

- 1) **Course Introduction and Brief History of Ancient Egypt. Mohamed Ali.** A series of select readings provide background on why Egypt has always played a pivotal leadership role in the region. This includes Egypt's movement from a historical position of regional dominance, to being under the influence of European and Russian powers, to once again becoming a regional power. (Oct 21)

Ancient Egypt

Overview

The basic element in the lengthy history of Egyptian civilization is geography. The Nile River rises from the lakes of central Africa as the White Nile and from the mountains of Ethiopia as the Blue Nile. The White and Blue Nile meet at Khartoum and flow together northward to the Nile delta, where the 4000 mile course of this river spills into the Mediterranean Sea (see [map](#)).



Less than two inches of rain per year falls in the delta and rain is relatively unknown in other parts of Egypt. Most of the land is uninhabitable. These geographical factors have determined the character of Egyptian civilization. People could farm only along the banks of the Nile, where arid sand meets the fertile soil. Of course, each summer the Nile swells as the rains pour down and the snow melts on the mountains. The river overflows its banks and floods the land with fresh water and deposits a thick layer of rich alluvial soil. The land would then yield two harvests before winter. This yearly flood determined more than just the agricultural needs of early Egypt. It also determined the lifecycle of society and helped to create the world view of ancient Egyptian civilization.

The basic source of Egyptian history is a list of rulers compiled in c.280 B.C. by Manetho for the Macedonians who ruled Egypt. Manetho divided Egyptian kings into thirty dynasties (a 31st was added later) in the following manner.

NAME	DYNASTY	YEARS
Archaic Period	1-2	3100-2700 B.C.
Old Kingdom	3-6	2700-2200 B.C.
Intermediate Period	7-10	2200-2050 B.C.
Middle Kingdom	11-12	2050-1800 B.C.
Intermediate Period	13-17	1800-1570 B.C.
New Kingdom	18-20	1570-1085 B.C.
Post-Empire	21-31	1085-332 B.C.

Early Egypt was divided into two kingdoms, one in Upper Egypt (Nile Valley), and one in Lower Egypt (Nile delta). Remember, the Nile flows from south to north.

Egyptian Dynasties

[Menes](#) (or Narmer) unified Upper and Lower Egypt and established his capital at Memphis around 3000 B.C.. By the time of the Old Kingdom, the land had been consolidated under the central power of a king, who was also the "owner" of all Egypt. Considered to be divine, he stood above the priests and was the only individual who had direct contact with the gods. The economy was a royal monopoly and so there was no word in Egyptian for "trader." Under the king was a carefully graded hierarchy of officials, ranging from the governors of provinces down through local mayors and tax collectors. The entire system was supported by the work of slaves, peasants and artisans.

The Old Kingdom reached its highest stage of development in the Fourth Dynasty. The most tangible symbols of this period of greatness are the three enormous pyramids built as the tombs of kings at Giza between 2600 and 2500. The largest, [Khufu](#) (called Cheops by the Greeks), was originally 481 feet high and 756 feet long on each side. Khufu was made up of 2.3 million stone blocks averaging 2.5 tons each. In the 5th century B.C. the Greek historian [Herodotus](#) tells us that the pyramid took 100,000 men and twenty years to build. The pyramids are remarkable not only for their technical engineering expertise, but also for what they tell us about royal power at the time. They are evidence that Egyptian kings had enormous wealth as well as the power to concentrate so much energy on a personal project.

The priests, an important body within the ruling caste, were a social force working to modify the king's supremacy. Yielding to the demands of the priests of Re, a sun god, kings began to call themselves "sons of Re," adding his name as a suffix to their own. Re was also worshipped in temples that were sometimes larger than the pyramids of later kings.

In the Old Kingdom, royal power was absolute. The pharaoh (the term originally meant "great house" or "palace"), governed his kingdom through his family and appointed officials. The lives of the peasants and artisans was carefully regulated: their movement was limited and they were taxed heavily. Luxury accompanied the pharaoh in life and in death and he was raised to an exalted level by his people. The Egyptians worked for the pharaoh and obeyed him because he was a living god on whom the entire fabric of social life depended. No codes of law were needed since the pharaoh was the direct source of all law.

In such a world, government was merely one aspect of religion and religion dominated Egyptian life. The [gods of Egypt](#) came in many forms: animals, humans and natural forces. Over time, Re, the sun god, came to assume a dominant place in Egyptian religion.

