egypt part of their empire. Two centuries later, Alexander the Great viewed things differently, at least in the north of the country, for while he built shrines to Amun at Karnak and was happy to be welcomed as pharaoh by the priests at Memphis, he also encouraged Greeks and Jews to bring their gods to his new city. Alexandria under the Macedonian's successors, the Ptolemies, became a centre for multiculturalism, where people of many different beliefs and religions lived and worshipped side by side.

The past and present are described and ruminated over by the archaeologists leading the ongoing harbour explorations in *Alexandria Rediscovered* by Jean-Yves Empreur.

It wasn't always a happy coexistence. The city's history is scarred by fights between devotees of different religions, as St Mark discovered to his cost: he was executed for speaking out against the worship of the city's pagan god Serapis. And at times, decrees came from Rome that litigated against Christians, the worst coming from Emperor Diocletian. The persecution was so extreme and cost so many lives (some Coptic historians have estimated 144,000) that the Coptic Church calendar, the Era of Martyrs, begins with the year of Diocletian's accession, AD 284. But change was not far away.

In AD 293, Diocletian found himself sharing power with Constantine. In 312, just as Constantine went into battle against his opponents, he had a vision of a cross blazing in the sky, on which was written, *In this conquer*. When he emerged victorious, becoming ruler of the empire, Constantine converted to Christianity and, in 324, made Christianity the imperial religion.

By then, Egypt's Christians had absorbed much from both the form and the content of the ancient pagan religion. It is impossible to make direct parallels, but the rise of the cult of Mary appears to have been influenced by the popularity of Isis: both were said to have conceived through divine intervention. According to the late Coptic musicologist Dr Ragheb Moftah, the way in which the Coptic liturgy was performed seems to have evolved from ancient rites and in it, even today, we can hear an echo of ancient Egypt's rituals. Even the physical structure of Coptic churches echoes the layout of

518 BC

Cambyses' successor, Darius I, visits Egypt, completes the canal to the Red Sea and introduces the camel, which transforms the possibilities of desert travel and the experience of modern visitors to Egypt.

331 BC

Alexander invades Egypt and visits the capital, Memphis, and the oracle at Siwa. He then lays out a city, Alexandria, that will become the pivot of a new Hellenic culture in the Mediterranean.

323 BC

On Alexander's death in Babylon, his general Ptolemy is given control of Egypt. Alexander's body is buried in Alexandria, Ptolemy's new capital. Ptolemy builds the Museion and Library and perhaps also the Pharos.

earlier pagan temples in the use of three different sacred spaces, the innermost one containing the altar reserved for priests. This is hidden from the rest of the congregation by the iconostasis, with its images of saints, just as ancient priests were hidden behind walls decorated with gods and pharaohs.

The early need to hold hidden prayer, the desire to follow Jesus' example of retreat from the world, the increasing difficulty of reconciling spiritual values with the demands and temptations of urban life, and perhaps also the memory of pagan hermits, led some Christians to leave the Nile Valley and to seek a spiritual purity in the desert. The man credited with being the first is St Paul, born in Alexandria in AD 228, who is said to have fled to the Eastern Desert to escape persecution and died there in AD 343. Although there are 5th-century accounts of the man, there is still some controversy as to whether St Paul existed. There is no such problem with the man he is said to have inspired.

St Anthony was the son of wealthy landowners, but found himself orphaned at an early age. As an adult, he sold his inheritance, gave the proceeds to the poor and retreated to the desert near St Paul. Other Christians soon followed, inspired by his example and perhaps also to escape persecution. The hermit moved further up into the hills, hiding alone in a cave, while leaving his followers to a life of collective retreat – a first monastery – in the valley below. Although there may have been earlier religious communities in the desert, especially one in Palestine, Copts credit St Anthony with creating a new way of life that sought salvation through retreat. It was left to St Pachomius, born around AD 285, to order the life of these hermits into what we would now recognise as monasteries, which has proved to be one of the most important movements in Christianity.

The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt by I Shaw and P Nicholson gives an authoritative overview of ancient Egypt.

Egypt's Christians played a decisive role in the evolution of the young religion. In a series of meetings with Christians from across the empire, Copts argued over the nature of divinity, the duties of a Christian, the correct way to pray and many other aspects of religious life. In one matter in particular, Copts found themselves isolated. Many Christians argued that, as Jesus was born, there must have been a time when he was not divine and part of God. The Coptic clergy, particularly one Athanasius, argued that this idea of a dual nature was a throwback to polytheism. The crunch came in 325 at a council in Nicea, organised by the emperor, at which the Alexandrians triumphed: the Nicene Creed stated unequivocally that Father and Son are one. With this success, Alexandria confirmed its status as the centre of Mediterranean culture.

In 391, Emperor Theodosius issued an edict that banned people from visiting pagan temples, but also even looking at pagan statues. While the edict was ignored in some places, it was taken seriously in Alexandria, where the Temple of Serapis still stood in the city centre. The golden statue of the god remained in his sanctuary, adored by the faithful, until the Christian patriarch

c 310–250 BC

Under Ptolemaic patronage and with access to a library of 700,000 written works, scholars in Alexandria calculated the earth's circumference, discovered it circles the sun and wrote the definitive edition of Homer's work.

246–221 BC

Ptolemy III Euergetes I begins a building programme that includes the Serapeum in Alexandria and the Temple of Horus at Edfu. His successor continues his work, adding a new tomb to Alexander in Alexandria.

145–116 BC

Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II's reign is characterised by violence and brutality, but also by the opening of Edfu Temple and by building at Phiae and Kom Ombo.

of Alexandria stirred a crowd and led them in an attack on the temple: the god was toppled from his plinth – proving false the prophets who foresaw doom should he be damaged – and then dragged through the streets and burned. The crowd also set fire to the temple library, a store of some three or four hundred scrolls, which had been one of the largest collections in the world, since the Alexandrian 'mother library' had been burned during an attack by Julius Caesar. The patriarch then built a church over the ruins.

Constantine had moved his capital to the city of Byzantium, renamed Constantinople (now Istanbul), in 330 and from that moment power seeped from Alexandria. More than a century later, in 451, the Egyptians were officially sidelined at the Council of Chalcedon. Refusing to accept that Jesus had one person but two natures, which again seemed a revival of polytheism, the Egyptians split with the rest of Christianity, their patriarch was excommunicated and soon after Alexandria was sacked.

'Under their brilliant leader Amr ibn al-As, the Arabs swept through a badly defended and ill-prepared Egypt'

Yet in spite of the religious split, Egypt was still part of the Byzantine Empire, ruled by a foreign governor and its fortunes were tied to the empire. This caused ever-greater tension, which peaked in the reign of Emperor Justinian (528–565). Alexandrians stoned the emperor's governor, who retaliated by sending his army to punish the people. In 629, a messenger travelled to the emperor in Byzantium from Arabia. He had been sent by a man named Mohamed, to reveal a new religion, Islam. The messenger was murdered on the way. Ten years later, Arab armies invaded Egypt.

Under their brilliant leader Amr ibn al-As, the Arabs swept through a badly defended and ill-prepared Egypt, defeated the Byzantine army near Babylon (see p123) and found the gates of Alexandria opened to them without a fight.

Amr didn't force Egyptians to convert to the new religion, but did levy a tax on unbelievers and showed preference to those who did convert. Slowly, inevitably, the population turned, although how fast is open to dispute. Eventually, however, some monasteries emptied and Coptic writing and language, the last version of the language of the pharaohs, stopped being spoken in public. Christian communities remained strongest in the new capital, Cairo, and in the valley south as far as the ancient capital, Thebes (Luxor). Increasingly Christians also fell back on the monasteries. In places such as Wadi Natrun and studded along the Nile Valley, monastic communities hid behind their high walls, preserving the old language, the old traditions and, in their libraries, some of the old wisdom.

By the middle of the 19th century, even the monasteries were under threat and European travellers sailing up the Nile were shocked to discover monks swimming naked up to their boats to beg for food and money. The decline continued until the 20th century. By then, only around 10% of Egyptians were Christians and the great monasteries were at their lowest ebb. Ironically it has responded to threats by enjoying something of a revival. Modernising

30 BC

After Anthony and Cleopatra are defeated at Actium, the queen commits suicide, bringing an end to the Ptolemies and the start of Roman rule, with Egypt initially the personal property of the Octarian (the future Emperor Augustus Caesar).

AD 45

According to Coptic tradition, St Mark arrived in Alexandria this year and converted the first Egyptian, an Alexandria cobbler, to Christianity. The new religion was certainly established in Egypt by the end of the century.

c 271

St Anthony begins his retreat from the world, leaving home near Beni Suef and living in a cave in the Eastern Desert. He soon attracts others, whom he organises into a loose community and Christianity's first monks.

influences in the early 20th century sparked a cultural renewal that breathed new life into, among other things, the long-defunct tradition of icon painting. Islamist violence aimed at Copts in the 1980s and 1990s had the effect of significantly increasing the number of monks. At St Anthony's Monastery it rose from 24 in 1960 to 69 in 1986, in St Bishoi from 12 to 115. But the majority of Christians in Egypt still live in towns and cities along the Nile, still coping with continual threat from Muslim extremists, still cut off from the rest of the world's Christians and still, as ever, proud of their claim to be the true heirs of ancient Egypt.

Zayni Barakat by Gamal al-Ghitani is full of intrigue, back-stabbing and general Machiavellian goings-on in the twilight of Mamluk-era Cairo.

THE MAMLUKS

Every Egyptian army had its contingent of foreign soldiers, sometimes mercenaries, often slaves. When Psammetichus II sent an expedition into Nubia in 593 BC, a large contingent of Greek mercenaries went with them and left graffiti on the walls of Abu Simbel to tell us about it. In fact, no ruler of Egypt seems ever to have embarked on a large-scale campaign without foreign fighters. And often even the rulers were foreign – Macedonians like Ptolemy I (323–283 BC), Romans like Octavian (30 BC–AD 14) and even Kurds such as Salah ad-Din (1171–93), the Saladin of Crusader fame.

Saladin had created a dynasty, the Ayyubids, and reinstated Sunni Islam after the Shia rule of the Fatamids (969–1171). One of the last rulers of his dynasty, a man named Sultan As-Salih, brought the innovation of a permanent Turkic slave-soldier class. Most sultans relied on friends and relatives to provide a measure of security. As-Salih was so despised by all that he thought it wise to provide his own protection and did so by purchasing a large number of slaves from the land between the Urals and the Caspian. These men were freed on arrival in Egypt – their name, Mamluks, means 'owned' or 'slave' – and formed into a warrior class, which came to rule Egypt.

Many of the tales recounted each night by Sherezade in *The Thousand and One Nights* (Anonymous) are set in Mamluk-era Egypt, particularly in Cairo, referred to as 'mother of the world'.

Mamluks owed their allegiance not to a blood line but to their original owner, the emir. New purchases maintained the groups. There was no system of hereditary lineage; instead it was rule by the strongest. Rare was the sultan who died of old age. Natural born soldiers, Mamluks fought a series of successful campaigns that gave Egypt control of all of Palestine and Syria, the Hejaz and much of north Africa, the largest Islamic empire of the late Middle Ages. Because they were forbidden to bequeath their wealth, Mamluks built on a grand scale, endowing Cairo with the most exquisite mosques, schools and tombs. During their 267-year reign (1250–1517), the city was the intellectual and cultural centre of the Islamic world.

Favoured punishments employed by the Mamluks included *al-tawsit,* in which the victim was cut in half at the belly, and *al-khazuq* (impaling).

The contradictions in the Mamluk constitution are typified in the figure of Sultan Qaitbey, who was bought as a slave-boy by one sultan and witnessed the brief reigns of nine more before clawing his way to power. As sultan he rapaciously taxed all his subjects and dealt out vicious punishments with his own hands, once tearing out the eyes and tongue of a court chemist who had

391

Fifty years after the Byzantine Emperor Constantine spoke against the religion of the pharaohs, his successor Theodosius makes paganism a treasonable offence and Alexandria's Temple of Serapis burns, along with its library of 40,000 books.

451

At the Council of Chalcedon, Egyptian Christians refuse to accept the Imperial view that Jesus Christ had two natures, human and divine. The Coptic Church has been separated from the rest of Christianity ever since.

640

An Arab army under Amr ibn al-As sweeps through Egypt and establishes a base at Babylon (now part of Cairo). The following year, Amr captures the Byzantine capital, Alexandria.

failed to transform lead into gold. Yet Qaitbey marked his ruthless sultanship with some of Cairo's most beautiful monuments, notably his mosque, which stands in the Northern Cemetery (p139).

The funding for the Mamluks' great buildings came from trade. A canal existed that connected the Red Sea with the Nile at Cairo, and thus the Mediterranean, forming a vital link in the busy commercial route between Europe and India and the Orient. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the Mamluks worked with the Venetians to control east–west trade and both grew fabulously rich from it.

The end of these fabled days came about for two reasons at the beginning of the 16th century: Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope freed European merchants from the heavy taxes charged by Cairo; and the Ottoman Turks emerged as a mighty new force, looking to unify the Muslim world. In 1516 the Mamluks, under the command of their penultimate sultan Al-Ghouri, were obliged to meet the Turkish threat. The battle, which took place at Aleppo in Syria, resulted in complete defeat for the Mamluks. In January of the following year the Turkish sultan Selim I entered Cairo and although the Mamluks remained in power in Egypt, they never again enjoyed their former prominence or autonomy.

FOREIGN INVADERS

The story of ancient Egypt is the story of Egypt's relationships with its neighbours, for its wealth attracted some and its strategic location on the Mediterranean and Red Seas, and on the trade routes between Africa and Asia, attracted others. When it was strong, it controlled the gold of Nubia and the trade route across the Levant – not for nothing was the image of Ramses II crushing the Hittites at Kadesh splashed across so many temple walls. When it was weak, it caught the attention of the power of the moment. In 663, the Assyrian leader Ashurbanipal sacked Thebes. A century later the Persians were in control of the Nile. In 331 BC, Alexander the Great moved against the Egyptians and incorporated them into his Hellenic empire. In 30 BC, Octavian, the future Emperor Augustus Caesar, annexed the country as his own property. Arab armies stormed through in the 7th century AD just as Ottoman ones did in the 16th century. But by the end of the 18th century, the arrival of Europeans heralded the start of a very different age.

The sixth Fatimid caliph, El Hakim, was notorious for his unusual behaviour: convinced that a woman's place was in the home, he banned the manufacture of women's shoes.

Napoleon & Description de l'Egypte

When Napoleon and his musket-armed forces blew apart the scimitar-wielding Mamluk cavalry at the Battle of the Pyramids in 1798, which he claimed he was doing with the approval of the Ottoman sultan, he dragged Egypt into the age of geopolitics. For all his professions about wanting to revive Egypt's glory, free it from the yoke of tyranny and educate its masses, what he really cared about was striking a blow at Britain. Unable to invade Britain,

832

The Caliph al-Mamun, son of Haroun ar-Rashid, arrives to suppress a Coptic uprising, but also forces a way into the Pyramid of Cheops in the hope of finding treasure. None is recorded as being found.

868

A Turkish general Ahmed ibn Tulun arrives as a governor for the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, but ends up establishing his own Tulunid dynasty.

969

The Shiite general Jawhar lays the foundations for a new palace-city, Al-Qahira (Cairo), where a new university-mosque, al-Azhar, is founded in 971. Two years later the Fatimid caliph, al-Muizz, settles here from Tunis.

Napoleon found a way to strike at British interests by capturing Egypt and in the process taking control of the quickest route between Europe and Britain's fast-growing empire in the East.

But Napoleon had plans for the newly conquered country. He established a French-style government, revamped the tax system, brought in Africa's first printing press, implemented public works projects and introduced new crops and a new system of weights and measures. He also brought 167 scholars and artists, whom he commissioned to make a complete study of Egypt's monuments, crafts, arts, flora and fauna, and of its society and people. The resulting work was published as the 24-volume *Description de l'Egypte,* which did much to stimulate the study of Egyptian antiquities.

The Great Pyramid of Khufu (built in 2570 BC) remained the tallest artificial structure in the world until the building of the Eiffel Tower in 1889.

Napoleon's army was less successful than his scholars. A British fleet under Admiral Nelson had been criss crossing the Mediterranean trying to find the French force and on 1 August, just a week after Napoleon had ridden into Cairo, they found them at anchor in Aboukir Bay, off the coast of Alexandria. Only three French warships survived the ensuing Battle of the Nile. Encouraged by the British, the Ottoman sultan then sent an army that was trounced by the French, which put paid to any pretence that the French were in Egypt with the complicity of Constantinople. Relations between the occupied and occupier deteriorated rapidly and uprisings in the capital could only be quashed by shelling that left 3000 Egyptians dead.

When the British landed an army, also at Aboukir, in 1801, the French agreed to an armistice and departed the way they had come.

Ancient Egypt: the Great Discoveries by Nicholas Reeves is a chronology of 200 years of marvellous finds, from the Rosetta Stone (1799) to the Valley of the Golden Mummies (1999).

The Albanian Mercenary

The French and then British departure left Egypt politically unstable, a situation that was soon exploited by a lieutenant in an Albanian contingent of the Ottoman army, named Mohammed Ali. Within five years of the French evacuation, he had fought and conspired his way to become pasha (governor) of Egypt. Although he was nominally the vassal of Constantinople, like so many governors before him, he soon realised that the country could be his own.

The sultan in Constantinople was too weak to resist this challenge to his power. And once he had defeated a British force of 5000 men, the only threat to Mohammed Ali could come from the Mamluk beys (leaders). Any danger here was swiftly and viciously dealt with. On 1 March 1811, Mohammed Ali invited some 470 Mamluk beys to the Citadel to feast his son's imminent departure for Mecca. When the feasting was over the Mamluks mounted their lavishly decorated horses and were led in procession down the narrow, high-sided defile below what is now the Police Museum. But as they approached the Bab al-Azab, the great gates were swung closed and gunfire rained down from above. After the fusillades, Mohammed Ali's soldiers waded in with swords and axes to finish the

At the Battle of the Pyramids, Napoleon's forces took just 45 minutes to rout the Mamluk army, killing 1000 for the loss of just 29 of their own men.

1171

Saladin, the caliph's Kurdish vizier, seizes power, restores Sunni rule and establishes the Ayyubid dynasty. In 1176 he begins work on a citadel in Cairo, home to the city's rulers for the next seven centuries.

1250

Mamluk slave warriors, most of Turkish or Kurdish origin, seize control of Egypt. Although their rule was often harsh and anarchic, they graced the capital with some of its most impressive and beautiful monuments.

1468

The Mamluk Sultan Qayt Bey begins a 27-year reign which brings stability and wealth to the country. Qayt Bey is a prodigious builder, constructing a notable tomb complex in Cairo and a fort on the site of the Pharos in Alexandria.

job. Legend relates that only one Mamluk escaped alive, leaping over the wall on his horse.

Mohammed Ali's reign is pivotal in the history of Egypt. Having watched the old Mamluk army flounder against modern European weapons and tactics, he recognised the need to modernise his new army, as well as his new country. Under his uncompromising rule, Egypt abandoned its medieval-style feudalism and looked to Europe for innovation. In his long reign (he died in 1848), Mohammed Ali modernised the army, built a navy, built roads, cut a new canal linking Alexandria with the Nile, introduced public education, improved irrigation, built a barrage across the Nile and began planting Egypt's fields with the valuable cash crop, cotton. His heirs continued the work, implementing reforms and social projects, foremost of which were the building of Africa's first railway, opening factories and starting a telegraph and postal system. Egypt's fledgling cotton industry boomed as production in the USA was disrupted by civil war, and revenues were directed into ever-grander schemes. Grandest of all was the Suez Canal, which opened in 1869 to great fanfare and an audience that included European royalty, foremost being the Empress Eugenie of France. In the same year that the Khedive (Viceroy) Ismail announced that Egypt was now part of Europe, not Africa, Thomas Cook led the first organised package tour to see the wonders of ancient Egypt. It was the start of an industry that was to become one of Egypt's core businesses, mass tourism.

City of the Horizon, City of Dreams, City of the Dead by Anton Gill is a highly readable mystery trilogy set in the turmoil of post-Akhenaten Egypt.

Khedive Ismail had taken on more debt than even Egypt's booming economy could handle and European politicians and banks were quick to exploit his growing weakness. Six years after opening the canal, Ismail was forced to sell his controlling share to the British government and soon after that, bankruptcy and British pressure forced him to abdicate. This sort of foreign meddling in Egyptian affairs created great resentment, especially among a group of officers in the Egyptian army, who moved against the new khedive. In 1882, under the pretext of restoring order, the British fleet bombarded Alexandria, and British soldiers defeated a nationalist Egyptian army.

Famed as an American icon, the monument now known as the Statue of Liberty was originally intended to stand at the mouth of the Suez Canal.

The Veiled Protectorate

The British had no desire to make Egypt a colony: their main reason for involvement was to ensure the safety of the Suez Canal. So they allowed the heirs of Mohammed Ali to remain on the throne, while real power was concentrated in the hands of the British Agent, Sir Evelyn Baring. By appointing British 'advisors' to Egyptian ministries and himself advising the khedive, Baring operated what became known as the veiled protectorate, colonisation by another name.

The opera *Aida* was originally commissioned for the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal, but Verdi was late delivering and it was first performed on Christmas Eve, 1871, two years after the opening.

British desire to ensure the safety of their passage to India coloured Egyptian policy for the next few decades. For instance, it became increasingly obvious that controlling Egypt meant controlling the Nile and therefore an

1517

Turkish sultan Selim I takes Cairo, executes the last Mamluk sultan and makes Egypt a Turkish province. For almost 300 years, it will be ruled, however weakly, from Istanbul.

1798

Napoleon invades, bringing a group of scholars, who produce the first full description of Egypt's antiquities. The British force the French to leave, but their legacy, a fascination with ancient Egypt, lives on.

1805

An Albanian mercenary, Mohammed Ali, exploits the power vacuum left by the French to seize power and establish a new 'Egyptian' dynasty; he begins a modernisation programme that transforms the country.

Egyptian force was sent to protect that interest in Sudan. When they came up against the Islamist uprising of the Mahdi, and following the death of General Charles Gordon in Khartoum in 1885, British troops became involved on the middle Nile.

The protectorate did much to achieve its ends. The canal was secure, Egypt's finances were bolstered, the bureaucracy and infrastructure improved, and there were some social advances, but the fact remained that Egypt and its resources were being used to further British foreign policy. This situation became even more frustrating for Egyptians with the outbreak of WWI. When Turkey, still officially sovereign of Egypt, sided with Germany and against Britain, the British felt the need to make Egypt an official protectorate.

The best source for accurate plans of the Theban tombs can be found in Reeves and Wilkinson's 1996 book *The Complete Valley of the Kings,* supplemented by Siliotti's *Guide to the Valley of the Kings*.