The Egyptians had a very clear idea of the afterlife. They took great care to bury their dead according to convention and supplied the grave with things that the departed would need for a pleasant life after death. The pharaoh and some nobles had their bodies preserved in a process of [mummification](#). Their tombs were decorated with paintings, food was provided at burial and after. Some tombs even included full sized sailing vessels for the voyage to heaven and beyond. At first, only pharaohs were thought to achieve eternal life, however, nobles were eventually included, and finally all Egyptians could hope for immortality.

The Egyptians also developed a system of writing. Although the idea may have come from Mesopotamia, the script was independent of the cuneiform. Egyptian writing began as pictographic and was later combined with sound signs to produce a difficult and complicated script that the Greeks called hieroglyphics ("sacred carvings"). Though much of what we have today is preserved on wall paintings and carvings, most of Egyptian writing was done with pen and ink on fine paper (papyrus). In 1798 Napoleon invaded Egypt as part of his Grand Empire. He brought with a Commission of Science and Arts composed of more than one hundred scientists, engineers and mathematicians. In 1799 the Commission discovered a basalt fragment on the west bank of the Nile at Rachid. The fragment is now known by its English name, the [Rosetta Stone](#). The Egyptian hieroglyphics found on the Rosetta Stone were eventually deciphered in 1822 by [Jean François Champollion](#) (1790-1832), a French scholar who had mastered Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Coptic. The Rosetta Stone contains three inscriptions. The uppermost is written in hieroglyphics; the second in what is now called demotic, the common script of ancient Egypt; and the third in Greek. Champollion guessed that the three inscriptions contained the same text and so he spent the next fourteen years (1808-1822) working from the Greek to the demotic and finally to the hieroglyphics until he had deciphered the whole text. The Rosetta Stone is now on display at the [British Museum](#) in London.

During the period of the Middle Kingdom (2050-1800 B.C.) the power of the pharaohs of the Old Kingdom waned as priests and nobles gained more independence and influence. The governors of the regions of Egypt (*nomes*) gained hereditary claim to their offices and subsequently their families acquired large estates. About 2200 B.C. the Old Kingdom collapsed and gave way to the decentralization of the First Intermediate Period (2200-2050 B.C.). Finally, the *nomarchs* of Thebes in Upper Egypt gained control of the country and established the Middle Kingdom.

The rulers of the Twelfth Dynasty restored the power of the pharaoh over the whole of Egypt although they could not control the *nomarchs*. They brought order and peace to Egypt and encouraged trade northward toward Palestine and south toward Ethiopia. They moved the capital back to Memphis and gave great prominence to Amon, a god connected with the city of Thebes. He became identified with Re, emerging as Amon-Re.

The Middle Kingdom disintegrated in the Thirteenth Dynasty with the resurgence of the power of the *nomarchs*. Around 1700 B.C. Egypt suffered an invasion by the Hyksos who came from the east (perhaps Palestine or Syria) and conquered the Nile Delta. In 1575 B.C., a Thebian dynasty drove out the Hyksos and reunited the kingdom. In reaction to the humiliation of the Second Intermediate Period, the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, most notably Thutmose III (1490-1436 B.C.), created an absolute government based on a powerful army and an Egyptian empire extending far beyond the Nile Valley.

One of the results of these imperialistic ventures of the pharaohs was the growth in power of the priests of Amon and the threat it posed to the pharaoh. When young Amenhotep IV (1367-1350 B.C.) came to the throne he was apparently determined to resist the priesthood of Amon. Supported by his family he ultimately made a clean break with the worship of Amon-Re. He moved his capital from Thebes (the center of Amon worship) to a city three hundred miles to the

north at a place now called [El Amarna](#). Its god was Aton, the physical disk of the sun, and the new city was called Akhenaton. The pharaoh changed his name to [Akhenaton](#) ("it pleases Aton"). The new god was different from any that had come before him, for he was believed to be universal, not merely Egyptian.

The universal claims for Aton led to religious intolerance of the worshippers of other gods. Their temples were closed and the name of Amon-Re was removed from all monuments. The old priests were deprived of their posts and privileges. The new religion was more remote than the old. Only the pharaoh and his family worshipped Aton directly and the people worshipped the pharaoh. Akhenaton's interest in religious reform proved disastrous in the long run. The Asian possessions fell away and the economy crumbled as a result. When the pharaoh died, a strong reaction swept away his life's work.