The desire for self-determination was strengthened by the Allies' use of the country as a barracks during a war that most Egyptians regarded as having nothing to do with them. Popular national sentiments were articulated by riots in 1919 and, more eloquently, by the likes of Saad Zaghloul, the most brilliant of an emerging breed of young Egyptian politicians, who said of the British, 'I have no quarrel with them personally but I want to see an independent Egypt'. The British allowed the formation of a nationalist political party, called the Wafd (Delegation), and granted Egypt its sovereignty, but this was seen as an empty gesture. King Fuad enjoyed little popularity among his people and the British still kept a tight rein on the administration.

The British and their Allies came to Egypt in ever-greater numbers following the outbreak of WWII. The war wasn't all bad news for the Egyptians, certainly not for shopkeepers and businessmen who saw thousands of Allied soldiers pouring into the towns and cities with money to burn on 48-hour leave from the desert. But there was a vocal element who saw the Germans as potential liberators. Students held rallies in support of Rommel, and a small cabal of Egyptian officers, including future presidents Nasser and Sadat, plotted to aid the German general's advance on their city.

J Baines and J Malek's *Atlas of Ancient Egypt,* B Manley's *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Egypt* and BJ Kemp's *Anatomy of a Civilisation* are all great Egypt resources.

Rommel pushed the Allied forces back almost to Alexandria, which had the British hurriedly burning documents in such quantity that the skies over Cairo turned dark with the ash, but the Germans did not break through. Instead, British maintained a military and political presence in Egypt until a day of flames almost seven years after the war.

INDEPENDENT EGYPT

A Riot of a Time

On 26 January 1952, 'Black Saturday', Cairo was set on fire. After years of demonstrations, strikes and riots against foreign rule, an Anglo-Egyptian showdown over a police station in the Suez Canal zone provided the spark that ignited the capital. Shops and businesses owned or frequented by foreigners were torched by mobs and many landmarks of 70 years of British rule were reduced to charred ruins within a day.

1856

Africa's first railway, between Tanta and Cairo, is built by British engineer Robert Stephenson. The line extended to Suez in 1858 and was popular with Europeans heading to India and the Far East until the opening of the Suez Canal.

1869

Khedive Ismail, Mohammed Ali's grandson, opens the Suez Canal. The British, who had preferred a railway, soon take control of the waterway as the quickest route to their empire in the East.

1882

British troops invade to suppress nationalist elements in the army. Although they officially restore power to the khedive, Britain effectively rules Egypt in what becomes the 'veiled protectorate'.

But while the smoke cleared, the sense of agitation remained, not just against the British but also against the monarchy that most Egyptians regarded as too easily influenced by the British. King Farouk assumed the monarchy would survive the turmoil because it could count on the support of the Egyptian Army. But a faction within the officer corps, known as the Free Officers, had long been planning a coup. On 20 July 1952, the leader of the Free Officers, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, heard that a new minister of war knew of the group and had planned their arrest. Two nights later, army units loyal to the Free Officers moved on key posts in the capital and by the following morning the monarchy had fallen. King Farouk, descendant of the Albanian Mohammed Ali, departed from Alexandria harbour on the royal yacht on 26 July 1952, leaving Egypt to be ruled by Egyptians for the first time since the pharaohs.

One of the most notable casualties of Black Saturday was Shepheard's, the city's most famous hotel, and host to European royalty and Hollywood stars. A new Shepheard's was built beside the Nile in 1957.

Colonel Nasser became president in elections held in 1956. With the aim of returning some of Egypt's wealth to its much-exploited peasantry, but also in an echo of the events of Russia in 1917, the country's landowners were dispossessed and many of their assets nationalised. Nasser also moved against the country's huge foreign community and although he did not force them to emigrate, his new measures persuaded many to sell up and ship out.

Cairo: The City Victorious by Max Rodenbeck is the most authoritative and entertaining read on the convoluted and picturesque 1000-year history of the Egyptian capital.

In the year of his inauguration, Nasser successfully faced down Britain and France in a confrontation over the Suez Canal, which was mostly owned by British and French investors. On 26 July, the fourth anniversary of King Farouk's departure, Nasser announced that he had nationalised the Suez Canal to finance the building of a great dam that would control the flooding of the Nile and boost Egyptian agriculture. A combined British, French and Israeli invasion force, intended to take possession of the canal, resulted in diplomatic embarrassment and undignified retreat after the UN and US applied pressure. Nasser emerged from the conflict a hero of the developing world, a sort of Robin Hood and Ramses rolled into one, and the man who had finally and publicly shaken off the colonial yoke.

Neighbours and Friends

The trilogy of *The Mummy* (1999), *The Mummy Returns* (2001) and *The Scorpion King* (2002) was written by Stephen Sommers. The films feature fabulous art direction and far-fetched plots set in ancient and early-20th-century Egypt.

Nasser's show of strength in 1956 led to many years of drum-beating and antagonism between Egypt and its Arab friends, and their unwelcome neighbour Israel. On June 1967 Israel launched a surprise attack and destroyed Egypt's air force before it even got into the air. With it went the confidence and credibility of Nasser and his nation.

Relations with Israel had been hostile ever since its founding in 1948. Egypt had sent soldiers to fight alongside Palestinians against the newly proclaimed Jewish state and ended up on the losing side. Since that time, the Arabs had kept up a barrage of anti-Zionist rhetoric. Although privately Nasser acknowledged that the Arabs would probably lose another war against Israel, for public consumption he gave rabble-rousing speeches about liberating Palestine. But he was a skilled orator and by early 1967 the mood

1902

Inauguration of the Aswan Dam, the world's largest at that time, and the Asyut Barrage, which help control the Nile flood. The Egyptian Museum is also opened on what is now Cairo's Midan Tahrir.

1914

When Turkey sides with Germany in the war, Britain moves to make Egypt an official British Protectorate. A new ruler, Hussein Kamel, takes the title of Sultan of Egypt.

1922

Britain ends the protectorate and grants Egypt independence, but reserves the right to defend Egypt, its interests in Sudan and, most importantly, the Suez Canal, where Britain continues to maintain a large military presence.

engendered throughout the Arab world by these speeches was beginning to catch up with him. Soon other Arab leaders started to accuse him of cowardice and of hiding behind the UN troops stationed in Sinai since the Suez Crisis. Nasser responded by ordering the peacekeepers out and blockading the Strait of Tiran, effectively closing the southern Israeli port of Eilat. He gave Israel reassurances that he wasn't going to attack but meanwhile massed his forces east of Suez. Israel struck first.

When the shooting stopped six days later, Israel controlled all of the Sinai Peninsula and had closed the Suez Canal (which didn't reopen for another eight years). A humiliated Nasser offered to resign, but in a spontaneous outpouring of support, the Egyptian people wouldn't accept this move and he remained in office. However, it was to be for only another three years; abruptly in November 1970, the president died of a heart attack.

Both Egypt and Israel were able to claim victory in the October 1973 war. The Egyptians boast of having broken the Israeli hold on Sinai while the Israelis were fighting their way towards Cairo when the UN imposed a ceasefire. This sense of victory made the Camp David peace talks possible.

Anwar Sadat, another of the Free Officers and Egypt's next president, instigated a reversal of foreign policy. Nasser had looked to the Soviet Union for inspiration, but Sadat looked to the US, swapping socialist principles for capitalist opportunism. Having kept a low profile for a decade and a half, the wealthy resurfaced and were joined by a large, new, moneyed middle class who grew rich on the back of Sadat's much-touted *al-infitah* (open door policy). Sadat also believed that to revitalise Egypt's economy he would have to deal with Israel. But first he needed bargaining power, a basis for negotiations.

On 6 October 1973, the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, Egypt launched a surprise attack across the Suez Canal. Its army beat back Israel's superior forces and crossed their supposedly impregnable line of fortifications. Although these initial gains were later reversed, Egypt's national pride was restored and Sadat's negotiating strategy had succeeded.

In November 1977, a time when Arab leaders still refused to talk publicly to Israel, Sadat travelled to Jerusalem to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel. The following year, he and the Israeli premier signed the Camp David Agreement in which Israel agreed to withdraw from Sinai in return for Egyptian recognition of Israel's right to exist. There was shock in the Arab world, where Sadat's rejection of Nasser's pan-Arabist principles was seen as a betrayal. As a result, Egypt lost much prestige among the Arabs, who moved the HQ of the Arab League out of Cairo, and Sadat lost his life. On 6 October 1981, at a parade commemorating the 1973 War, one of his soldiers, a member of an Islamist group, broke from the marching ranks and sprayed the presidential stand with gunfire. Sadat was killed instantly.

As a young Egyptian officer during WWII, Anwar Sadat was imprisoned by the British for conspiring with German spies.

Mubarak & the Rise of the Islamist Movement

Sadat was succeeded by another of the Free Officers, Hosni Mubarak, a former airforce general and vice president. Less flamboyant than Sadat and less charismatic than Nasser, Mubarak has been called unimaginative and indecisive, but has managed to carry out a balancing act on several

1922

Howard Carter discovers the tomb of Tutankhamun. The first great Egyptological discovery in the age of mass media, the tomb contains more than 3000 objects, which take 10 years to record and remove.

1952

Anti-British sentiment leads to many foreign buildings in Cairo being burned. By the summer, Nasser and his fellow Free Officers have overthrown King Farouk and established the Republic of Egypt.

1967

Egypt, Syria and Jordan are defeated by Israel in what becomes known as the Six Day War. Egypt loses control of the Sinai Peninsula and Nasser resigns, only to be returned to power by popular demand.

fronts, abroad and at home. To the irritation of more hard-line states such as Syria and Libya, Mubarak rehabilitated Egypt in the eyes of the Arab world without abandoning the treaty with Israel. At the same time, he managed to keep the lid on the Islamist extremists at home. In the early 1990s the lid blew off.

No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam by Genevieve Abdo is one of the best books on the Egyptian Islamist movement. It examines the movement as a response to a general increase in Muslim piety and the ineptitude of governance in the post-Nasser era.

Despite their use of religion, Egypt's Islamist groups are part of a political response to harsh socio-economic conditions. More than 30 years after the revolution, government promises had failed to keep up with the population explosion and a generation of youths was living in squalid, overcrowded housing, without jobs and with little or no hope for the future. With a repressive political system that allowed little chance to voice legitimate opposition, the only hope lay with Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and their calls for change. Denied recognition by the state as a legal political entity, in the 1980s and 1990s the Islamists turned to force. There were frequent attempts on the life of the president and his ministers, and clashes with the security forces. The matter escalated from a domestic issue to a matter of international concern when Islamists began to target one of the state's most vulnerable and valuable sources of income: tourists.

A History of Egypt by PJ Vatiokis is the best one-volume history available, although it's a decidedly modern history with a focus on the 19th and 20th centuries.

Several groups of foreign tourists were shot at, bombed or otherwise assaulted throughout the 1990s, most horrifically in 1997 with the sickening one-two of the fire-bomb attack on a tour bus outside the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, followed a few weeks later by the massacre of holidaymakers at the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor by members of the Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group), a Muslim Brotherhood splinter group.

The brutality of the massacre and its success at deterring foreign visitors destroyed grass-roots support for militants and the Muslim Brotherhood declared a ceasefire the following year. Things were relatively quiet until October 2004, when bombs at Taba, on the border with Israel, and the nearby Ras Shaytan camp, killed 34 and signalled the start of an unsettled 12 months.

The site of Luxor Temple has been a place of worship for the last 3500 years and remains one today: the Mosque of Abu al-Haggag is situated high above the great court.

In 2005 President Mubarak bowed to growing international pressure to bring the country's political system in line with Western-style democracy, and proposed a constitutional amendment (subsequently approved by parliament and ratified at a national referendum) that aimed to introduce direct and competitive presidential elections. While some pundits saw this as a step in the right direction, others suspected it was a sham, particularly as popular opposition groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood were still banned and other independent candidates were required to have the backing of at least 65 members of the lower house of parliament. As the lower house was dominated by the National Democratic Party (NDP), the possibility of real change was slight. When the Kifaya! (Enough!) coalition of opposition groups protested at these restrictions, security forces cracked down. Ayman Nour, the leader of the popular Ghad (Tomorrow) party, was jailed on what many claimed were trumped-up charges and opposition rallies around the country were violently dispersed.

1970

Fifty-two-year-old Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egyptian president since 1956, dies of a heart attack and is replaced by his fellow revolutionary, Anwar Sadat.

1971

The Aswan High Dam is completed. Eleven years in the making, it extends Lake Nasser to some 510km, forces the relocation of 50,000 Nubians and many monuments, and extends Egypt's farmland by 30%.

1973

In October, Egyptian forces attack and cross the supposedly impregnable Israeli defences along the Suez Canal. Although the Egyptians are repulsed and Israel threatens Cairo, the war is seen as an Egyptian success.

At this stage the banned Muslim Brotherhood began holding its own rallies and there were two isolated terrorist incidents in Cairo aimed at foreign tourists, both carried out by members of the same pro-Islamist family. Soon afterwards, three bombs at the popular beach resort of Sharm el-Sheikh claimed the lives of 88 people, most of them Egyptian. Various groups claimed responsibility, tourism took an immediate hit and Egyptians braced themselves for the possibility of further terrorist incursions and domestic unrest.

President Mubarak won the 2005 election with 89% of the vote, though with a turnout of just 23% of the 32 million registered voters, he could hardly claim to have a popular mandate. Even then, opposition parties and candidates (including Ayman Nour) alleged that the vote had been rigged and that the result was invalid.

They were even more concerned when subsequent parliamentary elections in November 2005 were marred by widespread allegations that pro-government supporters had physically prevented some voters from entering polling booths and voting for Brotherhood-aligned independent candidates. Even after these intimidation tactics, the Muslim Brotherhood independents managed to win an extraordinary 88 seats in the 444-seat national parliament (six times the number that they had previously held), making the Brotherhood a major player on the national political scene despite its officially illegal status.

Many commentators recognised that Gamal Mubarak's 2007 wedding in Sharm el-Sheikh removed one of the last obstacles to him becoming the next president. While most Egyptians marry young, Mubarak was still unmarried in his early 40s.

Egypt Today

Despite the ever-present – though slim – threat of an Islamist uprising, the two biggest challenges facing President Mubarak's government as this book goes to print are not associated with an election backlash, religious extremism or global terrorism. Nor are they related to the constant international and opposition denunciations of press censorship and other infringements on human rights in Egypt.

The single biggest threat to the NDP's hold on power is the irrefutable fact that Egypt is in serious economic crisis, and has been for many years. The national economy, often described as a basket case, has to cope with a massive growth in population, rise in unemployment, and decline in the value of the Egyptian currency. Perhaps of greater concern is uncertainty over the health of President Mubarak. When the national paper *Al-Dastur* ran rumours of the president's ill health in September 2007, the editor was arrested for damaging the public interest and some US$350 million was withdrawn from the Egyptian stock market by nervous foreign investors. The president's demise is an inevitability – he was one of the Free Officers who overthrew the monarchy in 1952 – but the succession is far from clear. The constitution states that power passes to the vice president, but Mubarak has always refused to appoint one. Many rumours surround the president's son, Gamal Mubarak. But whoever does succeed the current president will only do so with the blessing of the armed forces.

1981

President Sadat is assassinated by Islamist army officers, an event precipitated by his having signed the Camp David peace accord with Israel in 1978. He is replaced by Vice President Hosni Mubarak.

1988

Naguib Mafouz wins the Nobel Prize for Literature. Although many Egyptians feel he is not the best of their writers, his nomination, the first for an Arab writer, is the cause of great nationalist pride.

2005

After a highly controversial presidential election, in which American pressure forces the acceptance of other candidates, President Mubarak wins a fifth term (25th year) in office.

Pharaonic Egypt

Dr Joann Fletcher

Despite its rather clichéd image, there is so much more to ancient Egypt than temples, tombs and Tutankhamun. As the world's first nation-state, predating the civilisations of Greece and Rome by several millennia, Egypt was responsible for some of the most important achievements in human history – it was where writing was invented, the first stone monuments erected and an entire culture set in place, which remained largely unchanged for thousands of years.

Dr Joann Fletcher is an Egyptologist, a writer, and a consultant to museums and the media. For more biographical information, see p552.

All this was made possible by the Nile River, which brought life to this virtually rainless land. In contrast to the vast barren 'red land' of desert that the Egyptians called *deshret,* the narrow river banks were known as *kemet* (black land), named after the rich silt deposited by the river's annual floods. The abundant harvests grown in this rich earth were then gathered as taxes by a highly organised bureaucracy working on behalf of the king (pharaoh). They redirected this wealth to run the administration and to fund ambitious building projects designed to enhance royal status. Although such structures have come to symbolise ancient Egypt, the survival of so many pyramids, temples and tombs have created a misleading impression of the Egyptians as a morbid bunch obsessed with religion and death, when they simply loved life so much that they went to enormous lengths to ensure it continued for eternity.

The depth of this conviction suffused every aspect of the ancient Egyptians' lives, and gave their culture its incredible coherence and conservatism. They believed they had their gods to take care of them, and each pharaoh was regarded as the gods' representative on earth, ruling by divine approval. Absolute monarchy was integral to Egyptian culture, and the country's history was shaped around the lengths of each pharaoh's reign. Thirty royal dynasties ruled over a 3000-year period, now divided into the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms separated by intermittent periods of unrest (Intermediate periods) when the country split into north (Lower Egypt) and south (Upper Egypt).

The Tomb of Nerfertari one of five wives of Ramses II and perhaps his favourite, in Luxor.
PHOTO BY LEANNE LOGAN

When this split finally became permanent at the end of the New Kingdom (around 1069 BC), foreign powers were gradually able to take control of the government. Yet even then, Egyptian culture was so deeply rooted that the successive invaders could not escape its influence, and Libyans, Nubians and Persians all came to adopt traditional Egyptian ways. The Greeks were so impressed with the ancient culture that they regarded Egypt as the 'cradle of civilisation', and even the occupying Romans adopted the country's ancient gods and traditions. It was only at the end of the 4th century AD, when the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, that ancient Egypt finally died; their gods were taken from them, their temples were closed down, and all knowledge of the 'pagan' hieroglyphs that transmitted their culture was lost for some 1400 years.

PHARAONIC WHO'S WHO

Egypt's Pharaonic history is based on the regnal years of each king, or pharaoh, a word derived from *per-aa* (great house), meaning palace. Among the many hundreds of pharaohs who ruled Egypt over a 3000-year period,

the following are some of the names found most frequently around the ancient sites.

Narmer c 3100 BC First king of a united Egypt after he conquered the north (Lower) Egypt, Narmer from south (Upper) Egypt is portrayed as victorious on the famous Narmer Palette in the Egyptian Museum. He is perhaps to be identified with the semimythical King Menes, founder of Egypt's ancient capital city Memphis. See also p29, p32, p186 and p196.

Zoser (Djoser) c 2667–2648 BC As second king of the 3rd dynasty, Zoser was buried in Egypt's first pyramid, the world's oldest monumental stone building, designed by the architect Imhotep. Zoser's statue in the foyer of the Egyptian Museum shows a long-haired king with a slight moustache, dressed in a tight-fitting robe and striped *nemes* (headcloth). See also p187 and p201.

Although the Narmer Palette is in many ways Egypt's earliest historical document, it is also a giant piece of cosmetic equipment, designed as a surface on which to prepare eye make-up.

Sneferu c 2613–2589 BC The first king of the 4th dynasty, and held in the highest esteem by later generations, Sneferu was Egypt's greatest pyramid builder. He was responsible for four such structures, and his final resting place, the Red (Northern) Pyramid at Dahshur, was Egypt's first true pyramid and a model for the more famous pyramids at Giza. See also p210.

Khufu (Cheops) c 2589–2566 BC As Sneferu's son and successor, Khufu was second king of the 4th dynasty. Best known for Egypt's largest pyramid, the Great Pyramid at Giza, his only surviving likeness is Egypt's smallest royal sculpture, a 7.5cm-high figurine in the Egyptian Museum. The gold furniture of his mother Hetepheres is also in the museum. See also p147 and p187.

Khafre (Khephren, Chephren) c 2558–2532 BC Khafre was a younger son of Khufu who succeeded his half-brother to become fourth king of the 4th dynasty. He built the second of Giza's famous pyramids and although he is best known as the model for the face of the Great Sphinx, his diorite statue in the Egyptian Museum is equally stunning. See also p149 and p187.

Sneferu was a great inspiration to later pharaohs. Excavations at Dahshur have revealed that incense was still being offered to Sneferu's memory 2000 years after his death.

Menkaure (Mycerinus) c 2532–2503 BC As the son of Khafre and fifth king of the 4th dynasty, Menkaure built the smallest of Giza's three huge pyramids. He is also well represented by a series of superb sculptures in the Egyptian Museum, which show him with the goddess Hathor and deities representing various regions (nomes) of Egypt. See also p150 and p187.

Pepi II c 2278–2184 BC As fifth king of the 6th dynasty, Pepi II was a child at his accession; his delight with a dancing pygmy was recorded in the Aswan tomb of his official Harkhuf. As one of the world's longest-reigning monarchs (96 years), Pepi contributed to the decline of the Pyramid Age. See also p205 and p308.

Montuhotep II c 2055–2004 BC As overlord of Thebes, Montuhotep II reunited Egypt and his reign began the Middle Kingdom. He was the first king to build a funerary temple at Deir al-Bahri, in which he was buried with five of his wives and a daughter, with further wives and courtiers buried in the surrounding area. See also p188 and p267.

Sesostris III (Senwosret, Senusret) c 1874–1855 BC The fifth king of the 12th dynasty, Sesostris III reorganised the administration by taking power from the provincial governors (nomarchs). He strengthened Egypt's frontiers and occupied Nubia with a chain of fortresses, and is recognisable by the stern, 'careworn' faces of his statues. His female relatives were buried with spectacular jewellery. See also p206.

Amenhotep I c 1525–1504 BC As second king of the 18th dynasty, Amenhotep I ruled for a time with his mother Ahmose-Nofretari. They founded the village of Deir el-Medina for the workers who built the tombs in the Valley of the Kings, and Amenhotep I may have been the first king to be buried there. See also p190 and p249.

Regarded as the most magnificent of the pharaohs, Amenhotep III seems to have appreciated literature, judging by the discovery of small glazed bookplates bearing his name.

Hatshepsut c 1473–1458 BC As the most famous of Egypt's female pharaohs, Hatshepsut took power at the death of her brother-husband Tuthmosis II and initially ruled jointly with her nephew-stepson Tuthmosis III. After taking complete control, she undertook ambitious building schemes, including obelisks at Karnak Temple and her own spectacular funerary temple at Deir al-Bahri. See also p189, p248 and p267.