His chosen successor was put aside and replaced by [Tutankhamon](#) (1347-1339 B.C.), the husband of one of the daughters of Akhenaton and his wife, Nefertiti. The new pharaoh restored the old religion and wiped out as much as he could of the memory of the worship of Aton. He restored Amon to the center of the Egyptian pantheon, abandoned El Amarna, and returned the capital to Thebes. His magnificent tomb remained intact until its discovery in 1922.

The end of the El Amarna age restored power to the priests of Amon and to the military officers. Horemhab, a general, restored order and recovered much of the lost empire. He referred to Akhenaton as "the criminal of Akheton" and erased his name from the records. Akhenaton's city and memory disappeared for over 3000 years to be rediscovered by accident about a century ago.

Egyptian Religion

Religion was integral to Egyptian life. [Religious beliefs](#) formed the basis of Egyptian art, medicine, astronomy, literature and government. The great pyramids were burial tombs for the pharaohs who were revered as gods on earth. Magical utterances pervaded medical practices since disease was attributed to the gods. Astronomy evolved to determine the correct time to perform religious rites and sacrifices. The earliest examples of literature dealt almost entirely with religious themes. The pharaoh was a sacrosanct monarch who served as the intermediary between the gods and man. Justice too, was conceived in religious terms, something bestowed upon man by the creator-god. Finally, the Egyptians developed an ethical code which they believed the gods had approved.

J. A. Wilson once remarked that if one were to ask an ancient Egyptian whether the sky was supported by posts or held up by a god, the Egyptian would answer: "Yes, it is supported by posts or held up by a god -- or it rests on walls, or it is a cow, or it is a goddess whose arms and feet touch the earth" (*The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, 1943). The ancient Egyptian was ready to accept any and all gods and goddesses that seemed appropriate. For instance, if a new area was incorporated into the Egyptian state, its gods and goddesses would be added to the pantheon of those already worshipped.

From its earliest beginnings, Egyptian religious cults included animals. It is no accident that sheep, bulls, gazelles and cats have been found carefully buried and preserved in their own graves. As time passed, the figures of Egyptian gods became human (anthropomorphism)

although they often retained the animal's head or body. [Osiris](#), the the Egyptian god who judged the dead, first emerged as a local deity of the Nile Delta in Lower Egypt. It was Osiris who taught the Egyptian agriculture. [Isis](#) was his wife, and animal-headed Seth, his brother and rival. Seth killed Osiris. Isis persuaded the gods to bring him back to life, but thereafter he ruled below. Osiris was identified with the life-giving, fertilizing power of the Nile, and Isis with with the fertile earth of Egypt. [Horus](#), the god of the sky, defeated the evil Seth after a long struggle.

But Horus was only one kind of sky god. There was also Re, the sun god, later conjoined with Amen, and still later [Aten](#). The moon god was the baboon-headed Thoth, who was the god of wisdom, magic and numbers. In the great temple cities such as Heliopolis ("city of the sun"), priests worked out and wrote down hierarchies of divinities. In the small communities of villages, all the forces of nature were deified and worshipped. One local god was part crocodile, part hippopotamus, and part lion.

Despite the ever-increasing number of deities which could be added to this hierarchy of deities, one thing is certain: Egyptian religion, unlike the religion of Mesopotamia, was centralized. In Sumer, the temple was the focus of political, economic and religious organization. Indeed, it was often difficult to know where one aspect began and another ended. By contrast, the function of an Egyptian temple was focused on religion.

We are certain that ancient Egyptians were preoccupied with life after death. They believed that after death each human being would appear before Osiris and recount all the evil that had been committed during one's earthly existence: "I have not done evil to men. I have not ill-treated animals," and so on. This was a negative confession and justification for admittance into the blessed afterlife. Osiris would then have the heart of the person weighed in order to determine the truth of their confession.

The Egyptians believed not only in body and soul, but in *ka*, the indestructible vital principle of each person, which left the body at death but which could also return at other times. This explains why the Egyptians mummified the dead: so that the *ka*, on its return, would find the body not decomposed. And this also explains why tombs were filled with wine, grain, weapons, sailing ships and so on -- *ka* would find everything it needed, otherwise it might come back to haunt the living.

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The Holy Quran:

Egypt in the Quran:

<http://strongmail.real.com/track?t=c&mid=3358&msgid=407&did=1288904500&sn=1244662364&eid=mohamedeaali@gmail.com&uid=77397&extra=2001&&http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfIzyg1-MIE&feature=related>

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The Suez Canal:

The **Suez Canal** , also known by the nickname "The Highway to India", is an artificial sea-level waterway in [Egypt](#), connecting the [Mediterranean Sea](#) and the [Red Sea](#). . Opened in November 1869 after 10 years of construction work, it allows [water transportation](#) between [Europe](#) and [Asia](#), without navigation around [Africa](#).

Africa

Africa is the world's second-largest and second most-populous continent, after Asia. At about 30.2 million km² including adjacent islands, it covers 6% of the Earth's total surface area and 20.4% of the total land area...

- . The northern terminus is [Port Said](#)
- [Suez](#)
- . [Ismailia](#)

The Suez Canal (Arabic: قناة السويس, *Qanā al-Suways*), is a large, artificial maritime canal in [Egypt](#) west of the [Sinai Peninsula](#). It is 101 miles long and 984 feet wide at its narrowest point, running between Port Said on the [Mediterranean Sea](#), and Suez (al-Suways) on the far northern shore of the [Red Sea](#).

The canal allows two-way water transportation between Europe and Asia without circumnavigation of [Africa](#). Before its opening in 1869, goods were sometimes offloaded from ships and carried over land between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. The canal comprises two parts, north and south of the Great Bitter Lake, linking the [Mediterranean Sea](#) to the Gulf of Suez on the [Red Sea](#).

If the [Nile River](#) is the "lifblood of Egypt," then the Suez Canal is the Egypt's umbilical cord to the world. Some 7.5 percent of the world's sea trade travels the canal, as does most of Europe's [oil](#). This strategic waterway has existed almost as long as [Egyptian civilization](#), with digging going back to the [pharaohs](#), followed by the Persians, and [Ptolemy](#); even [Napoleon](#) saw its value. Many thousands were said to have died during its construction. Always a geopolitical flashpoint, international conflicts broke out at the canal in the 1950s and 1960s. Today, the Suez Canal remains a key short-cut for circumnavigation of the world.

Foreign Powers Occupied Egypt:

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5309.htm>

Persian, Greek, Roman, and Arab Conquerors

In 525 B., Cambyses, the son of Cyrus the Great, led a Persian invasion force that dethroned the last pharaoh of the 26th Dynasty. The country remained a Persian province until conquered by Alexander the Great in 322 BC, ushering in Ptolemaic rule in Egypt that lasted for nearly 300 years.

Following a brief Persian reconquest, Egypt was invaded and conquered by Arab forces in 642. A process of Arabization and Islamization ensued. Although a Coptic Christian minority remained--and remains today, constituting about 10% of the population--the Arab language inexorably supplanted the indigenous Coptic tongue. For the next 1,300 years, a succession of Arab, Mameluke, and Ottoman caliphs, beys, and sultans ruled the country.

European Influence

The Ottoman Turks controlled Egypt from 1517 until 1882, except for a brief period of French rule under Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1805, Mohammed Ali, commander of an Albanian contingent of Ottoman troops, was appointed Pasha, founding the dynasty that ruled Egypt until his great-great grandson, Farouk I, was overthrown in 1952. Mohammed Ali the Great ruled Egypt until 1848, ushering in the modern history of Egypt. The growth of modern urban Cairo began in the reign of Ismail (1863-79). Eager to Westernize the capital, he ordered the construction of a European-style city to the west of the medieval core. The Suez Canal was completed in his reign in 1869, and its completion was celebrated by many events, including the commissioning of Verdi's "Aida" for the new opera house and the building of great palaces such as the Omar Khayyam (originally constructed to entertain the French Empress Eugenie, and now the central section of the Cairo Marriott Hotel).

In 1882, British expeditionary forces crushed a revolt against the Ottoman rulers, marking the beginning of British occupation and the virtual inclusion of Egypt within the British Empire. In deference to growing nationalism, the U.K. unilaterally declared Egyptian independence in 1922. British influence, however, continued to dominate Egypt's political life and fostered fiscal, administrative, and governmental reforms.