Tuthmosis III c 1479–1425 BC As sixth king of the 18th dynasty, Tuthmosis III (the Napoleon of ancient Egypt) expanded Egypt's empire with a series of foreign campaigns into Syria. He built extensively at Karnak, added a chapel at Deir al-Bahri and his tomb was the first in the Valley of the Kings to be decorated. See also p189, p247 and p264.

Amenhotep III c 1390–1352 BC As ninth king of the 18th dynasty, Amenhotep III's reign marks the zenith of Egypt's culture and power. Creator of Luxor Temple and the largest ever funerary temple

marked by the Colossi of Memnon, his many innovations, including Aten worship, are usually credited to his son and successor Amenhotep IV (later 'Akhenaten'). See also p186, p252 and p257.

Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) c 1352–1336 BC Changing his name from Amenhotep to distance himself from the state god Amun, Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti relocated the royal capital to Amarna. While many still regard him as a monotheist and benign revolutionary, the evidence suggests he was a dictator whose reforms were political rather than religious. See also p189, p225 and p252.

Nefertiti had a taste for beer. She is shown drinking in several tomb scenes at Amarna, and even had her own brewery at the site, which produced a quick-fermenting brew.

Nefertiti c 1338–1336 BC (?) Famous for her painted bust in Berlin, Nefertiti ruled with her husband Akhenaten, and while the identity of his successor remains controversial, this may have been Nefertiti herself, using the throne name 'Smenkhkare'. Equally controversial is the suggested identification of her mummy in tomb KV 35 in the Valley of the Kings. See also p189, p225 and p252.

Tutankhamun c 1336–1327 BC As the 11th king of the 18th dynasty, Tutankhamun's fame is based on the great quantities of treasure discovered in his tomb in 1922. Most likely the son of Akhenaten by minor wife Kiya, Tutankhamun reopened the traditional temples and restored Egypt's fortunes after the disastrous reign of his father. See also p252 and p261.

Horemheb c 1323–1295 BC As a military general, Horemheb restored Egypt's empire under Tutankhamun and after the brief reign of Ay eventually became king himself. Married to Nefertiti's sister Mutnodjmet, his tomb at Saqqara was abandoned in favour of a royal burial in a superbly decorated tomb in the Valley of the Kings. See also p263.

Many of the treasures found in the tomb of Tutankhamun bear the names of his predecessors Akhenaten and the mysterious 'Smenkhkare', and were apparently buried with Tutankhamun simply to get rid of all trace of this unpopular family.

Seti I c 1294–1279 BC The second king of the 19th dynasty, Seti I continued to consolidate Egypt's empire with foreign campaigns. Best known for building Karnak's Hypostyle Hall, a superb temple at Abydos and a huge tomb in the Valley of the Kings, his mummy in the Egyptian Museum is one of the best preserved examples. See also p190, p233, p247 and p265.

Ramses II c 1279–1213 BC As son and successor of Seti I, Ramses II fought the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh and built temples including Abu Simbel and the Ramesseum, once adorned with the statue that inspired poet PB Shelley's 'Ozymandias'. The vast tomb of his children was rediscovered in the Valley of the Kings in 1995. See also p189, p190, p196, p234, p261, p263, p322 and p323.

Ramses III c 1184–1153 BC As second king of the 20th dynasty, Ramses III was the last of the warrior kings, repelling several attempted invasions portrayed in scenes at his funerary temple Medinat Habu. Buried in a finely decorated tomb in the Valley of the Kings, his mummy was the inspiration for Boris Karloff's *The Mummy*. See also p274.

Taharka 690–664 BC As fourth king of the 25th dynasty, Taharka was one of Egypt's Nubian pharaohs and his daughter Amenirdis II high priestess at Karnak where Taharka undertook building work. A fine sculpted head of the king is in Aswan's Nubian Museum, and he was buried in a pyramid at Nuri in southern Nubia. See also p243.

Alexander the Great 332–323 BC During his conquest of the Persian Empire, the Macedonian king Alexander invaded Egypt in 332 BC. Crowned pharaoh at Memphis, he founded Alexandria, visited Amun's temple at Siwa Oasis to confirm his divinity and after his untimely death in Babylon in 323 BC his mummy was eventually buried in Alexandria. See also p190, p250, p356 and p369.

Although synonymous with ancient Egypt, Cleopatra VII was actually Greek by descent, one of the Ptolemaic dynasty of pharaohs who originated from Macedonia where Cleopatra was a popular royal name.

Ptolemy I 323–283 BC As Alexander's general and rumoured half-brother, Ptolemy seized Egypt at Alexander's death and established the Ptolemaic line of pharaohs. Ruling in traditional style for 300 years, they made Alexandria the greatest capital of the ancient world and built many of the temples standing today, including Edfu, Philae and Dendera. See also p369.

Cleopatra VII 51–30 BC As the 19th ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty, Cleopatra VII ruled with her brothers Ptolemy XIII then Ptolemy XIV before taking power herself. A brilliant politician who restored Egypt's former glories, she married Julius Caesar then Mark Antony, whose defeat at Actium in 31 BC led to the couple's suicide. See also p236, p369 and p375.

EVERYDAY LIFE

With ancient Egypt's history focused on its royals, the part played by the rest of the ancient population is frequently ignored. The great emphasis on written history also excludes the 99% of the ancient population who were unable to write, and it can often seem as if the only people who lived in ancient Egypt were pharaohs, priests and scribes.

The silent majority are often dismissed as little more than illiterate peasants, although these were the very people who built the monuments and produced the wealth on which the culture was based.

Fortunately Egypt's climate, at least, is democratic, and has preserved the remains of people throughout society, from the mummies of the wealthy in their grand tombs to the remains of the poorest individuals buried in hollows in the sand. The worldly goods buried with them for use in the afterlife can give valuable details about everyday life and how it was lived, be it in the bustling, cosmopolitan capital Memphis or in the small rural settlements scattered along the banks of the Nile.

Eugen Strouhal's *Life in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) is one of the most informative and best illustrated books dealing with domestic life. Drawing on the author's medical expertise, the chapter on health and medicine is particularly good.

Domestic Life

In Egypt's dry climate, houses were traditionally built of mud brick, whether they were the back-to-back homes of workers or the sprawling palaces of the royals. The main differences were the number of rooms and the quality of fixtures and fittings. The villas of the wealthy often incorporated walled gardens with stone drainage systems for small pools, and some even had en-suite bathroom facilities – look out for the limestone toilet seat found at Amarna and now hanging in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Just like the mud-brick houses in rural Egypt today, ancient homes were warm in winter and cool in summer. Small, high-set windows reduced the sun's heat but allowed breezes to blow through, and stairs gave access to the flat roof where the family could relax or sleep.

Chickens, described as miraculous birds that 'give birth every day', were first imported from Syria around 1450 BC.

Often whitewashed on the outside to deflect the heat, interiors were usually painted in bright colours, the walls and floors of wealthier homes further enhanced with gilding and inlaid tiles. Although the furniture of most homes would have been quite sparse – little more than a mud-brick bench, a couple of stools and a few sleeping mats – the wealthy could afford beautiful furniture, including inlaid chairs and footstools, storage chests, beds with linen sheets and feather-stuffed cushions. Most homes also had small shrines for household deities and busts of family ancestors, and a small raised area seems to have been reserved for women in childbirth.

The home was very much a female domain. The most common title for women of all social classes was *nebet per* (lady of the house), emphasising their control over most aspects of domestic life. Although there is little evidence of marriage ceremonies, monogamy was standard practice for the majority, with divorce and remarriage relatively common and initiated by either sex. With the same legal rights as men, women were responsible for running the home, and although there were male launderers, cleaners and cooks, it was mainly women who cared for the children, cleaned the house, made clothing and prepared food in small open-air kitchens adjoining the home.

Wine jars were sometimes inscribed with the intended purpose of their contents, from 'offering wine' or 'wine for taxes' to 'wine for merry-making'.

The staple food was bread, produced in many varieties, including the dense calorie-laden loaves mass-produced for those working on government building schemes. Onions, leeks, garlic and pulses were eaten in great quantities along with dates, figs, pomegranates and grapes. Grapes were also used, along with honey, as sweeteners. Spices, herbs, nuts and seeds were also added to food, along with oil extracted from native plants and imported almonds and olives. Although cows provided milk for drinking and making butter and cheese, meat was only eaten regularly by the wealthy and by priests allowed to eat temple offerings once the gods had been satisfied. This was mostly beef, although sheep, goats and pigs were also eaten, as were game and wild fowl. Fish was generally dried and salted, and because of its importance in workers' diets, a fish-processing plant existed at the pyramid builders' settlement at Giza.

Although the wealthy enjoyed wine (with the best produced in the vineyards of the Delta and western oases, or imported from Syria), the standard beverage was rather soupy barley beer, which was drunk throughout society by everyone, including children. The ancient Egyptians' secret to a contented life is summed up by the words of one of their poems: 'it is good to drink beer with happy hearts, when one is clothed in clean robes'.

The BBC History Online article 'From Warrior Women to Female Pharaohs: Careers for Women in Ancient Egypt' looks at what was available for women outside the home. Go to www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/women_01.shtml

Public Life/At Work

The majority of ancient Egyptians were farmers, whose lives were based around the annual cycle of the Nile. This formed the basis of their calendar with its three seasons – *akhet* (inundation), *peret* (spring planting) and *shemu* (summer harvest). As the flood waters covering the valley floor receded by October, farmers planted their crops in the silt left behind, using irrigation canals to distribute the flood waters where needed and to water their crops until harvest time in April.

Agriculture was so fundamental to life in both this world and the next that it was one of the main themes in tomb scenes. The standard repertoire of ploughing, sowing and reaping is often interspersed with officials checking field boundaries or calculating the grain to be paid as tax in this pre-coinage economy. The officials are often accompanied by scribes busily recording all transactions, with hieroglyphs first developed c 3250 BC as a means of recording produce.

A contract from AD 206 states that Isadora the castanet dancer and two other women hired to perform at a six-day festival received 36 drachmae a day, well above the average wage.

A huge civil service of scribes worked on the pharaoh's behalf to record taxes and organise workers, and in a society where less than 1% were literate, scribes were regarded as wise and were much admired. Taught to read and write in the schools attached to temples where written texts were stored and studied, the great majority of scribes were male. However, some women are also shown with documents, and literacy would have been necessary to undertake roles they are known to have held, including overseer, steward, teacher, doctor, high priestess, vizier and even pharaoh on at least six occasions.

Closely related to the scribe's profession were the artists and sculptors who produced the stunning artefacts synonymous with ancient Egypt. From colossal statues to delicate jewellery, all were fashioned using simple tools and natural materials.

The first recorded workers' strike in history occurred in 1152 BC when royal tomb builders refused to go back to work because their supplies of moisturising oil had not been delivered.

Building stone was hewn by teams of labourers supplemented by prisoners, with granite obtained from Aswan, sandstone from Gebel Silsila, alabaster from Hatnub near Amarna and limestone from Tura near modern Cairo. Gold came from mines in the Eastern Desert and Nubia, and both copper and turquoise were mined in the Sinai. With such precious commodities being transported large distances, trade routes and border areas were patrolled by guards, police (known as *medjay*) and the army, when not out on campaign.

Men also plied their trade as potters, carpenters, builders, metalworkers, jewellers, weavers, fishermen and butchers, with many of these professions handed down from father to son. (This is especially well portrayed in the tomb scenes of Rekhmire (see Tombs of Sennofer & Rekhmire, p270). There were also itinerant workers such as barbers, dancers and midwives, and those employed for their skills as magicians. Men worked alongside women as servants in wealthy homes, performing standard household duties, and thousands of people were employed in the temples, which formed the heart of every settlement as a combination of town hall, college, library and medical centre. As well as a hierarchy of priests and priestesses, temples employed their own scribes, butchers, gardeners, florists, perfume makers, musicians and dancers, many of whom worked on a part-time basis.

OILS, PERFUMES & COSMETICS

Most Egyptians seem to have bathed regularly and used moisturising oils to protect their skin from the drying effects of the sun. These oils were sometimes perfumed with flowers, herbs and spices, and Egyptian perfumes were famous throughout the ancient world for their strength and quality. Perfume ingredients are listed in ancient texts, along with recipes for face creams and beauty preparations, and cosmetics were also used to enhance the appearance. Responsible for the familiar elongated eye shape, eye-paint also had a practical use, acting like sunglasses by reducing the glare of bright sunlight and explaining why builders are shown having their eyes made up during work. Both green malachite and black galena (kohl) were used in crushed form, mixed with water or oil and stored ready for use in small pots. Red ochre prepared in a similar fashion was used by women to shade their lips and cheeks. Some Egyptians were also trained to apply cosmetics and perform manicures and pedicures.

Although most people kept their cosmetic equipment in small baskets or boxes, the wealthy had beautifully decorated chests with multiple compartments, pull-out drawers and polished metal mirrors with which they could inspect their carefully designed appearance.

Clothing, Hairstyles & Jewellery

Personal appearance was clearly important to the Egyptians, with wigs, jewellery, cosmetics and perfumes worn by men and women alike. Garments were generally linen, made from the flax plant before the introduction of cotton in Ptolemaic times. Status was reflected in the fineness and quantity of the linen, but as it was expensive, surviving clothes show frequent patching and darning. Laundry marks are also found; male launderers were employed by the wealthy, and even a few ancient laundry lists have survived, listing the types of garments they had to wash in the course of their work.

The most common garment was the loincloth, worn like underpants beneath other clothes. Men also wore a linen kilt, sometimes pleated, and both men and women wore the bag-tunic made from a rectangle of linen folded in half and sewn up each side. The most common female garments were dresses, most wrapped sari-like around the body, although there were also V-neck designs cut to shape, and detachable sleeves for easy cleaning.

Linen leggings have also been found, as well as socks with a gap between the toes for wearing with sandals made of vegetable fibre or leather. Royal footwear also featured gold sequins, embroidery and beading, with enemies painted on the soles to be crushed underfoot.

Plain headscarves were worn to protect the head from the sun or during messy work; the striped headcloth (*nemes*) was only worn by the pharaoh, who also had numerous crowns and diadems for ceremonial occasions.

Jewellery was worn by men and women throughout society for both aesthetic and magical purposes. It was made of various materials, from gold to glazed pottery, and included collars, necklaces, hair ornaments, bracelets, anklets, belts, earrings and finger rings.

Wigs and hair extensions were also popular and date back to c 3400 BC, as does the hair dye henna (*Lawsonia inermis*). Many people shaved or cropped their hair for cleanliness and to prevent head lice (which have even been found in the hair of pharaohs). The clergy had to shave their heads for ritual purity, and children's heads were partially shaved to leave only a side lock of hair as a symbol of their youth.

By Roman times Isis had become the most important of all Egypt's gods and by the 1st century AD her worship had even spread as far as London.

Hair colour had great significance for the Egyptians and, in a largely dark-haired population, redheads were regarded as dangerous and described as 'followers of Seth', the god of chaos.

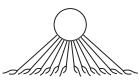
The ancient Egyptians were very good at faking certain materials, with wooden pots painted to resemble costly stone and painted linen used for priestly vestments instead of real panther skin.

GODS & GODDESSES

Initially representing aspects of the natural world, Egypt's gods and goddesses grew more complex through time. As they began to blend together and adopt each other's characteristics, they started to become difficult to


Amun


Anubis


Aten


Bes


Hapy


Hathor

identify, although their distinctive headgear and clothing can provide clues as to who they are. The following brief descriptions should help travellers spot at least a few of the many hundreds who appear on monuments and in museums.

Amun The local god of Thebes (Luxor) who absorbed the war god Montu and fertility god Min and combined with the sun god to create Amun-Ra, King of the Gods. He is generally portrayed as a man with a double-plumed crown and sometimes the horns of his sacred ram.

Anubis God of mummification, patron of embalmers and guardian of cemeteries, Anubis is generally depicted as a black jackal or a jackal-headed man.

Apophis The huge snake embodying darkness and chaos was the enemy of the sun god Ra and tried to destroy him every night and prevent him reaching the dawn.

Aten The solar disc whose rays end in outstretched hands, first appearing c 1900 BC and becoming chief deity during the Amarna Period c 1360–1335 BC.

Atum Creator god of Heliopolis who rose from the primeval waters and ejaculated (or sneezed depending on the myth) to create gods and humans. Generally depicted as a man wearing the double crown, Atum represented the setting sun.

Bastet Cat goddess whose cult centre was Bubastis; ferocious when defending her father Ra the sun god, she was often shown as a friendly deity, personified by the domestic cat.

Bes Grotesque yet benign dwarf god fond of music and dancing; he kept evil from the home and protected women in childbirth by waving his knife and sticking out his tongue.

Geb God of the earth generally depicted as a green man lying beneath his sister-wife Nut the sky goddess, supported by their father Shu, god of air.

Hapy God of the Nile flood and the plump embodiment of fertility shown as an androgynous figure with a headdress of aquatic plants.

Hathor Goddess of love and pleasure represented as a cow or a woman with a crown of horns and sun's disc in her guise as the sun god's daughter. Patron of music and dancing whose cult centre was Dendara, she was known as 'she of the beautiful hair' and 'lady of drunkenness'.

Horus Falcon god of the sky and son of Isis and Osiris, he avenged his father to rule on earth and was personified by the ruling king. He can appear as a falcon or a man with a falcon's head, and his eye *(wedjat)* was a powerful amulet.

Isis Goddess of magic and protector of her brother-husband Osiris and their son Horus, she and her sister Nephthys also protected the dead. As symbolic mother of the king she appears as a woman with a throne-shaped crown, or sometimes has Hathor's cow horns.

Khepri God of the rising sun represented by the scarab beetle, whose habit of rolling balls of dirt was likened to the sun's journey across the sky.

Khnum Ram-headed god who created life on a potter's wheel; he also controlled the waters of the Nile flood from his cave at Elephantine and his cult centre was Esna.

Khons Young god of the moon and son of Amun and Mut. He is generally depicted in human form wearing a crescent moon crown and the 'sidelock of youth' hairstyle.

Maat Goddess of cosmic order, truth and justice, depicted as a woman wearing an ostrich feather on her head, or sometimes by the feather alone.

Mut Amun's consort and one of the symbolic mothers of the king; her name means both 'mother' and 'vulture' and she is generally shown as woman with a vulture headdress.

Nekhbet Vulture goddess of Upper Egypt worshipped at el-Kab; she often appears with her sister-goddess Wadjet the cobra, protecting the pharaoh.

Nut Sky goddess usually portrayed as a woman whose star-spangled body arches across tomb and temple ceilings. She swallows the sun each evening to give birth to it each morning.

Osiris God of regeneration portrayed in human form and worshipped mainly at Abydos. As the first mummy created, he was magically revived by Isis to produce their son Horus, who took over the earthly kingship while Osiris became ruler of the underworld and symbol of eternal life.

Ptah Creator god of Memphis who thought the world into being. He is patron of craftsmen, wears a skullcap and usually clutches a tall sceptre (resembling a 1950s microphone).

Ra Supreme sun god generally shown as a man with a falcon's head topped by a sun disc, although he can take many forms (eg Aten, Khepri) and other gods merge with him to enhance

their powers (eg Amun-Ra, Ra-Atum). Ra travelled through the skies in a boat, sinking down into the underworld each night before re-emerging at dawn to bring light.

Sekhmet Lioness goddess of Memphis whose name means 'the powerful one'. As a daughter of sun god Ra she was capable of great destruction and was the bringer of pestilence; her priests functioned as doctors.

Seth God of chaos personified by a mythological, composite animal. After murdering his brother Osiris he was defeated by Horus, and his great physical strength was harnessed to defend Ra in the underworld.

Sobek Crocodile god representing Pharaonic might, he was worshipped at Kom Ombo and the Fayuum.

Taweret Hippopotamus goddess who often appears upright to scare evil from the home and protect women in childbirth.

Thoth God of wisdom and writing, and patron of scribes. He is portrayed as an ibis or baboon and his cult centre was Hermopolis.


Horus

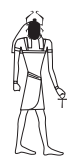

Isis

TEMPLES

Although many gods had their own cult centres, they were also worshipped at temples throughout Egypt. Built on sites considered sacred, existing temples were added to by successive pharaohs to demonstrate their piety. This is best seen at the enormous complex of Karnak (p243), the culmination of 2000 years of reconstruction.

Surrounded by huge enclosure walls of mud brick, the stone temples within were regarded as houses of the gods where daily rituals were performed on behalf of the pharaoh. As the intermediary between gods and humans, the pharaoh was high priest of every temple, although in practice these powers were delegated to each temple's high priest.

As well as the temples housing the gods (cult temples), there were also funerary (mortuary) temples where each pharaoh was worshipped after death. Eventually sited away from their tombs for security reasons, the best examples are on Luxor's West Bank, where pharaohs buried in the Valley of the Kings had huge funerary temples built closer to the river. These include Ramses III's temple at Medinat Habu, Amenhotep III's once-vast temple marked by the Colossi of Memnon and the best known example built by Hatshepsut into the cliffs of Deir al-Bahri.


Khepri

TOMBS & MUMMIFICATION

Tombs

Initially, tombs were created to differentiate the burials of the elite from the majority, whose bodies continued to be placed directly into the desert sand. By around 3100 BC the mound of sand heaped over a grave was replaced by a more permanent structure of mud brick, whose characteristic bench-shape is known as a mastaba after the Arabic word for bench.


Nut

As stone replaced mud brick, the addition of further levels to increase height created the pyramid, the first built at Saqqara for King Zoser (see Zoser's Funerary Complex, p201). Its stepped sides soon evolved into the familiar smooth-sided structure, with the Pyramids of Giza (p143) the most famous examples.

Pyramids are generally surrounded by the mastaba tombs of officials wanting burial close to their pharaoh in order to share in an afterlife which was still the prerogative of royalty; see Cemeteries (p151), Tomb of Akhethotep & Ptahhotep (p203), Mastaba of Ti (p204) and Tombs of Mereruka & Ankhmahor (p205). It was only when the power of the monarchy broke down at the end of the Old Kingdom that the afterlife became increasingly accessible to those outside the royal family, and as officials became increasingly independent they began to opt for burial in their home towns. With


Osiris


Ra

little room for grand superstructures along many of the narrow stretches beside the Nile, an alternative type of tomb developed, cut tunnel-fashion into the cliffs that border the river. Most were built on the west bank, the traditional place of burial where the sun was seen to sink down into the underworld each evening.

These simple rock-cut tombs consisting of a single chamber gradually developed into more elaborate structures complete with an open courtyard, offering a chapel and entrance façade carved out of the rock, with a shaft leading down into a burial chamber; see Tomb of Kheti (p223), Tomb of Baqet (p223), Tomb of Khnumhotep (p224) and Tombs of the Nobles (p307).


Sekhmet

The most impressive rock-cut tombs were those built for the kings of the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC), who relocated the royal burial ground south to the religious capital Thebes (modern Luxor) to a remote desert valley on the west bank, now known as the Valley of the Kings (see p258). With new evidence suggesting the first tomb (KV 39) here may have been built by Amenhotep I, the tomb of his successor Tuthmosis I was built by royal architect Ineni, whose biographical inscription states that he supervised its construction alone, 'with no-one seeing, no-one hearing'. In a radical departure from tradition, the offering chapels that were once part of the tomb's layout were now replaced by funerary (mortuary) temples built some distance away to preserve the tomb's secret location.


Sobek

The tombs themselves were designed with a long corridor descending to a network of chambers decorated with scenes to help the deceased reach the next world. Many of these were extracts from the Book of the Dead, the modern term for works including The Book of Amduat (literally, 'that which is in the underworld'), The Book of Gates and The Litany of Ra. These describe the sun god's nightly journey through the darkness of the underworld, the realm of Osiris, with each hour of the night regarded as a separate region guarded by demigods. In order for Ra and the dead souls who accompanied him to pass through on their way to rebirth at dawn, it was essential that they knew the demigods' names in order to get past them. Since knowledge was power in the Egyptian afterlife, the funerary texts give 'Knowledge of the power of those in the underworld, knowledge of the hidden forces, knowing each hour and each god, knowing the gates where the great god must pass and knowing how the powerful can be destroyed'.

Mummification


Taweret

Although mummification was used by many ancient cultures across the world, the Egyptians were the ultimate practitioners of this highly complex procedure, which they refined over 4000 years.

Their preservation of the dead can be traced back to the very earliest times, when bodies were simply buried in the desert away from the limited areas of cultivation. In direct contact with the sand, the hot, dry conditions allowed body fluids to drain away while preserving the skin, hair and nails intact. Accidentally uncovering such bodies must have had a profound effect upon those able to recognise people who had died years before.


Thoth

As society developed, those who would once have been buried in a hole in the ground demanded tombs befitting their status. But as the bodies were no longer in direct contact with the sand, they rapidly decomposed. An alternative means of preservation was therefore required. After a long process of experimentation, and a good deal of trial and error, the Egyptians seem to have finally cracked it around 2600 BC when they started to remove the internal organs, where putrefaction begins.

As the process became increasingly elaborate, all the organs were removed except the kidneys, which were hard to reach, and the heart, considered to

HEALTH

With average life expectancy around 35 years, the ancient Egyptians took health care seriously, and used a blend of medicine and magic to treat problems caused mainly by the environment. Wind-blown sand damaged eyes, teeth and lungs; snakes and scorpions were a common danger; parasitic worms lurked in infected water; and flies spread diseases. Medicines prescribed for such problems were largely plant- or mineral-based, and included honey (now known to be an effective antibacterial) and 'bread in mouldy condition' – as described in the ancient medical texts – which provided a source of penicillin.

By 2650 BC there were dentists and doctors, with specialists in surgery, gynaecology, osteopathy and even veterinary practice trained in the temple medical schools. The pyramid builders' town at Giza had medical facilities capable of treating fractures and performing successful surgical amputations.

Magic was also used to combat illness or injury, and spells were recited and amulets worn to promote recovery. Most popular was the *wedjat*-eye of Horus, representing health and completeness, while amulets of the household deities Bes and Taweret were worn during the difficult time of childbirth. Mixtures of honey, sour milk and crocodile dung were recommended as contraceptives, and pregnancy tests involving barley were used to foretell the sex of the unborn child. Magic was also used extensively during childhood, with the great mother goddess Isis and her son Horus often referred to in spells to cure a variety of childhood ailments.

be the source of intelligence. The brain was removed by inserting a metal probe up the nose and whisking until it had liquefied sufficiently to be drained down the nose. All the rest – lungs, liver, stomach and intestines – were removed through an opening cut in the left flank. Then the body and its separate organs were covered with natron salt (a combination of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate) and left to dry out for 40 days, after which they were washed, purified and anointed with a range of oils, spices and resins. All were then wrapped in layers of linen, with the appropriate amulets set in place over the various parts of the body as priests recited the necessary incantations.

Temple rituals included the burning or smashing of wax or clay figurines of anyone who threatened divine order, from enemies of the state to enemies of the sun god.

With each of the internal organs placed inside its own burial container (one of four Canopic jars), the wrapped body with its funerary mask was placed inside its coffin. It was then ready for the funeral procession to the tomb, where the vital Opening of the Mouth ceremony reanimated the soul and restored its senses. Offerings could then be given and the deceased wished 'a thousand of every good and pure thing for your soul and all kinds of offerings'.

The eyes of cats in tomb scenes were occasionally painted with gold leaf, giving them a realistic reflective quality in the darkness of the tomb and linking them to the sun god's protective powers.

The Egyptians also used their mummification skills to preserve animals, both much-loved pets and creatures presented in huge numbers as votive offerings to the gods with which they were associated. Everything from huge bulls to tiny shrews were mummified, with cats, hawks and ibis preserved in their millions by Graeco-Roman times.

ART IN LIFE & DEATH

Ancient Egyptian art is instantly recognisable, and its distinctive style remained largely unchanged for more than three millennia. With its basic characteristics already in place at the beginning of the Pharaonic period c 3100 BC, the motif of the king smiting his enemies on the Narmer Palette (see Room 43 – Atrium, p186) was still used in Roman times.

One of the most common souvenirs of a trip to Egypt in the 19th century was a mummy, either whole or in bits – heads and hands were particularly popular as they fitted easily into luggage.

Despite being described in modern terms as 'works of art', the reasons for the production of art in ancient Egypt are still very much misunderstood. Whereas most cultures create art for purely decorative purposes, Egyptian art was primarily functional. This idea is best conveyed when gazing at the most famous and perhaps most beautiful of all Egyptian images, Tutankhamun's

death mask (see Room 3, p192), which was quite literally made to be buried in a hole in the ground.

The majority of artefacts were produced for religious and funerary purposes, and despite their breathtaking beauty would have been hidden away from public gaze, either within a temple's dark interior or, like Tut's mask, buried in a tomb with the dead. This only makes the objects – and those who made them – even more remarkable. Artists regarded the things they made as pieces of equipment to do a job rather than works of art to be displayed and admired, and only once or twice in 3000 years did an artist actually sign their work.

Among the very few named artists known from ancient Egypt, Men worked as a sculptor for Amenhotep III while his son Bek worked for Amenhotep's son and successor Akhenaten, claiming he was 'the apprentice whom his majesty himself taught'.

This concept also explains the appearance of carved and painted wall scenes, whose deceptively simple appearance and lack of perspective reinforces their functional purpose. The Egyptians believed it was essential that the things they portrayed had every relevant feature shown as clearly as possible. Then when they were magically reanimated through the correct rituals they would be able to function as effectively as possible, protecting and sustaining the unseen spirits of both the gods and the dead.

Figures needed a clear outline, with a profile of nose and mouth to let them breathe, and the eye shown whole as if seen from the front, to allow the figure to see. This explains why eyes were often painted on the sides of coffins to allow the dead to see out, and why hieroglyphs such as snakes or enemy figures were sometimes shown in two halves to prevent them causing damage when re-activated.

The vast quantities of food and drink offered in temples and tombs were duplicated on surrounding walls to ensure a constant supply for eternity. The offerings are shown piled up in layers, sometimes appearing to float in that air if the artist took this practice too far. In the same way, objects otherwise hidden from view if portrayed realistically, appear to balance on top of the boxes that actually contained them.

The textiles used to wrap mummies are often described as 'bandages', although all kinds of recycled linen was used for the purpose, from old shirts to boat sails.

While working within such restrictive conventions, the ancient artists still managed to capture a feeling of vitality. Inspired by the natural world around them, they selected images to reflect the concept of life and rebirth, as embodied by the scarab beetles and tilapia fish thought capable of self-generation. Since images were also believed to be able to transmit the life-force they contained, fluttering birds, gambolling cattle and the speeding quarry of huntsmen were all favourite motifs. The life-giving properties of plants are also much in evidence, with wheat, grapes, onions and figs stacked side by side with the flowers the Egyptians loved so much. Particularly common are the lotus (water lily) and papyrus, the heraldic symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt often shown entwined to symbolise a kingdom united.

Since it was thought that images of living things could reanimate in the afterlife, the nose and mouth of unpopular figures were often defaced to prevent them inhaling the breath of life needed to live again in the next world.

Colour was also used as a means of reinforcing an object's function, with bright primary shades achieved with natural pigments selected for their specific qualities. Egypt was represented politically by the White Crown of Upper Egypt and the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, fitted together in the dual crown to represent the two lands brought together. The country could also be represented in environmental terms by the colours red and black, the red desert wastes of *deshret* contrasting with the fertile black land of *kemet*. For the Egyptians, black was the colour of life, which also explains the choice of black in representations of Osiris, god of fertility and resurrection in contrast to the redness associated with his brother Seth, god of chaos. Colour does not indicate ethnic origins, however, since Osiris is also shown with green skin, the colour of vegetation and new life. Some of his fellow gods are blue to echo the ethereal blue of the sky, and the golden-yellow of the sun is regularly employed for its protective qualities.

Even human figures were initially represented with different coloured skin tones, the red-brown of men contrasting with the paler, yellowed tones of women, and although this has been interpreted as indicating that men spent most of the time working outdoors whereas women led a more sheltered existence, changes in artistic convention meant everyone was eventually shown with the same red-brown skin tone.

Current research is starting to reveal that the Egyptians were experimenting with mummification as early as 4300 BC, almost 1000 years earlier than previously believed.

The choice of material was also an important way of enhancing an object's purpose. Sculptors worked in a variety of different mediums, with stone often chosen for its colour – white limestone and alabaster (calcite), golden sandstone, green schist (slate), brown quartzite and both black and red granite. Smaller items could be made of red or yellow jasper, orange carnelian or blue lapis-lazuli, metals such as copper, gold or silver, or less costly materials such as wood or highly glazed blue faïence pottery.

All these materials were used to produce a wide range of statuary for temples and tombs, from 20m-high stone colossi to gold figurines a few centimetres tall. Regardless of their dimensions, each figure was thought capable of containing the spirit of the individual they represented – useful insurance should anything happen to the mummy. Amulets and jewellery were another means of ensuring the security of the dead, and while their beauty would enhance the appearance of the living, each piece was also carefully designed as a protective talisman or a means of communicating status. Even when creating such small-scale masterpieces, the same principles employed in larger-scale works of art applied, and little of the work that the ancient craftsmen produced was either accidental or frivolous.

Although cats were considered sacred, X-ray examinations have revealed that some at least were killed to order by strangulation prior to their mummification for use as votive offerings.

There was also a standard repertoire of funerary scenes, from the colourful images that adorn the walls of tombs to the highly detailed vignettes illuminating funerary texts. Every single image, whether carved on stone or painted on papyrus, was designed to serve and protect the deceased on their journey into the afterlife.

Initially the afterlife was restricted to royalty, and the texts meant to guide the pharaohs towards eternity were inscribed on the walls of their burial chambers. Since the rulers of the Old Kingdom were buried in pyramids, the accompanying funerary writings are known as the Pyramid Texts – see Pyramid & Causeway of Unas (p202), Pyramid of Teti (p204) and South Saqqara (p205).

In the hope of sharing in the royal afterlife, Old Kingdom officials built their tombs close to the pyramids until the pharaohs lost power at the end of the Old Kingdom. No longer reliant on the pharaoh's favour, the officials began to use the royal funerary texts for themselves. Inscribed on their coffins, they are known as Coffin Texts – a Middle Kingdom version of the earlier Pyramid Texts, adapted for nonroyal use.

Among the wives of Tuthmosis III were three Syrians, whose joint tomb at Thebes, found in 1916, was filled with gold necklaces, crowns and bracelets, drinking vessels, mirrors and even pots of face cream.

This 'democratisation' of the afterlife evolved even further when the Coffin Texts were literally brought out in paperback, inscribed on papyrus and made available to the masses during the New Kingdom. Referred to by the modern term The Book of the Dead, the Egyptians knew this as The Book of Coming Forth by Day, with sections entitled 'Spell for not dying a second time', 'Spell not to rot and not to do work in the land of the dead' and 'Spell for not having your magic taken away'. The texts also give various visions of paradise, from joining the sun god Ra in his journey across the sky, joining Osiris in the underworld or rising up to become one of the Imperishable Stars, the variety of final destinations reflecting the ancient Egyptians' multifaceted belief system. These spells and instructions acted as a kind of guidebook to the afterlife, with some of the texts accompanied by maps, and images of some of the gods and demons that would be encountered en route together with the correct way to address them.

The same scenes were also portrayed on tomb walls; the New Kingdom royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings (p258) are decorated with highly formal scenes showing the pharaoh in the company of the gods and all the forces of darkness defeated. Since the pharaoh was always pharaoh, even in death, there was no room for the informality and scenes of daily life that can be found in the tombs of lesser mortals (see Tombs of the Nobles, p269).

This explains the big difference between the formal scenes in royal tombs and the much more relaxed, almost eclectic nature of nonroyal tomb scenes, which feature everything from eating and drinking to dancing and hairdressing. Yet even here these apparently random scenes of daily life carry the same message found throughout Egyptian art – the eternal continuity of life and the triumph of order over chaos. As the pharaoh is shown smiting the enemy and restoring peace to the land, his subjects contribute to this continual battle of opposites in which order must always triumph for life to continue.

The subterranean chambers beneath Zoser's pyramid were decorated with bright turquoise-blue tiles, some of which can be seen in the upper rooms of the Egyptian Museum.

In one of the most common nonroyal tomb scenes, the tomb owner hunts on the river (see Tombs of Menna & Nakht, p269). Although generally interpreted on a simplistic level as the deceased enjoying a day out boating with his family, the scene is far more complex than it first appears. The tomb owner, shown in a central position in the prime of life, strikes a formal pose as he restores order amid the chaos of nature all around him. In his task he is supported by the female members of his family, from his small daughter to the wife standing serenely beside him. Dressed far too impractically for a hunting trip on the river, his wife wears an outfit more in keeping with a priestess of Hathor, goddess of love and sensual pleasure. Yet Hathor is also the protector of the dead, and capable of great violence as defender of her father, the sun god Ra, in his eternal struggle against the chaotic forces of darkness.

Some versions of this riverside hunting scene also feature a cat. Often described as a kind of 'retriever' (whoever heard of a retriever cat?), the cat is one of the creatures who was believed to defend the sun god on his nightly journey through the underworld. Similarly, the river's teeming fish were regarded as pilots for the sun god's boat and were themselves potent symbols of rebirth. Even the abundant lotus flowers are significant since the lotus, whose petals open each morning, is the flower that symbolised rebirth. Once the coded meaning of ancient Egyptian art is understood, such previously silent images almost scream out the idea of 'life'.

Struggling with their hieroglyphs, student scribes were advised to 'Love writing and shun dancing, make friends with the scroll and palette, for they bring more joy than wine!'

Another common tomb scene is the banquet at which guests enjoy generous quantities of food and drink – see Tombs of Menna & Nakht (p269) and Tombs of Sennofer & Rekhmire (p270). Although no doubt reflecting some of the pleasures the deceased had enjoyed in life, the food portrayed was also meant to sustain their souls, as would the accompanying scenes of bountiful harvests which would ensure supplies never ran out. Even the music and dance performed at these banquets indicate much more than a party in full swing – the lively proceedings were another way of reviving the deceased by awakening their senses.

The culmination of this idea can be found in the all-important Opening of the Mouth ceremony, performed by the deceased's heir, either the next king or the eldest son. The ceremony was designed to reanimate the soul (ka), which could then go on to enjoy eternal life once all its senses had been restored. Noise and movement were believed to reactivate hearing and sight, while the sense of smell was restored with incense and flowers. The essential offerings of food and drink then sustained the soul that resided within the mummy as it was finally laid to rest inside the tomb.

HIEROGLYPHS

Hieroglyphs, meaning 'sacred carvings' in Greek, are the pictorial script used by the ancient Egyptians. It was first developed as a means of recording produce and recent discoveries at Abydos dating to around 3250 BC make this the earliest form of writing yet found, even predating that of Mesopotamia.

The impact of hieroglyphs on Egyptian culture cannot be overestimated, as they provided the means by which the state took shape. They were used by a civil service of scribes working on the king's behalf to collect taxes and organise vast workforces, and with literacy running at less than 1%, scribes were considered wise and part of society's elite.

Within a few centuries, day-to-day transactions were undertaken in a shorthand version of hieroglyphs known as hieratic, whereas hieroglyphs remained the perfect medium for monumental inscriptions. They were in constant use for more than 3500 years until the last example was carved at Philae temple on 24 August AD 394. Covering every available tomb and temple surface, hieroglyphs were regarded as 'the words of the Thoth', the ibis-headed god of writing and patron deity of scribes, who, like the scribes, is often shown holding a reed pen and ink palette.

The small figures of humans, animals, birds and symbols that populate the script were believed to infuse each scene with divine power. In fact certain signs were considered so potent they were shown in two halves to prevent them causing havoc should they magically reanimate. Yet the ancient Egyptians also liked a joke, and their language was often onomatopoeic – for example, the word for cat was *miw* after the noise it makes, and the word for wine was *irp*, after the noise made by those who drank it.

Evolving from a handful of basic signs, more than 6000 hieroglyphs have been identified, although less than 1000 were in general use. Although they may at first appear deceptively simple, the signs themselves operate on several different levels and can best be understood if divided into three categories – logograms (ideograms), determinatives and phonograms. While logograms represent the thing they depict (eg the sun sign meaning 'sun'), and determinatives are simply placed at the ends of words to reinforce their meaning (eg the sun sign in the verb 'to shine'), phonograms are less straightforward and are the signs that represent either one, two or three consonants. The 26 signs usually described in simple terms as 'the hieroglyphic alphabet' are the single consonant signs (eg the owl pronounced 'm', the zig-zag water sign 'n'). Another 100 or so signs are biconsonantal (eg the bowl sign read as 'nb'), and a further 50 are triconsonantal signs (eg 'nfr' meaning good, perfect or beautiful).

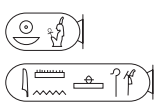
Unfortunately there are no actual vowels as such, and the absence of any punctuation can also prove tricky, especially since the signs can be arranged either vertically to be read down or horizontally to be read left to right or right to left, depending which way the symbols face.

Although they can seem incredibly complex, the majority of hieroglyphic inscriptions are simply endless repetitions of the names and titles of the pharaohs and gods, surrounded by protective symbols. Names were of tremendous importance to the Egyptians and as vital to an individual's existence as their soul (ka), and it was sincerely believed that 'to speak the name of the dead is to make them live'.

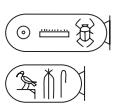
The loss of one's name meant permanent obliteration from history, and those unfortunate enough to incur official censure included commoners and pharaohs alike. At times it even happened to the gods themselves, a fate which befell the state god Amun during the reign of the 'heretic' pharaoh Akhenaten, who in turn suffered the same fate together with his god Aten when Amun was later restored.

PHARAONIC CARTOUCHES

Ramses II (Usermaatre Setepenre)



Amenhotep III (Nebmaatre)



Tuthmosis III (Menkheperre)

Hatshepsut (Maatkare)

In order to prevent this kind of obliteration, names were sometimes carved so deeply into the rock it is possible to place an outstretched hand right inside each hieroglyph, as is the case of Ramses III's name and titles at his funerary temple of Medinat Habu.

Royal names were also followed by epithets such as 'life, prosperity, health', comparable to the way in which the name of the Prophet Mohammed is always followed by the phrase 'peace be upon him'. For further protection, royal names were written inside a rectangular fortress wall known as a *serekh,* which later developed into the more familiar oval-shaped cartouche (the French word for cartridge).

For a straightforward approach to ancient Egypt's artistic legacy, Cyril Aldred's *Egyptian Art* (Thames & Hudson, 1985) remains hard to beat, while a useful guide to the way hieroglyphs were used in art is provided by Richard Wilkinson's *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (Thames & Hudson, 1994).

Although each pharaoh had five names, cartouches were used to enclose the two most important ones: the 'prenomen' or 'King of Upper and Lower Egypt' name assumed at the coronation and written with a bee and a sedge plant; and the 'nomen' or 'Son of Ra' name, which was given at birth and written with a goose and a sun sign.

As an example, Amenhotep III is known by his nomen or Son of Ra name 'Amun-hotep' (meaning Amun is content), although his prenomen or King of Upper and Lower Egypt name was Neb-maat-Re (meaning Ra, lord of truth). His grandson had the most famous of all Egyptian names, Tut-ankh-amun, which literally translates as 'the living image of Amun', yet he had originally been named Tut-ankh-aten, meaning 'the living image of the Aten', a change in name that reflects the shifting politics of the time.

Gods were also incorporated into the names of ordinary people, and as well as Amunhotep, there was Rahotep (the sun god Ra is content) and Ptahhotep (the creator god Ptah is content). By changing 'hotep' (meaning 'content') to 'mose' (meaning 'born of'), the names Amenmose, Ramose and Ptahmose meant that these men were 'born of' these gods.

In similar fashion, goddesses featured in women's names. Hathor, goddess of love, beauty and pleasure, was a particular favourite, with names such as Sithathor (daughter of Hathor). Standard names could also be feminised by the simple addition of 't', so Nefer (good, beautiful or perfect) becomes Nefert, which could be further embellished with the addition of a verb, as in the case of the famous name Nefertiti (goodness/beauty/perfection has come).

Fond of word play, the Egyptians often incorporated hieroglyphs into their designs to spell out names or phrases – the basket, beetle and sun disc featured in some of Tutankhamun's jewellery, for example, spells out his throne name 'neb-kheperu-re'.

Others were known by their place of origin, such as Panehesy (the Nubian), or could be named after flora and fauna – Miwt (cat), Debet (hippopotamus) and Seshen (lotus), which is still in use today as the name Susan.