Education and Egyptian Universities

<http://www.4icu.org/eg/>

Music, Entertainment

Umm Kalthoum

http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/arab_culture_and_identity/28205

Mohamed Abdel Wahab

<http://almashriq.hiof.no/egypt/700/780/abdel-wahab/abdel-wahab-bitton.html>

Literature

Naguib Mahfouz:

<http://www.answers.com/topic/naguib-mahfouz>

(born Dec. 11, 1911, Cairo, Egypt — died Aug. 30, 2006, Cairo) Egyptian writer. He worked in the cultural section of the Egyptian civil service from 1934 to 1971. His major work, the *Cairo Trilogy* (1956 – 57) — including the novels *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street* — represents a penetrating overview of 20th-century Egyptian society. Subsequent works offer critical views of the Egyptian monarchy, colonialism, and contemporary Egypt. Other well-known novels include *Midaq Alley* (1947), *Children of Gebelawi* (1959), and *Miramar* (1967). He also wrote short-story collections, some 30 screenplays, and several stage plays. In 1988 he became the first Arabic writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/naguib-mahfouz#ixzz1b82qJ8K8>

Tawfiq Al Hakim:

Egyptian dramatist, novelist, and man of letters. <http://www.answers.com/topic/tawfiq-al-hakim>

Tawfiq al-Hakim was born in Alexandria, and his early life was shaped by his father's frequent moves from job to job and by his ambition that his son should become a [lawyer](#). Al-Hakim's real interests, however, lay elsewhere; while still a student at the School of Law in Cairo, he wrote some plays (published under a pseudonym) for the Ukasha troupe. When he failed in his legal studies, his father sent him to France to study for a doctorate. Al-Hakim traveled to Paris in 1925, an event that was to be a turning point in his life. Instead of studying law, he [immersed](#) himself in European culture, particularly drama, and was strongly influenced by the works of Shaw, Pirandello, Ibsen, and Maeterlinck. Upon returning to Egypt in 1928, he prepared for publication a number of literary projects begun in Paris but also worked for a time as a deputy public prosecutor (*na'ib*) in the Nile delta area and, later, as an official in the ministry of social affairs. In 1943 he resigned his position as a civil servant to devote himself to his writing. Later in life, and particularly during the presidency of [Anwar](#) al-Sadat, he became somewhat controversial, partly because of his book *Awdat al-Wa'y* (1974; published in 1985 in English as *The Return of Consciousness*), in which the course of the Egyptian revolution and the status of Egypt's former president [Gamal Abdel Nasser](#) was critically reexamined. Only a short time before his death in 1987, he published a series of articles under the title "Hiwar ma' Allah" (Conversation with God), which aroused the [ire](#) of the religious establishment.

The inspiration that al-Hakim had found in France bore fruit when two of his works were published in 1933 to immediate critical acclaim: the play *Ahl al-Kahf* (People of the cave) and the novel *Awdat al-Ruh* (Return of the spirit). The latter was to be the first of a series of partially autobiographical contributions to fiction to be published in the 1930s. While it deals with the life of an Egyptian family during the turbulent years surrounding the revolution of 1919, *Yawmiyyat Na'ib fi al-Aryaf* (Diary of a provincial public prosecutor, 1937; published in English as *The Maze of Justice*, 1989) is a most successful portrait of the [dilemma](#) faced by Egyptian rural society in its confrontation with the laws and imported values of Europe, and *Ushfur min al-Sharq* (1938; published in English as *A Bird from the East*, 1966) takes [Muhsin](#), the main character in *Awdat al-Ruh*, to Paris.

Ahl al-Kahf was to mark the official beginning of the most notable career in Arabic drama to date. Along with several other plays written in the 1930s and 1940s (such as *Shahrazad* [1934; in English, 1981], *Pygmalion* [1942], and *Al-Malik Udib* [1949; in English, *King Oedipus*, 1981]), it dealt with historical and philosophical themes culled from a wide variety of sources and thus was seen as providing the dramatic genre with a cultural status that it had not enjoyed previously. Al-Hakim's dramatic output is vast and extends over five decades. It includes other plays with philosophical themes, two collections of shorter plays addressing social issues, and a number of works that experiment with dramatic technique (such as *Ya Tali al-Shajara* [Oh, tree [climber](#), 1962; in English, *The Tree Climber*, 1966] and varying levels of language (such as *Al-Safqa* [The deal, 1956]).

Tawfiq al-Hakim is the major pioneer figure in the development of a dramatic tradition in modern Arabic literature, and he has attained the status of one of the greatest Arab litterateurs of the twentieth century.