PHARAONIC GLOSSARY

akh – usually translated as 'transfigured spirit', produced when the ka (soul) and ba (spirit) united after the deceased was judged worthy enough to enter the afterlife

Ammut – composite monster of the underworld who was part crocodile, part lion, part hippo and ate the hearts of the unworthy dead, her name means 'The Devourer'

ba – usually translated as 'spirit', which appeared after death as a human-headed bird, able to fly to and from the tomb and into the afterlife

Book of the Dead – modern term for the collection of ancient funerary texts designed to guide the dead through the afterlife, developed at the beginning of the New Kingdom and partly based on the earlier Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts

Canopic jars – containers usually made of limestone or calcite to store the preserved entrails (stomach, liver, lungs and intestines) of mummified individuals

cartouche – the protective oval shape (the name derived from the French word for cartridge), which surrounded the names of kings and queens and occasionally gods

cenotaph – a memorial structure set up in memory of a deceased king or queen, separate from their tomb or funerary temple

Coffin Texts – funerary texts developed from the earlier Pyramid Texts, which were then written on coffins during the Middle Kingdom

coregency – a period of joint rule by two pharaohs, usually father and son
cult temple – the standard religious building(s) designed to house the spirits of the gods and accessible only to the priesthood, usually located on the Nile's east bank
deshret – 'red land', referring to barren desert
djed pillar – the symbolic backbone of Osiris, bestowing strength and stability and often worn as an amulet
false door – the means by which the soul of the deceased could enter and leave the world of the living to accept funerary offerings brought to their tomb
funerary (mortuary) temple – the religious structures where the souls of dead pharaohs were commemorated and sustained with offerings, usually built on the Nile's west bank
Heb-Sed festival – the jubilee ceremony of royal renewal and rejuvenation, which pharaohs usually celebrated after 30 years' rule
Heb-Sed race – part of the Heb-Sed festival when pharaohs undertook physical feats such as running to demonstrate their prowess and fitness to rule
hieratic – ancient shorthand version of hieroglyphs used for day-to-day transactions by scribes
hieroglyphs – Greek for 'sacred carvings', referring to ancient Egypt's formal picture writing used mainly for tomb and temple walls
hypostyle hall – imposing section of temple characterised by densely packed monumental columns
ka – usually translated as 'soul', this was a person's 'double', which was created with them at birth and which lived on after death, sustained by offerings left by the living
kemet – 'black land', referring to the fertile areas along the Nile's banks
king lists – chronological lists of each king's names kept as a means of recording history
lotus (water lily) – the heraldic plant of Upper (southern) Egypt
mammisi – the Birth House attached to certain Late Period and Graeco-Roman temples and associated with the goddesses Isis and Hathor
mastaba – Arabic word for bench, used to describe the mud-brick tomb structures built over subterranean burial chambers and from which pyramids developed
name – an essential part of each individual given at birth, and spoken after their death to allow them to live again in the afterlife
naos – sanctuary containing the god's statue, generally located in the centre of ancient temples
natron – mixture of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate used to dry out the body during mummification and used by the living to clean linen, teeth and skin
nemes – the yellow-and-blue striped headcloth worn by pharaohs, the most famous example found on Tutankhamun's golden death mask
nomarch – local governor of each of Egypt's 42 nomes
nome – Greek term for Egypt's 42 provinces, 22 in Upper Egypt and later 20 added in Lower Egypt
obelisk – monolithic stone pillar tapering to a pyramidal top that was often gilded to reflect sunlight around temples and usually set in pairs
Opening of the Mouth ceremony – the culmination of the funeral, performed on the mummy of the deceased by their heir or funerary priest using spells and implements to restore their senses
Opet festival – annual celebration held at Luxor Temple to restore the powers of the pharaoh at a secret meeting with the god Amun
papyrus – the heraldic plant of Lower (northern) Egypt whose reedlike stem was sliced and layered to create paperlike sheets for writing
pharaoh – term for an Egyptian king derived from the ancient Egyptian word for palace, *per-aa,* meaning great house
pylon – monumental gateway with sloping sides forming the entrance to temples
Pyramid Texts – funerary texts inscribed on the walls of late Old Kingdom pyramids and restricted to royalty
sacred animals – living creatures thought to represent certain gods – eg the crocodile (identified with Sobek), the cat (identified with Bastet) – and often mummified at death
sarcophagus – derived from the Greek for 'flesh-eating' and referring to the large stone coffins used to house the mummy and its wooden coffin(s)
scarab – the sacred dung beetle believed to propel the sun's disc through the sky in the same way the beetle pushes a ball of dung across the floor

Serapeum – vast network of underground catacombs at Saqqara in which the Apis bulls were buried, later associated with the Ptolemaic god Serapis
serdab – from the Arabic word for cellar, a small room in a mastaba tomb containing a statue of the deceased to which offerings were presented
shabti (or ushabti) – small servant figurines placed in burials designed to undertake any manual work in the afterlife on behalf of the deceased
shadow – an essential part of each individual, the shadow was believed to offer protection, based on the importance of shade in an extremely hot climate
sidelock of youth – characteristic hairstyle of children and certain priests in which the head is shaved and a single lock of hair allowed to grow
solar barque – the boat in which the sun god Ra sailed through the heavens, with actual examples buried close to certain pyramids for use by the spirits of the pharaohs
Uraeus – an image of the cobra goddess Wadjet worn at the brow of royalty to symbolically protect them by spitting fire into the eyes of their enemies
Weighing of the Heart (The Judgement of Osiris) – the heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of Maat with Osiris as judge; if light and free of sin they were allowed to spend eternity as an *akh*, but if their heart was heavy with sin it was eaten by Ammut and they were damned forever

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

If there's one characteristic that links the majority of Egyptians, from the university professor in Alexandria to the shoeshine boy in Luxor, it's an immense pride in simply being Egyptian.

It's hard sometimes to see where that pride could come from, given the pervasive poverty, low literacy levels, high unemployment, housing shortages, infrastructure shortfalls and myriad other pitfalls that face the country. But aiding every Egyptian in the daily struggle is every other Egyptian, and indeed there's a sense that everybody's in it together. Large extended families and close-knit neighbourhoods act as social support groups, strangers fall easily into conversation with each other, and whatever goes wrong, somebody always knows someone somewhere who can fix it.

Religion also cushions life's blows. Islam permeates Egyptian life. It's manifested not in a strictly authoritarian manner as in Saudi Arabia – Egyptians love enjoying themselves too much for that – but it's there at an almost subconscious level. Ask after someone's health and the answer is *'Alhamdulallah'*, (Fine. Praise to God). Arrange to meet tomorrow and it's *'in sha'Allah'*, (God willing). Then, if your appointee fails to turn up, God obviously didn't mean it to be.

And when all else fails there's humour, and Egyptians are renowned for it. Jokes and wisecracks are the parlance of life. Comedy is the staple of the local cinema industry and backbone of TV scheduling. The stock character is the little guy who through wit and a sharp tongue always manages to prick pomposity and triumph over the odds. Laughter lubricates the wheels of social exchange and one of the most enjoyable aspects of travel in Egypt is how much can be negotiated with a smile.

The nitty-gritty low-down of what's going on in Egypt is available to the public eye at the CIA World Factbook (www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html).

LIFESTYLE

There's no simple definition of Egyptian society. On the one hand there's traditional conservatism, reinforced by poverty, in which the diet is one of *fuul, ta'amiyya* and vegetables; women wear the long, black, all-concealing

BACKHAND ECONOMY – THE ART OF BAKSHEESH

Tipping in Egypt is called baksheesh, but it's more than just a reward for services rendered. Salaries and wages in Egypt are much lower than in Western countries, so baksheesh is an essential means of supplementing income. It's far from a custom exclusively reserved for foreigners. Egyptians have to constantly dole out the baksheesh too – to park their cars, receive their mail, ensure they get fresh produce at the grocers and to be shown to their seat at the cinema.

For travellers who are not used to continual tipping, demands for baksheesh for doing anything from opening doors to pointing out the obvious in museums can be quite irritating. But it is the accepted way in Egypt. Just use your discretion, always remembering that more things warrant baksheesh here than anywhere in the West.

In hotels and restaurants, a 12% service charge is included at the bottom of the bill. However, since the money goes into the till, it's necessary to leave an additional tip for the waiter, usually 10% to 20%. Services such as opening a door, delivering room service or carrying your bags warrant at least E£1. A guard who shows you something off the beaten track at an ancient site or an attendant at a mosque who looks after your shoes should receive a couple of pounds. Baksheesh is not necessary when asking for directions.

We suggest carrying lots of small change with you (trust us – you'll need it!) and also to keep it separate from bigger bills as flashing your cash will lead to demands for greater baksheesh.

abeyya and men wear the gownlike *galabiyya;* cousins marry cousins; going to Alexandria constitutes the trip of a lifetime; and all is 'God's will'. On the other hand, there are sections of society whose members order out from McDonald's; whose daughters wear slinky black numbers and flirt outrageously; who think nothing of regular trips to the USA; and who never set foot in a mosque until the day they're laid out in one.

Shahhat: An Egyptian by Richard Critchfield has become an anthropology classic, even though much of its content was recently debunked as a copy of a 1930s ethnographic study. So long as you keep this in mind it's still a good read, especially if you're spending time on Luxor's West Bank.

The bulk of the Egyptian populace falls somewhere between these two extremes. The typical urban family lives in an overcrowded suburb in a six-floor breeze-block apartment building with cracking walls and dodgy plumbing. If they're lucky they may own a small car (Fiat or Lada), which will be 10 or more years old. Otherwise the husband will take the metro to work or, more likely, fight for a handhold on one of the city's sardine-can buses. He may well be a university graduate (about 40,000 people graduate each year), although a degree is no longer any guarantee of a job. He may also be one of the million-plus paper-pushing civil servants, earning a pittance to while away each day in an undemanding job. This at least allows him to slip away from work early each afternoon to borrow his cousin's taxi for a few hours to bring in some much-needed supplementary income. His wife remains at home cooking, looking after the three or more children, and swapping visits with his mother, her mother and various other family members.

Meanwhile life in rural Egypt, where just over half the country's population lives, is undergoing a transformation. The population density on the agricultural land of the Nile Valley, on which most cities and villages are built, is one of the highest in the world. What little land remains is divided into small plots (averaging just 0.6 hectares), which don't even support a medium-sized family. As much as 50% of the rural population no longer makes its living off the land. For those who do, the small size of their plots prevents the mechanisation needed to increase yields. As a result, they increasingly rely on animal husbandry or are forced to look for other ways of surviving. So the farmer you see working his field is probably spending his afternoons working as a labourer or selling cigarettes from a homemade kiosk in an effort to make ends meet.

The latest in groundbreaking Egyptology news can be yours to read in digital format at www.egyptologyblog.co.uk.

The countryside remains the repository of traditional culture and values. Large families are still the norm, particularly in Upper Egypt, and extended families still live together. High rates of female illiteracy are standard. Whether all this will change with the steady diet of urban Cairene values and Western soap operas currently beamed into village cafés and farmhouses each night remains to be seen.

ECONOMY

Over the last few decades, the Egyptian government has struggled to reform the centralised economy it inherited from Nasser. In recent years, personal and corporate tax rates have been reduced, energy subsidies have been cut and several enterprises have been privatised. Despite these achievements, however, living standards for the average Egyptian are still abysmally low.

Fifty per cent of Egyptians live or work within 150km of Cairo.

In response to the stagnating quality of life, the government has continued to subsidise basic commodities, which has created a spiralling budget deficit. As a result, the economy has been slowly collapsing, which has deterred vital foreign investment. Of course, there is hope that Egypt can recoup these financial losses in the energy sector, particularly since the country is sitting on enormous natural gas reserves that foreign countries such as the US are eagerly eyeing.

POPULATION

Although the latest census results show that Egypt's population growth rate is falling, the number of citizens continues to increase by around one million every nine months. The Nile Valley is in danger of becoming one giant sprawling city,

and Greater Cairo alone is home to nearly 20 million people. Parts of the city continue to house the world's highest density of people per kilometre. The strain placed on the city's decaying infrastructure is more than it can cope with.

MULTICULTURALISM

Most Egyptians will proudly tell you that they are descendants of the ancient Egyptians, and while there is a strand of truth in this, any Pharaonic blood still flowing in modern veins has been seriously diluted. The country has weathered invasions of Libyans, Persians, Greeks, Romans and, most significantly, the 4000 Arab horsemen who invaded in AD 640. Following the Arab conquest, there was significant Arab migration and intermarriage with the indigenous population. The Mamluks, rulers of Egypt between the 13th and 16th centuries, were of Turkish and Circassian origins, and then there were the Ottoman Turks, rulers and occupiers from 1517 until the latter years of the 18th century.

Beside the Egyptians, there are a handful of separate indigenous groups with ancient roots. The ancestors of Egypt's Bedouins migrated from the Arabian Peninsula, and settled the Western and Eastern Deserts and Sinai. The number of Bedouin in Egypt these days is around 500,000, but their nomadic way of life is under threat as the interests of the rest of the country increasingly intrude on their once-isolated domains (see p480).

In the Western Desert, particularly in and around Siwa Oasis, are a small number of Berbers who have retained much of their own identity. They are quite easily distinguished from other Egyptians by the dress of the women, who usually don the *meliyya* (head-to-toe garment with slits for the eyes). Although many speak Arabic, they have preserved their own native tongues.

In the south are the tall, dark-skinned Nubians. They originate from Nubia, the region between Aswan in southern Egypt and Khartoum in Sudan, an area that almost completely disappeared in the 1970s when the High Dam was created and the subsequent build-up of water behind it drowned their traditional lands.

The official site of Egypt's Ministry of Tourism (www.touregypt.net) has magazine-type features, news and a huge range of resources and links.

The State Information Service (www.sis.gov.eg) has a huge amount of information on tourism, geography and culture.

SPORTS

Egypt is football obsessed. The country hosts the Egyptian Premier League, which is regarded as one of the top 20 most competitive leagues in the world. The two most popular clubs are Ahly and Zamalek, both of which are located in Cairo, and inspire fervent loyalty in their fans. The Egyptian national team is also a regular in FIFA World Cup tournaments, though the squad has sadly never made it beyond the first round of competition.

MEDIA

As in the West the media is big business in Egypt. The biggest daily newspapers are all pro-government or 'nationalist', including *Al-Akhbar,* the biggest seller with a circulation of around one million, *Al-Ahram,* the oldest daily in the Arab world (founded in 1877) and *Al-Gomhurriya,* set up by the military regime following the 1952 coup. Battling against them is an array of independents, including the weekly opposition publications *Al-Arabi* and the Islamist *Al-Ahrar,* as well as the business-slanted *Al-Alam al-Yom*. Although there are red lines not to be crossed (no criticism of the military, no presidential sleaze, nothing detrimental to 'national unity'), editors are given a degree of licence to publish what they will – which they do, often irrespective of whether a story happens to be true or not.

Illiteracy of around 50% means TV is the medium with the most penetration. In addition to the state channels (whose most popular output is Arabic films and home-grown soap operas), Egypt has its own satellite channels (ArabSat, NileSat 101, NileSat 202) including a couple of private operations

For everything you've ever wanted to know about the art of smoking hookah, visit www.smoking-hookah.com/Guide/Guide.asp.

(Al-Mehwar and Dream), both set up by well-known, politically connected businessmen. Quality of programming has markedly improved in recent years, forced to evolve by competition from other Arab and foreign channels such as CNN, Al-Jazeera and even transmissions from the old enemy to the north, Israel, whose channels many Egyptians furtively tune to for the better quality US-made soaps and comedies.

RELIGION

About 90% of Egypt's population is Muslim. Islam prevails in Egyptian life at a low-key, almost unconscious level. Few pray the specified five times a day, but almost all men heed the amplified call of the *muezzin* (mosque official) each Friday noon, when the crowds from the mosques block streets and footpaths. The 10% of Egypt that isn't Muslim is Coptic Christian. The two communities enjoy a more-or-less easy coexistence, although flare-ups in Minya and Alexandria in 2005 seemed to herald the introduction of tensions in this historically peaceful relationship.

For a general overview of Egyptian culture, look no further than the people's encyclopaedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Egypt.

Islam

Islam is the predominant religion of Egypt. It shares its roots with Judaism and Christianity. Adam, Abraham (Ibrahim), Noah, Moses and Jesus are all accepted as Muslim prophets, although Jesus is recognised as a mere prophet and not the son of God. Muslim teachings correspond closely to the Torah (the foundation book of Judaism) and the Christian Gospels. The essence of Islam is the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed, who was the last and truest prophet to deliver messages from God (Allah in Arabic) to the people.

Islam was founded in the early 7th century by Mohammed, who was born around AD 570 in Mecca. Mohammed received his first divine message at about the age of 40. The revelations continued for the rest of his life and were transcribed to become the holy Quran. To this day not one dot of the Quran has been changed, making it, Muslims claim, the direct word of God.

Mohammed started preaching in 613, three years after the first revelation, but could only attract a few dozen followers. Having attacked the ways of Meccan life, especially the worship of a wealth of idols, he made many enemies. In 622 he and his followers retreated to Medina, an oasis town some 360km from Mecca. This Hejira, or migration, marks the start of the Muslim calendar.

Mohammed died in 632 but the new religion continued its rapid spread, reaching all of Arabia by 634 and Egypt in 642.

Islam means 'submission' and this principle is visible in the daily life of Muslims. The faith is expressed by observance of the five so-called pillars of Islam:

- Publicly declare that 'there is no god but God, and Mohammed is His Prophet'.
- Pray five times a day: at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night.
- Give *zakat* (alms) for the propagation of Islam and to help the needy.
- Fast during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan.
- Complete the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The first pillar is accomplished through prayer, which is the second pillar and an essential part of the daily life of a believer. Five times a day the muezzins bellow out the call to prayer through speakers on top of the minarets. It is perfectly permissible to pray at home or elsewhere; only the noon prayer on Friday need be conducted in the mosque. It is preferred that women pray at home. (For information about Islamic holidays and festivals, see p511.)

The fourth pillar, Ramadan, is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, when all believers fast during the day. Pious Muslims do not allow anything to pass their lips in daylight hours. Although many Muslims do not follow the injunctions to the letter, most conform to some extent. However, the impact of the fasting is often lessened by a shift in waking hours: many only get up in the afternoon when there are just a few hours of fasting left to observe. They then feast through the night until sunrise. The combination of abstinence and lack of sleep means that tempers are often short during Ramadan.

Although there are no public holidays until Eid al-Fitr, it is difficult to get anything done during Ramadan because of erratic hours. Almost everything closes in the afternoon or has shorter daytime hours; this does not apply to businesses that cater mostly to foreign tourists, but some restaurants and hotels may be closed for the entire month. Although non-Muslims are not expected to fast, it is considered impolite to eat or drink in public during fasting hours. The evening meal during Ramadan, called *iftar* (breaking the fast), is always a celebration. In some parts of town, tables are laid out in the street as charitable acts by the wealthy to provide food for the less fortunate. Evenings are imbued with a party atmosphere, and there's plenty of street entertainment, often through until sunrise.

One of the most influential Islamic authorities in Egypt is the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, a position currently held by Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi. It is the role of the supreme sheikh to define the official Islamic line on any particular matter from organ donations to heavy metal music.

'The evening meal during Ramadan, called *iftar*, is always a celebration'

Coptic Christianity

Egyptian Christians are known as Copts. The term is the Western form of the Arabic *qibt,* derived from the Greek *aegyptios* (Egyptian).

Before the arrival of Islam, Christianity was the predominant religion in Egypt. St Mark, companion of the apostles Paul and Peter, began preaching Christianity in Egypt around AD 45, and although it did not become the official religion of the country until the 4th century, Egypt was one of the first countries to embrace the new faith.

Egyptian Christians split from the Orthodox Church of the Eastern (or Byzantine) Empire, of which Egypt was then a part of, after the main body of the church described Christ as both human and divine. Dioscurus, the patriarch of Alexandria, refused to accept this description, and embraced the theory that Christ is totally absorbed by his divinity and that it is blasphemous to consider him human.

The Coptic Church is ruled by a patriarch (presently Pope Shenouda III), other members of the religious hierarchy and an ecclesiastical council of laypeople. It has a long history of monasticism and can justly claim that the first Christian monks, St Anthony and St Pachomius, were Copts.

The Coptic language, which has its origins in Egyptian hieroglyphs and Ancient Greek, is still used in religious ceremonies, sometimes in conjunction with Arabic for the benefit of the congregation. Today the Coptic language is based on the Greek alphabet with an additional seven characters taken from hieroglyphs.

The Copts have long provided something of an educated elite in Egypt, filling many important government and bureaucratic posts. Furthermore, they've always been an economically powerful minority, and the vast majority of Copts are wealthy and influential.

With that said, there are also a lot of Copts at the very bottom of the heap: the *zabbalin,* the garbage-pickers of Cairo, who collect and sort through most of the city's rubbish, have always been Copts.

UNDERSTANDING THE LACK OF VIOLENT CRIME IN EGYPT *Hassan Ansah*

Social scientists commonly argue that crime and poverty are bedfellows that are intractably interwoven at the hip. However, despite the overwhelming and at times grinding poverty experienced by the majority of Egyptians, the country's violent crime rate is lower than the United States and Britain. Of course, this brings about the question of why Egypt has a relative lack of violent crime, particularly rape and murder. This is especially puzzling in Cairo where millions of people contend daily with dense living conditions, a high unemployment rate and urban malaise. To answer this lingering question, it is important to realise that crime, like any other social dynamic, is the reflection of a country's cultural norms.

While many developed nations in the West have a tendency to view Islamic societies such as Egypt with a wary eye, the fact of the matter is that there is a great deal they can learn from a country that puts faith in a higher power. In Egypt, the majority of the people seem united in their enduring focus on the afterlife (a local holy man once joked that everyone in Egypt lives partly in their coffin!), a conservative tradition that permeates virtually every aspect of life. This conservatism has established and maintained a system of moral values and principles that has in part tapered the violent crime rate in Egypt. Unlike crime in other Western countries, and even in the other two African powerhouses of South Africa and Nigeria, crime in Egypt is rarely random and almost never targeted towards foreigners.

Although the Egyptian government sets out to create a manageable and law abiding society, it is the family and the community that establishes and maintains the safe environment found throughout the country. Within Egypt, nothing functions outside of the realm of religion, which is often regarded as the very fabric that holds the entire country together. The family ethos, maintained and fostered by Islamic law, facilitates channels of cooperation, arbitration, conflict resolution and economic assistance within the greater community. Furthermore, these same interactions are also used as enforcement mechanisms for common moral values, which certainly serve as a deterrent for crime within the community. Not surprisingly, breaking these informal moral ethical codes often comes with a heavy price – certain individuals may not be able to find a job, a spouse, a home, or even negotiate the bureaucracy of state institutions.

Unlike the West where conflicts often take place behind closed doors in the shadows of official court rooms, in Egypt these renegotiations and fights often occur in public with a theatrical hint to them in order to injure, shore up, or improve one's public reputation. For example, a man will pick a quiet evening to shout from the street to a friend reprimanding him for not repaying a personal loan, thus sharing with the entire community that the man is dishonourable and irresponsible. Or, in the instance of spousal abuse, a woman will go to the roof of her building, shouting to the entire neighbourhood that her husband has beaten her.

As a result, this community-enforced moral code creates an extremely discouraging environment for a would-be criminal assailant. In fact, it is arguably these deeply interconnected and informal social networks that temper the towering poverty experienced by most Egyptians. As one Cairene puts it, perhaps it is the 'deeply embedded nosiness' of Egyptians that helps to maintain the peace.