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Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/tawfiq-al-hakim#ixzz1b83ZRgP8>

Yusuf Idris

<http://www.answers.com/topic/yusuf-idris>

1927 – 1991 *Egyptian author of short stories, plays, and novels.*

After a childhood spent in the Nile delta region, Yusuf Idris moved to Cairo in 1945 to study medicine at Cairo University. He began writing short stories while a student and published several in newspapers before his graduation in 1951. He began to practice medicine but continued his involvement in both political causes and fiction; his first collection of short stories, *Arkhas Layali* (The cheapest nights), was published to great acclaim in 1954. In the same year he

was imprisoned for his involvement in political activities. Following his release in September 1955, he began writing articles for the newspaper *al-Jumhuriyya*. The late 1950s and the 1960s, until the 1967 Arab - Israel War, became [Idris](#)'s most productive period - in an amazing outpouring of creativity, he published several short-story collections as well as a number of plays and novels. He gave up medical practice in 1967 and assumed an administrative post in the ministry of culture. As was the case with many Arab authors, the Arab - Israel War had a profound effect on his literary career. Until his death in 1991, poor health, depression, and the demands and distractions of a weekly column in the Cairo daily *al-Ahram* combined to reduce his creative output.

Of the literary genres to which Idris made contributions, it is undoubtedly in the development of the Arabic short story that his key role is most obvious. His mastery of the genre was instinctive, and the [brilliance](#) of his contributions was recognized by critics from the [outset](#). From the realistic vignettes of provincial and urban life to be found in the earliest collections, such as *Arkhas Layali* and *Hadithat Sharaf* (An affair of honor, 1958), he gradually shifted to more symbolic and surrealistic narratives in such collections as *Akhir al-Dunya* (The world's end, 1961) and *Lughat al-Ay-Ay* (Language of screams, 1965) - many of the stories essentially [parables](#) about the alienation of human beings in contemporary society. In these later collections, we still encounter scenes from country life, but the focus has shifted from realistic detail to the symbolic portrait of the inner workings of the mind. Several also show his [virtuoso](#) ability to manipulate narrative point-of-view and to incorporate us into the storytelling process. Above all, his command of narrative structure and his use of allusive language has given his contributions to this genre a [stature](#) unmatched by any other Egyptian writer - and by very few other Arab litterateurs.

Idris often admitted to writing on [impulse](#), something that may well contribute to his great success in the realm of the short story. This same [impulsiveness](#) may explain why his essays in other genres have, for the most part, not met with similar success. While many of Idris's plays have been performed to great popular acclaim, even his most popular and accomplished play, *Al-Farafir* (The Farfoors, 1964), loses [cohesion](#) in its lengthy second act. Of his novels, only *Al-Haram* (The taboo, 1959), with its realistic portrayal of [migrant](#) communities in the provinces, manages to sustain a narrative focus through the longer fictional mode.

Idris's craft shows the greatest development and made the greatest contribution in the much-discussed area of language. Coupled to a great story-teller's ability in creating scenes and moods with an allusiveness and economy akin to that of poetry, Idris's narrative style co-opted the riches of the colloquial dialect to create a multitextured descriptive instrument of tremendous [subtlety](#) and variety. This colloquial level was his natural choice for dialogue in both plays and fiction, but aspects of the colloquial's [lexicon](#) and syntax are also to be found in narrative passages of his fiction. This stylistic feature has not endeared him to conservative critics, but it lent his stories an element of spontaneity and authenticity that contributed in no small part to their popularity. Idris's storytelling style, his lively imagination, [sardonic](#) sense of humor, and tremendous concern for the [plight](#) of modern life, are at their best in his short stories - many of which rival the very best in that most [elusive](#) and self-conscious of literary genres.

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Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/yusuf-idris#ixzz1b84T817G>

Alaa al-Aswany

(Arabic: علاء الأسواني) (born 1957) is an Egyptian writer, and a founding member of the political movement Kefaya.

Life and works

Trained as a dentist in Egypt and Chicago, it took him 9 years to earn his masters degree in dentistry from the University of Illinois at Chicago where he spent 17 years in his life. al-Aswany has contributed numerous articles to Egyptian newspapers on literature, politics, and social issues. His second novel, *The Yacoubian Building*, an ironic depiction of modern Egyptian society, has been widely read in Egypt and throughout the Middle East. It has been translated into English, Danish, Finnish, French, Norwegian, Greek and Dutch, and was adapted into a film (2006) and a television series (2007) of the same name. *Chicago*, a novel set in the city in which the author was educated, was published in January 2007. Al-Aswany participated in the *Blue Metropolis* in Montreal, June 2008, and was featured in interviews with the CBC programme "Writers and Company".

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- Watch a video interview with Alaa al Aswany talking about Chicago on The Interview Online

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Al-Azhar University, Cairo

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The world's oldest university and Sunni Islam's foremost seat of learning.

Preface

Al-Azhar university concerns itself with the religious syllabus, which pays special attention to the Quranic sciences and traditions of the prophet, on the one hand, while on the other, university teaches all the modern scientific fields of science . Thus, the university has not only fulfilled its obligations in these two fields of study but also fulfilled its obligations towards the Arabic language which is the language of the Holy Quran. In 1961, according to Al-Azhar university's legislative law No. 103 new colleges of applied sciences, such as the faculties of Medicine and engineering, were introduced to Al-Azhar university. These newly introduced faculties are not duplicates of their counter- parts in other universities since they combine both the empirical as well as the religious sciences. Alongside the Egyptian students who are studying at Al-Azhar university, there are many other students from the various Islamic and European countries. These foreign Moslem brothers have exactly the same rights as the Egyptian students.

Al-Azhar University Educational policy

Al-Azhar University is a natural expansion of the great mosque of Al-Azhar, the oldest and most celebrated of all Islamic academic institutes and Universities all over the world without exception. For over one thousand year Al-Azhar was venerated cultural centre for all Muslims in the East and West. Al-Azhar's educational policy is governed and oriented by the following basic guide lines and principles : The University of Al-Azhar is

opened for all Muslim students who wish to study a particular academic discipline or to further and deepen their knowledge of Islamic Religion. The University of Al-Azhar is always attempting to create a kind of intellectual unity between Muslims everywhere in the Islamic world, it also works hard to cement and strengthen their relationship and sharpen their loyalty to the Islamic faith. In all its curriculum and scholarly activities the University is concerned with everything that can strengthen the spiritual ties of Islam, and revive the national sense of pride among its people. The University is also keen to remain a guiding light for Islam and stronghold for the Arab nation, inculcating the Islamic teaching in the hearts and minds of Muslims, safeguarding its language, serving its objectives and aims, reforming its cultural heritage, and illuminating it for the benefit of mankind. Thus the University can perform the great task that Al-Azhar took upon itself throughout the ages, and likewise it keeps Egypt in its leading and pioneering position among Muslims. The University of Al-Azhar aims to provide Egypt and the Arabic and Islamic world with scholars and experts, well equipped with Islamic culture and moral, and well prepared to serve their societies, and play their role in building up their countries on faith and scientific basis . To prepare a stock of leading and highly qualified academicians and scientists for the coming generation in all branches of knowledge and experience required for life in its spiritual and material sides. To achieve this goal the university supports the higher studies, creating a new area of different specializations, providing scholarships in various walks of life to have the best experiences for the interest of Egypt and all Muslims in the entire Muslim world. To keep an open eye on the scientific activities and benefit from them, and to contribute towards scientific progress and development through establishing and enforcing academic relations between AL-AZHAR University and the Universities of the entire world. It is also required to have such relations with research foundations and all other academic and scientific centres and to exchange academic visits with other universities, inviting the best of scholars in their fields to deliver lectures, conduct research in all different specializations. The university of Al-Azhar sends some of its members of staff from time to time, to catch up with the most recent, and up to date discoveries and developments in all the different scientific and academic fields and various research activities.

Historical Background

When Jawhar the Sicilian, commander of the Fatimid troops sent by the Fatimid Caliph Almuiz to conquer Egypt, founded Cairo in 358 AH / 969 AD he built Al-Azhar mosque. The mosque was completed in nearly two years. It was first opened for prayers on 7th of Ramadan 361 A.H/ June 22, 972 AD. Since then it has become the most well-known mosque in the whole Muslim World, and the oldest university ever for both religious and secular studies.

Historians differ as to how the mosque got its name. Some hold that it is called as such because it was surrounded by flourishing mansions at the time when Cairo was founded. Others believe that it was by then considered as a good omen of the high status which the mosque was going to attain as a result of the flourishing studies being conducted in the mosque. A third group believe that it was named after "Fatima al-Zahraa" the daughter of Prophet Mohamed (peace and blessing be upon him) to glorify her name. This last explanation sounds the most likely as Fatimids themselves were called after her.