Hassan Ansah is a freelance writer and journalist who has taught at the Western International University in Phoenix, Arizona, and at the American University of Cairo (AUC).

Other Creeds

Other Christian denominations are represented in Egypt, each by a few thousand adherents. In total, there are about one million members of other Christian groups. Among Catholics, apart from Roman Catholics of the Latin rite, the whole gamut of the fragmented Middle Eastern rites is represented, including the Armenian, Syrian, Chaldean, Maronite and Melkite rites. The Anglican communion comes under the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem. The Armenian Apostolic Church has 10,000 members, and the Greek Orthodox Church is based in Alexandria.

Egypt was once home to a significant number of Jews. Historical sources record that there were 7000 Jews living in Cairo as far back as 1168. In

Mamluk times, there was a Jewish quarter, Haret al-Yahud, in the vicinity of the Al-Azhar Mosque.

The first 40 years of the 20th century constituted something of a golden age for Egyptian Jews as their numbers reached an all-time peak of 80,000, and they came to play a bigger role in society and the affairs of state.

However, the reversal began with the creation of Israel in 1948. Not long afterwards, the exodus received further impetus with the nationalisation that followed Gamal Abdel-Nasser's seizure of power. Today, there are no more than 200 Jews left in Egypt.

Though women received the vote in 1956, restrictive personal-status laws prohibited a woman leaving her husband's house without his permission or a court order up until 1979.

WOMEN IN EGYPT

Some of the biggest misunderstandings between Egyptians and Westerners occur over the issue of women. Half-truths and stereotypes exist on both sides: many Westerners assume all Egyptian women are veiled, repressed victims, while a large number of Egyptians just see Western women as sex-obsessed and immoral.

For many Egyptians of both genders, the role of a woman is specifically defined: she is the mother and the matron of the household. The man is the provider. However, as with any society, generalisations can be misleading and the reality is far more nuanced. There are thousands of middle- and upper-middle-class professional women in Egypt who, like their counterparts in the West, juggle work and family responsibilities. Among the working classes, where adherence to tradition is strongest, the ideal may be for women to concentrate on home and family, but economic reality means that millions of women are forced to work (but are still responsible for all the domestic chores).

On their return from a women's suffrage conference in Rome in 1923, pioneer Arab feminists Huda Sharawi and Saiza Nabarawi threw away their *abeyya*s at Ramses Railway Station in Cairo. Many in the crowd of women who had come to welcome them home followed suit.

The issue of sex is where the differences between Western and Egyptian women are most apparent. Premarital sex (or, indeed, any sex outside marriage) is taboo in Egypt. However, as with anything forbidden, it still happens. Nevertheless, it is the exception rather than the rule – and that goes for men as well as women.

For women, however, the issue is potentially far more serious. With the possible exception of the upper classes, women are expected to be virgins when they marry and a family's reputation can rest upon this point. In such a context the restrictions placed on a girl – no matter how onerous they may seem to a Westerner – are to protect her and her reputation from the potentially disastrous attentions of men.

ARTS

To the Arab world, Egypt (or more specifically Cairo) is a powerhouse of film, TV, music and theatre. While little of this culture has had any impact on the West, a great many Egyptian actors and singers are superstars and revered cultural icons to Arabic-speakers around the world.

Literature

Hakmet Abu Zeid became the first woman in the Egyptian cabinet in 1962, assuming the post of social affairs minister.

Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, Naguib Mahfouz can claim to have single-handedly shaped the nature of Arabic literature in the 20th century. Born in 1911 in Cairo's Islamic quarter, Mahfouz began writing when he was 17. His first efforts were influenced by the European greats, but over the course of his career he developed a voice that was uniquely Arab, and drew its inspiration from the talk in the coffeehouses and the dialect of Cairo's streets. In 1994 he was the victim of a knife attack that left him partially paralysed. The attack was a response to a book that Mahfouz had written, which was a thinly disguised allegory of the life of the great religious leaders including Mohammed. In 2006, Mahfouz died after falling and sustaining a head injury.

On the strength of what's available in English, it's easy to view Egyptian literature as beginning and ending with Mahfouz, but he's only the best known of a canon of respected writers. Others include Taha Hussein, a blind author and intellectual who spent much of his life in trouble with whichever establishment happened to be in power; the Alexandrian Tewfiq Hakim; and Yousef Idris, a writer of powerful short stories. Unfortunately, none of these authors has gained the international attention they deserve, and they're only published in English by the American University in Cairo Press, a small Cairo-based academic publishing house that publishes an impressive line-up of Egyptian novelists as well as a large (and quite excellent) nonfiction list.

The Egyptian Center for Culture & Art (www.egyptmusic.org) aims to safeguard, foster and spread oral and traditional arts.

Egypt's women writers are enjoying more international success than the men. Nawal al-Saadawi's fictional work *Woman at Point Zero* has been published, at last count, in 28 languages. An outspoken critic on behalf of women, she is marginalised at home – her nonfiction book *The Hidden Face of Eve,* which criticises the role of women in the Arab world, is banned in Egypt. For many years following its publication, Saadawi was forced to stay out of the country after Islamists issued death threats against her. Today, tensions have settled, and she's now one of the few female Egyptian members of parliament. Those interested in learning more about her fascinating and inspirational life should read her autobiography *Walking Through Fire,* which was published in 2002.

www.perseus.tufts.edu/GreekScience/Students/Ellen/Museum.html presents a detailed overview of the history and culture surrounding the Library at Alexandria.

Salwa Bakr is another writer who tackles taboo subjects such as sexual prejudice and social inequality. All of this is a world away from Egypt's current best-known cultural export, Ahdaf Soueif. Though Egyptian, born and brought up in Cairo, she's something of an anomaly in that she writes in English. She lives and is published in London, where she's part of the UK literary scene. So far, most of her work has yet to appear in Arabic. Her absolutely wonderful 1999 novel *The Map of Love* was short-listed for the UK's most prestigious literary prize, the Booker. Her other novels are *Aisha, Sandpiper* and *In the Eye of the Sun*.

The most controversial novel to hit the Egyptian literary scene in recent years is Sonallah Ibrahim's *Zaat,* a scathing piece of satire on contemporary Egyptian life. Ibrahim became a cause célèbre in 2003 when he declined to accept the country's most prestigious literary prize, the Arab Novel Conference Award, which was being presented by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture and the Egyptian Supreme Council for Culture. Ibrahim labelled the award 'worthless'.

If you're new to Egyptian writers then the following is a short list of must-read books, all of which are (or have been) available in English-language translations.

Apricots on the Nile: A Memoir by Collette Rossant brings to life a young girl's childhood in 1930s and '40s Cairo.

EGYPTIAN CLASSICS

Beer at the Snooker Club by Waguih Ghali is a fantastic novel of youthful angst set against a backdrop of revolutionary Egypt and literary London. It's the Egyptian *Catcher in the Rye.*

The Cairo Trilogy by Naguib Mahfouz is usually considered Mahfouz' masterpiece; this generational saga of family life is rich in colour and detail, and has earned comparisons with Dickens and Zola.

Yousef Idris is best known for his short stories, but the novel *City of Love and Ashes* is set in January 1952 as Cairo struggles free of British occupation.

The Harafish by Naguib Mahfouz would be our desert-island choice if we were allowed only one work by Mahfouz. This is written in an episodic, almost folkloric style that owes much to the tradition of *The Thousand and One Nights.*

Albert Cossery is an Egyptian who has resided in Paris since 1945; his novels are widely available in French, less so in English, not at all in Arabic. His novel *Proud Beggars* is worth a read.

Zayni Barakat by Gamal al-Ghitani is a drama set in Cairo during the waning years of the Mamluk era. It was made into an extremely successful local TV drama in the early 1990s.

EGYPTIAN CONTEMPORARY NOVELS

The 2002 blockbuster *The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa Al-Aswany is a bleak and utterly compelling snapshot of contemporary Cairo and Egypt seen through the stories of the occupants of a Downtown building. The world's best-ever-selling novel in Arabic, it is reminiscent (though not at all derivative) of the novels of Rohinton Mistry. If you read only one contemporary Egyptian novel before or during your visit, make it this one.

With that said, it's important to mention that this book is groundbreaking for its plot and characters, not the actual language. In fact, the story is really just an elaborate soap opera, though it's remarkable in that it depicts Egypt in a particular time and place, and introduces archetypes that hadn't previously been captured in Arabic literature. At the time of writing, a sequel was out in the stores, though it had not yet been translated in to English.

Other recommended books include the following:

The Golden Chariot by Salwa Bakr is a short novel in which inmates in a women's prison exchange life stories. It's surprisingly upbeat, funny and even bawdy.

No One Sleeps in Alexandria by Ibrahim Abdel Meguid is an antidote to the mythical Alexandria of Lawrence Durrell. It portrays the city in the same period as the *Quartet* but as viewed by two poor Egyptians.

The Tent by Miral al-Tahawy is a bleak but beautiful tale of the slow descent into madness of a crippled Bedouin girl.

Love in Exile by Bahaa Taher is a meditation on the themes of exile, disillusionment, failed dreams and the redemptive power of love. Taher was born in Egypt in 1935, but lived for many years in Switzerland, and is one of the most outspoken figures within the local literary scene. The novel may be too mannered for some readers' tastes.

Taxi by Khalid al-Khamisi is one of the most popular books to hit the Egyptian shelves in years, and is rumoured to have outsold the *The Yacoubian Building*. Written in the Egyptian dialect (the English translation is on its way), the book details the author's conversations with cab drivers, which results in an amusing discourse on the trials and tribulations of daily Egyptian life. For an interview with the author, see the boxed text p183.

In *Khul-Khaal: Five Egyptian Women Tell their Stories* by Nayra Atiya (ed), five women from different backgrounds speak out. It's an often harrowing but revealing portrait of women's lives in Egypt.

Author Alaa Al Aswany *(The Yacoubian Building)* is a professional dentist whose first office was located in the real-life Yacoubian Building, which is on Sharia Suleiman Basha in Downtown Cairo.

WESTERN NOVELS OF EGYPT

The Alexandria Quartet by Lawrence Durrell is essential reading perhaps, but to visit Alexandria looking for the city of the *Quartet* is a bit like heading to London hoping to run into Mary Poppins.

Baby Love by Louisa Young is a smart, hip novel that shimmies between Shepherd's Bush in London and the West Bank of Luxor, as an ex–belly dancer, now single mother, skirts romance and a violent past.

City of Gold by Len Deighton is a thriller set in wartime Cairo, elevated by solid research. The period detail is fantastic and brings the city to life.

Death on the Nile by Agatha Christie draws on Christie's experiences of a winter in Upper Egypt. An absolute must if you're booked on a cruise.

Although the well-known film of the same name bears little resemblance to the novel, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* – a story of love and destiny in WWII – remains a beautifully written, poetic novel.

The Face in the Cemetery by Michael Pearce is the latest in an ever-expanding series of lightweight historical mystery novels featuring the 'Mamur Zapt', Cairo's chief of police. A bit like Tintin but without the pictures.

Egypt during the war serves as the setting for the trials and traumas of a despicable bunch of expats in *The Levant Trilogy* by Olivia Manning. It has some fabulous descriptions of life in Cairo during WWII, and was filmed by the BBC as *Fortunes of War* starring Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson.

Moon Tiger by Penelope Lively is an award-winning romance, technically accomplished, very moving in parts, with events that occurred in Cairo during WWII at its heart.

The Photographer's Wife by Robert Sole is one of three historical romances by this French journalist set in late-19th-century Egypt. They're slow-going but it's worth persevering for the fine period detail and emotive stories.

Crocodile on the Sandbank is the first of a bestselling series of crime fiction novels by American Egyptologist, Elizabeth Peters. Lightweight but highly entertaining, it and its successors recount the various adventures of Amelia Peabody Emerson, a feisty archaeologist and amateur sleuth excavating in Egypt at the start of the 20th century.

'In the 1940s and 1950s, Cairo's film studios turned out more than 100 movies annually'

Cinema

EGYPTIAN CINEMA

In the halcyon years of the 1940s and 1950s, Cairo's film studios turned out more than 100 movies annually, filling cinemas throughout the Arab world. These days, only about 20 films are made each year. The chief reason for the decline, according to the producers, is excessive government taxation and restrictive censorship. Asked what sort of things they censor, one film industry figure replied, 'Sex, politics, religion – that's all'. However, at least one Cairo film critic has suggested that another reason for the demise of local film is that so much of what is made is trash. The ingredients of the typical Egyptian film are shallow plot lines, farcical slapstick humour, over-the-top acting and perhaps a little belly dancing.

One director who consistently stands apart from the mainstream detritus is Yousef Chahine. Born in 1926, he directed 37 films before officially retiring in a career that defies classification. Accorded messiah-like status by critics in Egypt (though he's not a huge hit with the general public), he has been called Egypt's Fellini and was honoured at Cannes in 1997 with a lifetime achievement award. Chahine's films are also some of the very few Egyptian productions that are subtitled into English or French, and they regularly do the rounds of international film festivals.

His most recent works are 1999's *Al-Akhar* (The Other), 1997's *Al-Masir* (Destiny) and 1994's *Al-Muhagir* (The Emigrant), effectively banned in Egypt because of Islamist claims that it portrays scenes from the life of the Prophet. Others to look out for are *Al-Widaa Bonaparte* (Adieu Bonaparte), a historical drama about the French occupation, and *Iskandariyya Ley?* (Alexandria Why?), an autobiographical meditation on the city of Chahine's birth.

EGYPT IN WESTERN CINEMA

The meticulously painted backdrops of 1998's animated *Prince of Egypt* aside, Egypt hasn't been seen much at the cinema in recent years. True, a large part of the Oscar-sweeping *The English Patient* (1996) was set in the Western Desert and Cairo, but this was silver-screen trickery, achieved with scenic doubles – the Egyptian locations were filmed in Tunisia, and the building interiors were filmed in Venice. The same goes for *The Mummy* (1999), *The Mummy Returns* (2001) and *The Scorpion King* (2002), all of which used Morocco and computer graphics to stand in for Egypt. (The original 1932

version, however, with Boris Karloff, does feature footage shot at Cairo's Egyptian Museum.)

It's not that Egypt is unphotogenic – quite the opposite. Its deserts, temples and colourful bazaars appear beguilingly seductive on a wide screen. So much so that the country experienced a surge in tourism in the wake of *The English Patient,* despite the best attempts of the Tunisian tourist authority to set the record straight. But extortionate taxes levied on foreign film companies keep the cameras away. It wasn't always so, and the 1970s and 1980s in particular resulted in a number of films on location in Egypt, most of which you should still be able to find at the local video library.

The Awakening (1980) is a lame, ineffective horror film about an ancient Egyptian queen possessing modern souls, loosely based on Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of the Seven Stars*.

Agatha Christie's whodunit, *Death on the Nile* (1978), has Poirot investigating the murder of an heiress on board a Nile cruiser. It's gorgeous scenery but the real mystery is how the boat manages to sail from Aswan down to Karnak in Luxor and back up to Abu Simbel all in the same day.

Five Graves to Cairo (1943) is a wartime espionage thriller directed by Billy Wilder *(Some Like It Hot)* featuring a British corporal holed up in a Nazi-controlled hotel in the Western Desert.

The Aussie film *Gallipoli* (1981) is about the fateful WWI battle with an extended middle section devoted to the young soldiers' training in Egypt in the shadow of the Pyramids.

In the classic wartime thriller *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958), a British ambulance officer and crew flee Rommel's forces across the Western Desert and dream of an ice-cold beer in a little bar in Alexandria.

Ruby Cairo (1992), one of the last Hollywood productions to brave the bureaucracy, is the limp tale of a wife who tracks down her missing-presumed-dead husband to a hideaway in Egypt. The real star of the film is Cairo, where no cliché is left unturned, including camels, pyramids and feluccas.

Sphinx (1980), adapted from a bestselling novel by Robin Cook *(Coma),* is a tale about antiquities smuggling shot entirely in Cairo and Luxor, but from which no-one emerges with any credit, except the location scout.

In *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) the Pyramids, Islamic Cairo and Karnak provide glamorous backdrops for the campy, smirking antics of Roger Moore as James Bond.

The father and son team of screenwriter Wahis Hamed and director Marwan Hamed adapted Alaa Al Aswany's bestselling *The Yacoubian Building* into a feature film. The budget of over US$3 million was the largest ever seen in Egypt.

Music

CLASSICAL

Classical Arabic music peaked in the 1940s and '50s. These were the golden days of a rushing tide of nationalism and then, later, of Nasser's rule when Cairo was the virile heart of the Arab-speaking world. Its singers were icons, and through radio their impassioned words captured and inflamed the spirits of listeners from Algiers to Baghdad.

Chief icon of all was Umm Kolthum, the most famous Arab singer of the 20th century. Her protracted love songs and *qasa'id* (long poems) were the very expression of the Arab world's collective identity. Egypt's love affair with Umm Kolthum was such that on the afternoon of the first Thursday of each month, streets would become deserted as the whole country sat beside a radio to listen to her regular live-broadcast performance. She had her male counterparts in Abdel Halim Hafez and Farid al-Attrache, but they never attracted anything like the devotion accorded to 'As-Sitt' (the Lady). She retired after a concert in 1972, and when she died in 1975, her death caused havoc, with millions of grieving Egyptians pouring onto the streets of Cairo.

The Umm Kolthum Museum (p122) opened in Cairo in 2002.

POP

As Egypt experienced a population boom and the mean age decreased, a gap in popular culture developed, which the memory of the greats couldn't fill. Enter Ahmed Adawiyya, who did for Arabic music what punk did to popular music in the West. Throwing out traditional melodies and melodramas, his backstreet, streetwise and, to some, politically subversive songs captured the spirit of the times and dominated popular culture throughout the 1970s.

Adawiyya set the blueprint for a new kind of music known as *al-jeel* (the generation), characterised by a clattering, hand-clapping rhythm overlaid with synthesised twirling and a catchy, repetitive vocal. Highly formulaic, poorly recorded and mass-produced on cheap cassettes, this form of Egyptian pop was always tacky and highly disposable. That's changing fast as in recent years, the Cairo sound is getting ever more chic and slickly produced as the big-name artists look towards the international market. Head of the pack is Amr Diab, the foremost purveyor of Western-style pop, who is often described as the Arab world's Ricky Martin.

Adawiyya's legacy also spawned something called *shaabi* (from the word for popular), which is considered the real music of the working class. Indeed, it's much cruder than *al-jeel,* and its lyrics are often satirical or politically provocative. The acceptable face of *shaabi* is TV-friendly Hakim, whose albums regularly sell around the million mark.

Amr Diab's *Nour El Ain* (Mind's Eye) is the highest selling album ever released by an Arabic artist.

The majority of current big sellers in Cairo cassette shops hail from Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and even Iraq. The consolation is that Egypt still provides the best backing musicians, songwriters and production facilities in the Arab world, not to mention the biggest audiences.

Dance

BELLY DANCING

Tomb paintings in Egypt prove that the tradition of formalised dancing goes back as far as the pharaohs. During medieval times, dancing became institutionalised in the form of the *ghawazee,* a cast of dancers who travelled with storytellers and poets and performed publicly or for hire, rather like the troubadours of medieval Europe. Performances were often segregated, with women dancers either performing for other women or appearing before men veiled.

The arrival of 19th-century European travellers irrevocably changed this tradition. Religious authorities, outraged that Muslim women were performing for 'infidel' men, pressured the government to impose heavy taxes on the dancers. When high prices failed to stop Western thrill-seekers, the dancers were banished from Cairo. Cut off from their clientele, many turned to prostitution to survive.

For intrepid male travellers, this only increased the lure and they went out of their way to fulfil their erotic fantasies. Visitors such as French author Gustave Flaubert, who travelled through Egypt in 1849 and wrote *Flaubert in Egypt,* supplied lurid accounts of their experiences, titillating Victorian Europeans and helping to cement the less-than-respectable reputation of Egyptian dance:

> They both wore the same costume – baggy trousers and embroidered jacket, their eyes painted with kohl. The jacket goes down to the abdomen, whereas the trousers, held by an enormous cashmere belt folded over several times, begin approximately at the pubis, so that the stomach, the small of the back and the beginning of the buttocks are naked, seen through a bit of black gauze held in place by the upper and lower garments. The gauze ripples on the hips like a transparent wave with every movement they make.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Together, the following tapes/CDs give a pretty good taste of what Egyptian music is all about. Some of these are available internationally on CD or MP3.

Aho by Hakim 'Hey People' – a loud, anthemic shout rooted in a traditional *shaabi* sound.

Layli Nahari by Amr Diab The latest catchy album from the Egyptian heart-throb skyrocketed to the top of the charts across the Arab world. Highly sing-along-able.

Khosara by Abdel Halim Hafez The riff from this song sounds remarkably like that in the track 'Big Pimpin' by US rapper Jay-Z.

Inta Omri by Umm Kolthum One hour long and an absolute classic. Also try *Fakharuni* and *Al-Atlal*.

Lo Laki by Ali Hameida Pivotal The 1988 track that set the formula for much of the Egyptian pop to follow.

Al-Darb fil Iraq by Shaaban Abdel Rahim A former ironing man and the *shaabi*est of *shaabi* singers, hugely popular for singing the words that few others in the spotlight would dare say.

Nagham al-Hawa by Warda Algerian by birth but an honorary Cairene by residency. This double CD includes one of her best songs, 'Batwanes Beek'.

Fi'Ishq al-Banat by Mohammed Mounir Latest album by the thinking-person's pop star, a Nubian who fuses traditional Arabic music with jazz. His lyrics are admired above all others.

Zakma by Ahmed Adawiyya Social comment (the title means 'crowded') from the 1970s when Adawiyya's irreverent sound was at the peak of its popularity.

Belly dancing began to gain credibility and popularity in Egypt with the advent of cinema, when dancers were lifted out of nightclubs and put on the screen before mass audiences. The cinema imbued belly dancing with glamour and made household names of a handful of dancers. It also borrowed liberally from Hollywood, adopting Tinseltown's fanciful costumes of hip-hugging bikini bottoms, sequined bras and swathes of diaphanous veils.

Also imported from the Western movie industry was the modern phenomenon of the belly dancer as a superstar capable of commanding Hollywood-style fees for an appearance. Dancers such as Samia Gamal and Tahia Carioca, who became the stars of black-and-white films of the 1930s and '40s, can still be seen today as the old films are endlessly rerun on Egyptian TV. Such is the present-day earning power of the top dancers that in 1997 a series of court cases was able to haul in E£900 million in back taxes from 12 of the country's top artists.

One of Egypt's most famous belly dancers, Soheir el-Babli, renounced show business and adopted the Islamic veil in 1993, setting off a wave of religiously motivated resignations among the country's belly-dance artists.

Despite its long history, belly dancing is still not considered completely respectable, and is slowly dying out according to many aficionados. In the early 1990s, Islamist conservatives patrolled weddings in poor areas of Cairo and forcibly prevented women from dancing or singing, cutting off a vital source of income for lower-echelon performers. In an attempt to placate the religious right, the government joined in and declared that bare midriffs, cleavage and thighs were out. At the same time, a number of high-profile entertainers donned the veil and retired, denouncing their former profession as sinful. Since then, bellies have once more been bared but the industry has not recovered.

Painting

While Egypt has produced one or two outstanding painters, contemporary art is very much in the doldrums. The problem stems from the Egyptian art school system, where a student's success largely depends on their ability to emulate the artistic styles favoured or practised by their professors. Not surprisingly, some of the most interesting work comes from artists with no formal training at all. Such artists are often shunned by the state-run galleries, but there are several private exhibition spaces that are happy to show nonconformist work. Anyone seriously interested in contemporary art should visit the Mashrabia or Townhouse galleries (p153) in Cairo.

SISTERS ARE DANCIN' IT FOR THEMSELVES *Louisa Young*

'Why did you make the heroine of your novels a belly dancer?' I get asked with some regularity. 'Because she gets to hang out in low dives and swanky hotels, wear fabulous outfits and consider the historical background to a woman's power over her own body, from Salome to contemporary prostitution, via Flaubert and sexual tourism in the developing world', I reply.

It's easy to forget, when you're being dragged up onto a tiny nightclub stage by a strapping Ukrainian lass in a sequinned bikini, that belly dancing is older than the hills, deeply private and an icon of postfeminism. Men and foreigners tend to see it as a sexual show but for many Arab women – and an increasing number of Western women – it is a personal activity incorporating identity, history and community alongside fun, exercise and girl-bonding.

The Babylonian goddess Ishtar, when she went down to the underworld to get her dead husband Tammuz back, danced with her seven veils at each of the seven entrances. Ancient Egyptian wall paintings, the Bible, Greek legend and *The Thousand and One Nights* are full of women dancing by and for themselves and each other. Salome's dance for Herod – the seven veils again – was so powerful because she was bringing into public what normally only happened in the women's quarters.

Arab domestic dancing nowadays tends to involve tea, cakes, female friends and relations, little girls and old ladies, a scarf around the hips and a lot of laughter and gossip. Western versions, particularly in the US and Germany, are the bastard children of aerobics classes, women's groups, New Age Goddess awareness, and the perennial female weakness for fancy underwear and showing off in it. Belly dancing is extremely good exercise – for the back, the figure, stamina, sex life. It's also good for the soul – it's an art, and requires the distilled concentration, self-respect and 'heart' necessary to art.

Louisa Young is the author of Baby Love, Desiring Cairo *and* Tree of Pearls.

For more information, see Liliane Karnouk's *Modern Egyptian Art 1910–2003,* or pick up Fatma Ismail's *29 Artists in the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art*.

Architecture

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (www.metmuseum.org/explore/newegypt/htm/a_index.htm) has an excellent web resource on the art of ancient Egypt.

Early in the 21st century, architecture in Egypt is in a sad state. In fact, according to one published survey, the highest rate of depression in 2000 in Egypt was among architects.

Besides Cairo's Opera House (p141) and Alexandria's Bibliotheca Alexandrina (p381) – both foreign designs – the country possesses few buildings of architectural worth that postdate the 1950s. The only exceptions are works by the influential Hassan Fathy, author of the seminal work *Architecture for the Poor* and designer of utopian projects such as New Gurna (p275) on Luxor's West Bank and the Fathy-influenced practice of Rami el-Dahan and Soheir Farid, responsible for the pavilion at the new Al-Azhar Park in Cairo (see the boxed text, p140).

The Theban Mapping Project (www.thebanmappingproject.com) is dedicated to all things to do with the Valley of the Kings – if only all Egyptology websites were this good.

This depressing reality wasn't always so. Cairo and Alexandria possess a splendid legacy of late-19th- and early-20th-century apartment blocks, villas and public buildings. Even more splendid is the capital's fantastic legacy of medieval architecture. Starting with the Mosque of Amr ibn al-As (p125) in AD 642, the earliest existing Islamic structure in Cairo, it's possible to trace the development of Muslim architecture through more than 1000 years of history. Sadly, these grand monuments are often overshadowed by chock-a-block brick and concrete high-rises. Unfortunately, a booming population and a lack of space mean that this architectural trend is not likely to be reversed anytime soon.

Environment

THE LAND

The Nile Valley is home to most Egyptians, with some 90% of the population confined to the narrow carpet of fertile land bordering the great river. To the south the river is hemmed in by mountains and the agricultural plain is narrow, but as the river flows north the land becomes flatter and the valley widens to between 20km and 30km.

Egypt has four of the world's five officially identified types of sand dunes, including the *seif* (sword) dunes, so named because they resemble the blades of curved Arab swords.

To the east of the valley is the Eastern Desert (this is also known as the Arabian Desert), a barren plateau bounded on its eastern edge by a high ridge of mountains that rises to more than 2000m and extends for about 800km. To the west is the Western Desert (also known as the Libyan Desert), which officially comprises two-thirds of the land surface of Egypt. If you ignore the political boundaries on the map, it stretches right across the top of North Africa under its better-known and highly evocative name, the Sahara.

Cairo also demarcates Egyptian geography as it lies roughly at the point where the Nile splits into several tributaries and the valley becomes a 200km-wide delta. Burdened with the task of providing for the entire country, this Delta region ranks among the world's most intensely cultivated lands.

Natural Selections: A Year of Egypt's Wildlife, written and illustrated by Richard Hoath and published locally by the American University in Cairo Press, is a passionate account of the birds, mammals, insects and marine creatures that make Egypt their home.

To the east, across the Suez Canal, is the triangular wedge of Sinai. A geological extension of the Eastern Desert, terrain here slopes from the high mountain ridges, which include Mt Sinai and Gebel Katarina (the highest mountain in Egypt at 2642m) in the south, to desert coastal plains and lagoons in the north.

WILDLIFE

Egypt is about 94% desert – such a figure conjures up images of vast, barren wastelands where nothing can live. However, there are plenty of desert regions where fragile ecosystems have adapted over millennia to extremely hostile conditions. For more information on desert flora, see the boxed text p458.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Tourism is vital to the Egyptian economy and the country would be a mess without it. At the same time, however, millions of visitors a year can't help but add to the ecological and environmental overload. As long as outsiders have been stumbling upon or searching for the wonders of ancient Egypt, they have also been crawling all over them, chipping bits off or leaving their own contributions engraved in the stones. Needless to say, this is not sustainable.

The organised menace of mass tourism threatens to destroy the very monuments that visitors come to see. At sites such as the Valley of the Kings, thousands of visitors a day mill about in cramped tombs designed for one occupant. The deterioration of the painted wall reliefs alarms archaeologists whose calls for limits on the numbers of visitors have largely fallen on deaf ears.

Even the Pyramids, which have so far survived 4500 years, are suffering. Cracks have begun to appear in inner chambers and, in cases like these, authorities have been forced to limit visitors and to close the great structures periodically to give them some rest and recuperation. It can only be a matter of time before similar measures are enforced elsewhere.

In the meantime, it's up to you, the traveller, to behave responsibly. Don't be tempted to baksheesh guards so you can use your flash in tombs. Don't clamber over toppled pillars and statues. Don't touch painted reliefs. It's all just common sense.

Animals

Egypt is home to about 100 species of mammals, though you'd be lucky to see anything other than camels, donkeys, horses and buffaloes. Although Egypt's deserts were once sanctuaries for an amazing variety of larger mammals, such as the leopard, cheetah, oryx, aardwolf, striped hyena and caracal, all of these have been brought to the brink of extinction through hunting. In fact, there's only one known family of cheetah still alive in Egypt, and many years have passed since a leopard was sighted. Other creatures such as the sand cat, the fennec fox and the Nubian ibex are very rarely sighted.

There are three types of gazelle in Egypt: the Arabian, Dorcas and white. Unfortunately, Arabian gazelles are thought to be extinct, and there are only individual sightings of Dorcas and white gazelles, despite the fact that herds were common features of the desert landscape only 35 years ago.

The zorilla, a kind of weasel, lives in the Gebel Elba region. In Sinai you may see the rock hyrax, a small creature about the size of a large rabbit, which lives in large groups and is extremely sociable.

Less loveable are the 34 species of snake in Egypt. The best known is the cobra, which featured prominently on the headdress of the ancient pharaohs. Another well-known species is the horned viper, a thickset snake that has horns over its eyes. There are also plenty of scorpions, although they're largely nocturnal and rarely seen. Be careful if you're lifting up stones, as they like to burrow into cool spots.

The Egyptian tortoise, native to the Mediterranean coastal desert, is one of the world's smallest tortoises; most males are less than 9cm long.

BIRDS

About 430 bird species have been sighted in Egypt, of which about one-third actually breed in Egypt, while most of the others are passage migrants or winter visitors. Each year an estimated one to two million large birds migrate via certain routes from Europe to Africa through Egypt. Most large birds, including flamingos, storks, cranes, herons and all large birds of prey, are protected under Egyptian law.

The most ubiquitous birds are the house sparrow and the hooded crow, while the most distinctive is the hoopoe. This cinnamon-toned bird has a head shaped like a hammer and extends its crest in a dramatic fashion when it's excited. Hoopoes are often seen hunting for insects in gardens in central Cairo, though they're more common in the countryside.

For information on bird watching in Egypt, see p502.

Birding Egypt (www.birdingegypt.com) serves the Egyptian birding community by listing top birding sites, rarities and travel tips.

MARINE LIFE

See Marine Life (p441) in the Diving the Red Sea chapter for details on Egypt's marine life.

At www.hepca.com you can learn about the efforts of HEPCA (Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association) to conserve the Red Sea's reefs through public awareness campaigns, direct community action and lobbying efforts.

Plants

The lotus that symbolises ancient Egypt can be found, albeit rarely, in the Delta area, but the papyrus reed, depicted in ancient art as vast swamps where the pharaohs hunted hippos, has disappeared from its natural habitats. Except for one clump found in 1968 in Wadi Natrun, papyrus is now found only in botanical gardens.

More than 100 varieties of grass thrive in areas where there is water, and the date palm can be seen in virtually every cultivable area. Along with tamarisk and acacia, the imported jacaranda and poinciana (red and orange flowers) have come to mark Egyptian summers with their vivid colours.

NATIONAL PARKS

Egypt currently has 23 'protected areas', although just what the status of 'protected area' means varies wildly. Take for instance the Nile Islands

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY: EGYPT'S WAVE OF THE FUTURE *Hassan Ansah*

People have often complained that Egypt is surrounded by some of the world's most lucrative oil producers, yet the country itself isn't endowed with such profitable resources. Yes, Egypt is loaded with historical monuments unmatched by any other country in the world, but some local entrepreneurs would love a little more access to the earth's black gold. Fortunately, the future just may give Egypt a level playing field in terms of energy resources, namely in the form of alternative energy – something that both capitalists and environmentalists can soundly agree upon.

One of Egypt's most acclaimed achievements is the High Dam in Aswan, which gave the country the opportunity to generate a large portion of its electricity cleanly and freely. For a country that still relies heavily on thermal power plants, which are notorious for emitting noxious fumes directly into the atmosphere, increased reliance on hydropower was definitely a step in the right direction. Currently, hydropower projects are under way in towns like Kanater and Nag Hammadi, which will hopefully set a precedent for further investment in this industry.

Another form of alternative energy that has huge potential in Egypt is wind power, more precisely large-scale wind farms. One of the largest wind farms in all of Africa and the Middle East is located in the town of Al-Zafaran, approximately halfway between Cairo and Hurghada. Here, along the windswept Red Sea coast, the average wind speed is 9m/s, which allows a production capability of over 150MW. Due to the success of this project, numerous other plans for construction of wind farms in towns along the coast are under way, with aims to increase the total wind capacity to at least 850MW by 2010.

There is also a growing business sector in Egypt for diverse forms of solar power usage, particularly in remote areas that are unable to access the unified power grid. A good example of this is the use of photovoltaics, which are high-powered reflectors that can produce voltage when exposed to sunlight. Photovoltaics are extremely advantageous in that they can be easily utilised for anything from illuminating roads to strengthening scattered mobile phone signals. Considering that Egypt basks in sunshine virtually year-round, there is an incredible amount of potential in this field.

Of course, despite the progress that has been made so far in the renewable energy industry within Egypt, significant problems and obstacles for its development remain. For instance, there are still heavy government regulations within the energy industry that protect existing large companies and hinder entrepreneurial innovation. Although government officials and businesses argue that nothing can compete with the cheapness and safe returns of electricity or natural gas, it's impossible to deny the impending global energy crisis, rising pollution levels and the threat of global warming.

Fortunately, government regulations may just be a temporary obstacle, especially considering Egypt's mushrooming population and increased energy needs. As more and more countries start to take drastic steps to reach sustainability in a time of depleting resources, there's reason to be optimistic that Egypt will follow suit. Furthermore, as an influential player in both Africa and the Middle East, Egypt is in a unique position to be able to induce a change in attitude beyond its borders.

Hassan Ansah is a freelance writer and journalist who has taught at the Western International University in Phoenix, Arizona, and at the American University in Cairo (AUC).

Protected Area, which runs all the way from Cairo to Aswan: nobody is clear which islands are included and most are inhabited and cultivated without restriction. Other sites are closed to the public while some, such as Ras Mohammed National Park (p460) in the Red Sea, are popular tourist destinations that have received international plaudits for their eco smarts.

The problem, as always, is a lack of funding. The Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) has neither the high-level support nor the resources needed to provide effective management of the protectorates. Some help has arrived through foreign donorship and assistance: the Italians at Wadi

UNDER A BLACK CLOUD

Cairo is close to claiming the dubious title of the world's most polluted city. Airborne smoke, soot, dust, and liquid droplets from fuel combustion constantly exceed World Health Organisation (WHO) standards (up to 259 ug/m3 when the international standard is 50), leading to skyrocketing instances of emphysema, asthma and cancer among the city's population. A startling feature article by Ursula Lindsey published in a March 2005 edition of *Cairo* magazine asserted that as many as 20,000 Cairenes die each year of pollution-related disease and that close to half a million contract pollution-related respiratory diseases every year.

The government blames the city's pollution on its dry, sandy climate, which leads, it says, to a thick dust rarely cleared by rain. Not surprisingly, it doesn't like to comment on contributing factors such as the increase in dirty industry (a direct result of government economic initiatives) and Cairo's ever-burgeoning population, a result of people moving to the city from rural areas in search of work.

Cars are, of course, a major offender. Some estimates place over two million cars in the greater Cairo area, and it's clear that this number is increasing every year. Very few run on unleaded petrol; most are poorly maintained diesel-run Fiats and Peugeots that spew out dangerous fumes.

Though factories are officially required to undertake environmental impact assessments and the government lays out a system of incentives and penalties designed to encourage industrial polluters to clean up their acts, few have done so and the government is doing little to prosecute offenders. Neither is it enforcing laws designed to have emission levels of vehicles tested. Organisations such as USAID are trying to turn the situation around, funding initiatives such as the US$200-million Cairo Air Improvement project. To date, however, these welcome initiatives are making little impact.

The seriousness of the situation is particularly apparent each October and November, when the infamous 'black cloud' appears over the city. A dense layer of smog that is variously blamed on thermal inversion, rice straw burning in the Delta, automobile exhaust, burning rubbish and industrial pollution, it is a vivid reminder of an increasingly serious environmental problem.

Rayyan; the EU at St Katherine; and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) at the Red Sea coast and islands.

Egypt has a number of notable national parks:

Lake Qarun Protected Area (p211) Scenic oasis lake important for wintering water birds.
Nabq Protected Area (p472) Southern Sinai coastal strip with the most northerly mangrove swamp in the world.
Ras Mohammed National Park (p460) Spectacular reefs with sheer cliffs of coral; a haven for migrating white storks in autumn.
Siwa Reserve (p355) Three separate areas of natural springs, palm groves, salt lakes and endangered Dorcas gazelles.
St Katherine Protectorate (p490) Mountains rich in plant and animal life including Nubian ibex and rock hyrax.
Wadi Rayyan (p211) Uninhabited Saharan oasis with endangered wildlife.
White Desert (p347) White chalk monoliths, fossils and rock formations.
Zerenike Protectorate (p497) A lagoon on Lake Bardawil that harbours migrating water birds.

You can download the Wadi Rayyan Protected Area atlas, which contains 15 chapters of photos and maps, at www.wadielrayyan.org.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Ill-planned touristic development remains one of the biggest threats to Egypt's environment, particularly along the Red Sea coast and in Sinai. Following decades of frenzied development along the Red Sea coast, damaged coral reefs now run along most of its length. In Sinai, the coastline near Sharm el-Sheikh is already the site of a building boom and half-finished and extremely ugly resorts are clamouring for every speck of beach front. Whether the businesspeople investing here will make good on their

promises to protect the reefs around the area remains to be seen. Given their past record there is little reason to believe them.

The opening of the Nile bridge in Luxor (previously there was only a ferry) and the destruction of large parts of the West Bank has finally happened. After more than 50 years of trying to move people off the hillside, the present governor finally succeeded. He is also planning on knocking down some of central Luxor to excavate the avenue of sphinxes that once linked Karnak and Luxor Temple. Luxor residents are quaking at the might of the new ruler.

Fortunately, there have been some positive developments. A National Parks office (see boxed text, p425) has opened in Hurghada and it is hoping to rein in some of the more grandiose development plans in the Marsa Alam area. And new 'green' guidelines for running hotels are being trialled under a joint US-Egyptian Red Sea Sustainable Tourism Initiative (RSSTI). Recommendations focus on energy use, water conservation, and handling and disposal of waste, including simple measures such as installing foot-pedal taps at sinks, which make it harder to leave water running.

Finally, Egypt now has a growing number of high-profile ecolodges – including the fabulous Basata in Sinai (p488) and Adrére Amellal at Siwa (p363) – which may be the harbingers of a new, environmentally responsible trend in Egyptian tourism. We can only hope that this is the case.

Food & Drink

The reputation of Egyptian cuisine takes a constant battering, largely because it's compared with regional heavyweights such as those of Lebanon, Turkey and Iran. Truth be told, Egypt does not have a well-established culinary heritage, and lacks the diversity and regionalisation of dishes found elsewhere in the Middle East. However, this ill-reputation is unfortunate simply because the food here is good, honest peasant fare that packs an occasional – and sensational – knockout punch.

Whether you're a hard-core carnivore or a devoted vegetarian, Egypt never fails to serve up cheap and hearty fare. True to its Middle East roots, Egyptian meals typically centre on lightly-spiced lamb or chicken, though there's enough coastline to reel in the fruits of the sea. Of course, even meat lovers will wait in line for hot and crispy falafel, the ubiquitous Middle Eastern vegetarian staple. Regardless of your culinary preference however, you can always count on stacks of freshly baked pita and heaping bowls of rice to accompany any meal.

There is always room for dessert in Egypt. This is one culinary arena where the country really shines, especially when you accompany your plate of delectable treats with a cup of dark, thick and knock-your-socks-off-strong coffee. And, just when your stomach is about to explode, signal your waiter to bring you an apple-scented *sheesha* (water pipe) – a few long, drawn out puffs not only settles the stomach but also relaxes the mind and calms the nerves.

A New Book of Middle Eastern Food by Egyptian-born Claudia Roden brought the cuisines of the region to the attention of Western cooks when it was released in 1968. It's still an essential reference, as fascinating for its cultural insights as for its great recipes.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Mezze

Largely vegetable based and always bursting with colour and flavour, mezze (a selection of hot and cold starters) aren't strictly Egyptian (many hail from the Levant), but they have been customised here in a more limited and economical form. They're the perfect start to any meal, and it's usually perfectly acceptable for diners to order an entire meal from the mezze list and forego the mains.

Bread

'Aish (bread) is the most important staple of the national diet. Usually made with a combination of plain and wholemeal flour with sufficient leavening to form a pocket and soft crust, it's cooked over an open flame. Locals use it in lieu of cutlery to scoop up dips, and rip it into pieces to wrap around

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

- *Fatta* – dish involving rice and bread soaked in a garlicky-vinegary sauce with lamb or chicken, which is then oven cooked in a *tāgen* (clay pot). It's very heavy; after eating retire to a chaise longue.
- *Mahshi kurumb* – these rice- and meat-stuffed cabbage leaves are decadently delightful when correctly cooked with plenty of dill and lots of sinful *semna* (clarified butter).
- *Molokhiyya* – a soup made from mallow. Properly prepared with rabbit broth and plenty of garlic, it's quite delicious.
- *Hamam mahshi* – smaller than European pigeons and usually stuffed with *fireek* (green wheat) and rice, this dish is served at all traditional restaurants but can be fiddly to eat. Beware the plentiful little bones.

morsels of meat. *Shammy,* a version made with plain flour only, is the usual wrapping for *ta'amiyya* (see Quick Eats, p97).

Salads

Dozens of recipes for tasty Egyptian dishes can be found at http://food downunder.com/cgi-bin /search.cgi?q=egyptian.

Simplicity is the key to Egyptian salads, with crunchy fresh ingredients (including herbs) often tossed in oil and vinegar, and eaten with relish as a mezze or as an accompaniment to a meat or fish main. Two salads are found on menus throughout the country: oriental salad, a colourful mix of chopped tomatoes, cucumber, onion and pepper; and the Middle East's signature salad, *tabbouleh* (bulgur wheat, parsley and tomato, with a sprinkling of sesame seeds, lemon and garlic). Less common, but equally delicious, is a salad made of boiled beetroot with a tangy oil and vinegar dressing.

Vegetables & Soups

In Egypt, there's none of the silly Western fixation with preparing vegetables that are out of season – here tomatoes are eaten when they're almost bursting out of their skins with sweet juices, corn is picked when it's golden and plentiful, and cucumbers are munched when they're soft and sweet.

There are a number of vegetables that are particular to Middle Eastern cuisine, including *molokhiyya,* a green leafy vegetable known in the West as mallow. Here it's made into a slimy and surprisingly sexy soup with a glutinous texture and earthy flavour. Usually served as an accompaniment to roast chicken, it inspires an almost religious devotion among locals.

Vegetable soups are extremely popular, as are soups made with pulses. *Shourba ads* (lentil soup) is made with red or yellow lentils, and is always served with wedges of lemon on the side. *Fuul nabbed* (broad bean soup) is almost as popular.

Meats

The Complete Middle East Cookbook by Tess Mallos is full of easy-to-follow recipes and devotes an entire chapter to the cuisine of Egypt.

Kofta and kebab are two of the most popular dishes in Egypt. *Kofta,* spiced ground lamb or beef peppered with spices and shaped into balls, is skewered and grilled. It is the signature element of the Egyptian favourite *daoud basha,* meatballs cooked with pine nuts and tomato sauce in a *tāgen* (a clay pot; also used to describe a stew cooked in one of these pots). Kebab is skewered and flame-grilled chunks of meat, normally lamb (the chicken equivalent is called *shish tawouq*). The meat usually comes on a bed of *badounis* (parsley), and may be served in upmarket restaurants with grilled tomatoes and onions; otherwise you eat it with bread, salad and tahini.

Firekh (chicken) roasted on a spit is a commonly spotted dish, and in restaurants is typically ordered by the half. *Hamam* (pigeon) is also extremely popular, and is best served as *tāgen* with onions, tomatoes and rice or cracked wheat.

Seafood

For a basic overview of Egyptian food in addition to recipes for the country's most popular dishes, check out www.foodby country.com/Alergia-to -France/Egypt.com.

When in Alexandria, along the Red Sea and in Sinai, you'll undoubtedly join the locals in falling hook, line and sinker for the marvellous array of fresh seafood on offer. Local favourites are *kalamaari* (squid); *balti,* which are about 15cm long, flattish and grey with a light belly; and the larger, tastier *bouri* (mullet). You'll also commonly find sea bass, bluefish, sole, *subeit* or *gambari* (shrimp) on restaurant menus. The most popular ways to cook fish are to bake them with salt, grill them over coals or fry them in olive oil.

Desserts & Sweets

If you have a sweet tooth, be prepared to put it to good use on your travels in Egypt. The prince of local puds is undoubtedly *muhalabiyya,* a concoc-

tion like blancmange, made using ground rice, milk, sugar and rose or orange water and topped with chopped pistachios and almonds. Almost as popular are *ruz bi laban* (rice pudding) and *omm ali* (layers of pastry filled with nuts and raisins, soaked in cream and milk, and baked in the oven). Seasonal fresh fruit is just as commonly served, and provides a refreshing finale to any meal.

Best of all are the pastries, including *kunafa,* a vermicelli-like pastry over a vanilla base soaked in syrup that is often associated with feasts and is always eaten at Ramadan. The most famous of all pastries is baklava, made from delicate filo drenched in honey or syrup. Variations on baklava are flavoured with fresh nuts or stuffed with wickedly rich clotted cream *(eishta)*.

The popular Egyptian dessert of *omm ali* is said to have been introduced into the country by Miss O'Malley, an Irish mistress of Khedive Ismail.

DRINKS

Tea & Coffee

Drinking *shai* (tea) is the signature pastime of the country, and it is seen as strange and decidedly antisocial not to swig the tannin-laden beverage at regular intervals throughout the day. *Shai* will either come in the form of a teabag plonked in a cup or glass of hot water (Lipton is the usual brand) or a strong brew of the local leaves (the brew of choice is El Arosa).

It is always served sweet; to moderate this, order it *sukar shwaiyya,* with 'a little sugar'. If you don't want any sugar, ask for *min ghayr sukar*. Far more refreshing, when it's in season, is *shai* served with mint leaves: ask for *shai na'na'*. Be warned that you'll risk severe embarrassment if you ask for milk anywhere but in tourist hotels and restaurants. In these places, ask for *b'laban*.

Turkish and Arabic coffee *(ahwa;* the word is also used for coffeehouse*)* aren't widely consumed in the region; instant coffee (always called *neskaf*) is far more common. If you do find the real stuff, it's likely to be a thick and powerful Turkish-style brew that's served in small cups and drunk in a couple of short sips. As with tea, you have to specify how much sugar you want: *ahwa mazboot* comes with a moderate amount of sugar but is still fairly sweet; if you don't want any sugar ask for *ahwa saada*.

Beer & Wine

For beer in Egypt just say 'Stella'. It's been brewed and bottled in Cairo now for more than 100 years. A yeasty and highly drinkable lager, it has a taste that varies enormously by batch. Since 1998, the standard Stella has been supplemented by sister brews including Stella Meister (a light lager) and Stella Premium (for the beer snob in us all). Most locals just stick to the unfussy basic brew – it's the cheapest (around E£10 in restaurants), and as long as it's cold, it's not bad. Since the late 1990s, there's been a worthy 'competitor' on the market called Saqqara, though this is actually owned by the same brewery as Stella.

There's a growing viticulture industry around Alexandria, but the product is pretty unimpressive; Grand de Marquise is by far the best of a lacklustre bunch, producing an Antipodean-style red and a Chablis-style white. Obelisk is a newcomer to the scene, and has a quaffable Cabernet Sauvignon, a Pinot Blanc and a dodgy rosé. The country's oldest winery Gianaclis produces three decidedly headache-inducing tipples: a dry red known as Omar Khayyam, a rosé called Rubis D'Egypte and a gasoline-like dry white called Cru des Ptolémées.

These wines average between E£100 and E£150 per bottle in restaurants throughout the country. Imported wines are both hard to find and prohibitively expensive.

Water

Don't even *think* of drinking from the tap in Egypt – the dreaded 'Nile Piles' is enough to ruin any traveller's day. Cheap bottled water is readily available in even the smallest towns.

With that said, there is some debate regarding the drinkability of water in Cairo. Although we'll leave it to you to see whether or not your body can cope, according to one Cairo expat: 'You can drink the water in Cairo, I swear. It just tastes less than delicious.'

Other Drinks

Over the hot summer months many *ahwa*-goers forgo their regular teas and coffees for cooler drinks such as the crimson-hued, iced *karkadai,* a wonderfully refreshing drink boiled up from hibiscus leaves; *limoon* (lemon juice); or *zabaady* (yogurt beaten with cold water and salt). In winter many prefer *sahlab,* a warm drink made with semolina powder, milk and chopped nuts; or *yansoon,* a medicinal-tasting aniseed drink.

Did you know that the delicious drink *karkadai,* made from boiling hibiscus leaves, is famous for 'strengthening the blood' (lowering blood pressure)?

Juice stands are recognisable by the hanging bags of netted fruit (and carrots) that adorn their façades and are an absolute godsend on a hot summer's day. Standard juices *(asiir)* include *moz* (banana), *guafa* (guava), *limoon* (lemon), *manga* (mango), *bortuaan* (orange), *rumman* (pomegranate), *farawla* (strawberry), and *asab* (sugar cane). A glass costs between 50pt and E£2 depending on the fruit used.

CELEBRATIONS

Egyptians love nothing more than a celebration, and food plays an important role when it comes to giving thanks for a birth, celebrating an engagement or marriage, bringing in a harvest or marking a significant religious holiday.

The most important religious feasts occur during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month. *Iftar,* the evening meal prepared to break the fast, is a special feast calling for substantial soups, chicken and meat dishes, and other delicacies. It's often enjoyed communally in the street or in large, specially erected tents.

Family celebrations are always accompanied by a flurry of baking. *Ataïf* (pancakes dipped in syrup) are eaten on the day of a betrothal and biscuits known as *kahk bi loz* (almond bracelets) are favourites at wedding parties. The birth of a son is marked by serving an aromatic rice pudding with aniseed called *meghlie*. *Moulids* (see p509) also involve copious eating of sweet pastries.

WHERE & WHEN TO EAT & DRINK

In Egypt, one rule stands firm: the best food is always served in private homes. If you are fortunate enough to be invited to share a home-cooked meal, make sure you take up the offer. Be warned however that you will most likely be stuffed to the point of bursting – the minute you look close to cleaning your plate, you will be showered with more food, which no amount of protesting can stop.

Looking to learn more about food and drink in ancient Egypt? Be sure to visit www.civilization.ca/civil/Egypt/egcl02e.html.

The only place we'd recommend branching out and trying other regional cuisines is Cairo as well as in tourist cities such as Luxor, Sharm el-Sheikh and Dahab. Otherwise, look for where the locals are eating. In Alexandria for instance, you should follow their lead and dine out in the local seafood restaurants – they're some of the best in the region.

When you do eat out, you'll find that locals usually dine at a later hour than is the norm in the West; it's usual to see diners arrive at a restaurant at 10pm or even later in the big cities, particularly in summer. They also dine in large family groups, order up big, smoke like chimneys and linger over their meals.

BEFORE THERE WAS STARBUCKS

The coffeehouse or *ahwa* (the Arabic word means both coffee and the place in which it's drunk) is one of the great Egyptian social institutions. Typically just a collection of cheap tin-plate-topped tables and wooden chairs in a sawdust-strewn room open to the street, the *ahwa* is a relaxed and unfussy place where the average Joe (or Ahmed) will hang out for part of each day, whiling away the hours reading the papers, meeting friends or sipping tea. The hubbub of conversation is usually accompanied by the incessant clacking or slamming of *domina* (dominoes) and *towla* (backgammon) pieces, and the burbling of smokers drawing heavily on their *sheesha*s (water pipes).

The *sheesha* is a tradition, an indulgence and a slightly naughty habit all wrapped into one gloriously fragrant and relaxing package. A feature of coffeehouses from Alexandria to Aswan, it's a pastime that's as addictive as it is magical. Traditionally *ahwa*-going has been something of an all-male preserve, and older men at that, but in recent years *sheesha* smoking has become extremely fashionable. It's now common to see young, mixed-sex groups of Egyptians in *ahwas,* especially in Cairo and Alexandria. In fact, *sheesha* is sweeping the world – from New York to London and Tokyo to Sydney, *sheesha* bars are all the rage these days.

When you order a water pipe you'll need to specify the type of tobacco and molasses mix you would like. Most people opt for tobacco soaked in apple juice *(tufah),* but it's also possible to order strawberry, melon, cherry or mixed-fruit flavours. Some purists order their tobacco unadulterated, but in doing this they miss out on the wonderfully sweet and fragrant aroma that makes the experience so memorable. Once you've specified your flavour, a decorated bulbous glass pipe filled with water will be brought to your table, hot coals will be placed in it to get it started and you will be given a disposable plastic mouthpiece to slip over the pipe's stem. Just draw back and you're off. The only secret to a good smoke is to take a puff every now and again to keep the coals hot; when they start to lose their heat the waiter (or dedicated water pipe–minder) will replace them. Bliss!

Of course, it's worth mentioning that even though the smoke from *sheesha* is filtered through water and tastes nothing like the tobacco from cigarettes, it's still smoke nevertheless. Studies vary, but since you're pulling large volumes of smoke into your lungs with each puff, it has been estimated that a one-hour *sheesha* session delivers as much tar as smoking an entire pack of cigarettes. Consider yourself warned. The good news however is that *sheesha* isn't nearly as addictive as cigarettes, so it's unlikely that you'll stealing be away in morning hours to puff one before breakfast. The intoxicating scents of roasted coffee and apple tobacco are a seductive blend, and about as authentically Egyptian as you can get.

The main meal of the day is usually lunch – see p503 for restaurants' and cafés' business hours. Tipping is expected in almost every eatery and restaurant and 10% is the norm.

Quick Eats

Forget the bland international snack food served up by the global chains: once you've sampled the joys of Egyptian street food you'll never again be able to face dining under golden arches or with the colonel.

The national stars of the snack-food line-up are *fuul* and *ta'amiyya*, and they are both things of joy when served and eaten fresh. *Fuul*, an unassuming peasant dish of slow-cooked fava beans cooked with garlic and garnished with parsley, olive oil, lemon, salt, black pepper and cumin, is the national dish. It's absolutely delicious stuffed into *shammy* and eaten as a sandwich. *Ta'amiyya* (better known outside Cairo as felafel) is mashed broad beans and spices rolled into balls and deep fried.

www.foodtimeline.org/foodfaq3.html offers an impressive overview of the history of food from Mesopotamia through the Middle Ages.

Almost as popular as *fuul* and *ta'amiyya* is *shwarma*, the local equivalent of the Greek *gyros* sandwich or the Turkish *döner kebap;* strips are sliced from a vertical spit of compressed lamb or chicken, sizzled on a hot plate with chopped tomatoes and garnish, and then stuffed into a *shammy.*

OUR FAVOURITE EATERIES

- Qadoura (p388) in Alexandria. The best seafood in the country, especially when the sea has been bountiful.
- Sabaya (p164) in Cairo. Lebanese food as impressive as anything you'll find in Beirut.
- Oasis Café (p283) in Luxor. Sophisticated décor and a colonial ambience complement the eclectic menu at this tourist favourite.
- Al-Fanar (p469) in Sharm el-Sheikh. Arguably the best pizza in Egypt, with stunning ocean views and a chic Bedouin-inspired ambience to match.
- Funny Mummy (p478) in Dahab. A popular seaside tourist spot serving Western and Asian favourites beneath a palm-tree canopy.

You should also look out for shops sporting large metal tureens in the window: these specialise in the vegetarian delight *kushari,* a delicate mix of noodles, rice, black lentils and dried onions, served with an accompanying tomato sauce that's sometimes fiery with chilli. Although the entire concoction is somewhat reminiscent of your mum's leftovers thrown together in a dish, it's extremely cheap and filling, and authentically Egyptian to boot. Don't forget to splash a healthy amount of the provided garlicky vinegar on your *kushari.*

The local variation of the pizza is *fiteer,* which has a thin, flaky pastry base. Try it topped with salty haloumi cheese, or even with a mixture of sugar-dusted fruit.

Picturesque as some of them are, avoid the street carts trundled around by vendors. These guys sell anything from sandwiches to milk puddings, but the food has often been out in the sun all day long, not to mention exposed to fumes, dust and all manner of insect life.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Still hungry? More recipes for tasty Egyptian dishes can be found at www.gourmet.gr/recipes/egyptian/?gid=1&nodeid=23.

Though it's quite usual for the people of the Middle East to eat vegetarian meals, the concept of vegetarianism is quite foreign. Say you're a vegan, and Egyptians will either look mystified or assume that you're 'fessing up to some sort of socially aberrant behaviour.

Fortunately, it's not difficult to order vegetable-based dishes. You'll find that you can eat loads of mezze and salads, *fuul, kushari, ta'amiyya,* the occasional omelette or oven-baked vegetable *tāgen*s with okra and eggplant. When in doubt, you can always order a stack of pita bread and a bowl of hummus, which can easily be a meal itself. If your diet enables you to eat fish, fresh seafood is nearly always available in tourist towns and along the coasts.

The main source of inadvertent meat eating is meat stock, which is often used to make otherwise vegetarian *tāgen*s and soups. Your hosts or waiter may not even consider such stock to be meat, so they will reassure you that the dish is vegetarian. Be vigilant.

Egyptian Cooking: A Practical Guide by Samia Abdennour is published by the American University Press and readily available in Egypt.

EATING WITH KIDS

It's usual for Egyptians to eat out as a family group, and you'll often see children and teenagers dining with their parents and friends in restaurants until the early hours. Waiters are uniformly accepting of children, and they will usually go out of their way to make them feel welcome (offerings of fried potato chips being a tried and true method). Best of all, the cuisine of the region is very child-friendly, being simple yet varied.

Letting the youngest members of the party choose from the mezze dishes is a good idea, kebabs (particularly *shish tawouq*) are perennial favourites and roast chicken is usually a safe bet, especially when put into fresh bread

DOS & DON'TS

- Remember to always remove your shoes before sitting down on a rug or carpet to eat or drink tea.
- Avoid putting your left hand into a communal dish if you're eating Bedouin style – your left hand is used for, well, wiping yourself in the absence of toilet paper.
- Be sure to leave the dining area and go outside or to the toilet before blowing your nose in a restaurant.
- Make sure you refrain from eating, drinking or smoking in public during the daytime in the holy month of Ramadan (international hotels are an exception to this rule).
- Always sit at the dinner table next to a person of the same sex unless your host(ess) suggests otherwise.

to make a sandwich. And of course the snack foods tend to go down a treat, particularly *fiteer, kushari* and *ta'amiyya*. Fresh juice and soft drinks are almost always available to quench Junior's thirst, too.

Some places have high chairs, but they're in the minority. Kid's menus are usually only seen at Western-style hotel restaurants.

For more information on travelling with children, see p503.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Egyptians eat a standard three meals a day. When it comes to breakfast, Kellogg's has yet to make inroads – for much of the populace the morning meal consists of bread and cheese, maybe olives or a fried egg at home, or a *fuul* sandwich on the run. Lunch is the day's main meal, taken from 2pm onwards, but more likely around 3pm or 4pm when dad's home from work and the kids are back from school. Whatever's served, the women of the house (usually the mother) will probably have spent most of her day in the kitchen preparing it, it'll be hot and there'll probably be plenty to go around. Whatever's left over is usually served up again later in the evening as supper.

For younger readers, www.historyforkids.org/learn/Egypt/food/egyptfood.htm is a great kid-friendly overview of food in ancient Egypt.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Following are some phrases to help you order successfully. For pronunciation guidelines, see p543.

Useful Phrases

Table for (five), please.	ta·ra·*bay*·za li (*kham*·sa) low sa·*maHt*
May we see the menu?	*mum*·kin ni·*shoof* il mi·*nay*?
Is service included in the bill?	il Hi·*saab shaa*·mil il *khid*·ma?
I'm vegetarian.	*a*·na na·*baa*·tee (male speaker)/ *a*·na na·ba·*tee*·ya (female speaker)
Do you have any vegetarian dishes?	'*an*·dak *ak*·la na·ba·*tee*·ya?
I can't eat dairy products.	ma ba·*kulsh* il al·*baan*
Please bring us the bill.	low sa·*maHt* hat·*li*·na il Hi·*saab*

Menu Decoder

MEZZE

Note that because of the imprecise nature of transliterating Arabic into English, spellings will vary; for example, what we give as *kibbeh* may appear variously as 'kibba', 'kibby' or even 'gibeh'.

baba ghanoug (*ba*·ba gha·*noug*) – a lumpy paste of mashed eggplant mixed with tomato and onion and sometimes, in season, pomegranate; done well, it has a delicious smoky taste

besara (be·*sā*·ra) – purée of broad beans served as a dip

hummus (*Hum*·mus) – cooked chickpeas ground into a paste and mixed with tahini, garlic and lemon; this is available in every restaurant and at its best it should be thick and creamy
kibbeh (*kib*·beh) – minced lamb, bulgur wheat and pine seeds shaped into a patty and deep-fried
kibbeh nayeh (*kib*·beh *nay*·eh) – ground lamb and cracked wheat served raw like steak tartare
kibda (*kib*·da) – liver, often chicken liver *(kibda firekh),* usually sautéed in lemon or garlic; done correctly it should have an almost pâtélike consistency
labneh (*lab*·neh) – a cheesy yogurt paste, which is often heavily flavoured with garlic or sometimes, even better, with mint
loubieh (*lou*·bieh) – French bean salad with tomatoes, onions and garlic
mahshi (*maH*·shi) – mincemeat, rice, onions, parsley and herbs stuffed into vine leaves (in summer), cabbage (in winter), peppers, courgettes or white and black eggplants; the mixture is baked and is delicious when just cooked and hot, but less so when cold
mokh (mokh) – brains served crumbed and deep fried or whole, garnished with salad
muhalabiyya (mu·hal·a·*biy*·ya) – blancmangelike concoction made with ground rice, milk, sugar and rose or orange water and topped with chopped pistachios and almonds
muttabel (mut·*ta*·bel) – similar to *baba ghanoug* but the blended eggplant is mixed with tahini, yogurt and olive oil to achieve a creamier consistency
sanbusak (san·*boo*·sak) – pastry filled with salty white cheese or spicy minced meat with pine kernels
shanklish (shank·*leesh*) – a salad of small pieces of crumbled, tangy, eye-wateringly strong cheese mixed with chopped onion and tomato
tabbouleh (tab·*bou*·leh) – a salad of bulgur wheat, parsley and tomato, with a sprinkling of sesame seeds, lemon and garlic
tahina/tahini (ta·*Hee*·na/ta·*Hee*·nee) – paste made of sesame seeds and served as dip
wara einab (*wa*·ra' *ai*·nab) – stuffed vine leaves, served both hot and cold

MAIN COURSES

fasoolyeh (fa·*sool*·yeh) – a green-bean stew
hamam (Ham·*aam*) – pigeon, usually baked or grilled and served stuffed with rice and spices; it's also served as a stew (*tāgen),* cooked in a deep clay pot
kebab (ke·*baab*) – skewered chunks of meat (usually lamb) cooked over a flame grill
kofta (*kof*·ta) – mincemeat and spices grilled on a skewer
shish tawouq (shish ta·*wouq*) – kebab with pieces of marinated, spiced chicken instead of lamb

DESSERTS

asabeeh (a·*sā*·beeh) – rolled filo pastry filled with pistachio, pine and cashew nuts and honey; otherwise known as 'lady's fingers'
baklava (*ba*·kla·wa) – generic term for any layered, flaky pastry with nuts, drenched in honey
barazak (*ba*·ra·zak) – flat, circular cookies sprinkled with sesame seeds; very crisp and light
isfinjiyya (is·fin·*jiy*·ya) – coconut slice
kunafa (ku·*naa*·fa) – vermicelli-like strands of cooked batter over a creamy sweet cheese base baked in syrup
mushabbak (mu·*shab*·bak) – lace-shaped pastry drenched in syrup
zalabiyya (za·la·*beey*·ya) – pastries dipped in rose-water

Food Glossary

BASICS

ah·wa	coffeehouse
kub·*baa*·ya	glass
makh·baz	bakery
ma'·*la'*·a	spoon
ma·t'am	restaurant
me·*nai*	menu
shō·ka	fork
si·*kee*·na	knife
ta·ba'	plate

COOKING TERMS

fil·*forn*	baked
ma'·li	fried
mas·*loo'*	boiled

DRINKS

ah·wa	coffee
bee·ra	beer
la·ban	milk
li·*moon*	lemonade
may·ya	water
may·ya ma'·dan·*eey*·ya	mineral water
shai	tea

FRUIT & VEGETABLES

a·na·*naas*	pineapple
ar·na·*beet*	cauliflower
ba'·*doo*·nis	parsley
bam·ya	okra
ba·sal	onion
ba·*tā*·tis	potatoes
bat·*teekh*	watermelon
bi·*sil*·la	peas
bur·tu'·*ān*	orange
fa·*raw*·la	strawberry
ga·*waa*·fa	guava
ga·zar	carrot
'i·nab	grapes
man·ga	mango
mooz	banana
oo·tah/ta·*mā*·tim	tomato
tom	garlic
tor·shi	pickled vegetables
tuf·*faaH*	apple

MEAT

fir·*aakh*	chicken
kib·da	liver
laH·ma	meat
laH·ma *dā*·ni	lamb

OTHER FOODS & CONDIMENTS

'a·*sal*	honey
bayd	eggs
fil·fil	pepper
gib·na	cheese
mal·H	salt
sa·*lā*·ta	salad
suk·kar	sugar
talg	ice
za·*baa*·di	yogurt
zib·da	butter

STAPLES

'ai·sh	bread
ruz	rice