The Beginning of the Scholarly activities at Al-Azhar: Three and half years after its establishment, Al-Azhar began to acquire its academic and scholastic nature. It was in Ramadan, 365 AH (October 975 AD) during the reign of Al-Muiz when chief justice Abu El-Hassan Ali ibn Al-Nu'man El-Kairawany sat in the court of Al-Azhar and read "El-

ikhtisar" a book written by his father Abu Hanifa Al-Nu'man as a reference on Shi'ite law (fiqh). This happened in the presence of a large audience whose names were recorded in memorial of the occasion. Abu El-Hassan was the first to be given the title chief Justice. This was the first Seminar to be held at Al-Azhar which was followed by many others. Those seminars were religious, however they had political overtones. At the beginning of the reign of Al-Aziz Billah, Al-Azhar made great strides towards real academic studies. Jacob ibn Killis, the minister of Al-Mu'eiz and later of Al-Aziz read his 'Al-Risalah Al-Azizyah' on Shi'ite law. He later developed studies at Al-Azhar when he appointed thirty seven Jurists. He gave them monthly salaries and build them houses near Al-Azhar. During the Fatimid period, Al-Azhar was an essential part of the intellectual life. Beside the usual seminars, moral education sessions were held for women. Al-Azhar was also the official seat of judges on certain days and the accountant or chief tax collector "Muhtasib" for nearly two centuries. Since the collapse of Islamic Cultural Centres in Baghdad and Andalusia at the greatest centre for Arabic and Islamic studies all over the world.

Right from the beginning, the seminars held at Al-Azhar were of purely academic nature. They were inherently characterized by free scientific discussions and scholarships. There was also the system of instructors and visiting professors. Such activities worked later as the foundations of the University academic system, which became known later in both East and west. Hence, Al-Azhar has duly come to be known as the oldest religious university all over the world.

Although Al-Azhar ceased to function either as a university or as a mosque for nearly a century, during the Ayyubid reign studies were conducted in the same way as they were during the Fatimid period. However, they were mainly religious and linguistic. During the Mamluks period 648-922 A.H/ 1250-1517 A.D, Al-Azhar assumed new responsibilities towards the Muslim world.

As a result of Mughul attacks on central Asia and the shrinkage of Muslim rule in Andalusia, Al-Azhar became the only shelter for the scholars who were forced out of their homeland. Those scholars helped Al-Azhar to reach the apex of its glory during the eighth and ninth centuries A.H (14th and 15th centuries A.D). It should be mentioned here that Al-Azhar played an important role in the development of natural sciences. Some of Al-Azhar scholars studied medicine, mathematics, Astronomy, geography and history. They put much effort to advance these sciences even in times of political and intellectual deterioration and stagnation.

Under the Ottomans, Al-Azhar was financially independent because of the Waqfs (endowments), the scholars were free to choose their fields of study and the text books. Thus Al-Azhar had its own free identity and became a leading Islamic and Arabic centre.

It attracted many teachers as well as many students from all over the Islamic world. It is worth mentioning that the Ottomans never appointed one of them as Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. This high position entirely left for the Egyptians. When Bonaparte attacked Egypt in (1213 A.H / July 1789 A.D) he looked upon Al-Azhar as the most well-known university in the whole Islamic world. During his exile at Saint. Helena he wrote in his dairy that Al-Azhar was the counterpart of Sorbonne in Paris. He looked highly upon Al-Azhar Ulama as the elite of the educated class and as the leaders of the people. When he first set foot in Cairo he formed a special council (diwan) to govern the capital. That council consisted of nine eminent Sheikhs under the chairmanship of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sharkawi, the grand Imam of Al-Azhar at that time. The formation of this council

stands as an evidences of the importance of Al-Azhar and the high status of its Ulama .

However, Al-Azhar was the meeting place for the opponents of the French occupation and the seat of the revolution. A special revolutionary committee was formed under the leadership of Sheikh Mohamed El-Sadat. When the revolution broke out against the French, the grand Imam and the Ulama Decided that it was impossible to carry on their studies, so they closed the mosque.

This has been the only time for Al-Azhar to be closed over its long history. When the French evacuated three years later, Al-Azhar resumed its normal activities and received its teachers and students. When Mohammad Ali took over the rule of Egypt in 1220 A.H 1805 A.D he planned to set up a modern state. To achieve his aim he greatly depended on Al-Azhar. He sent scholarships from among the students of Al-Azhar to Europe. These students were the pioneers who raised high the banner of the modern renaissance in Egypt. Most of the leading figures including the leader of the Orabi revolution were graduates of Al-Azhar. This also applied to the leader of 1919 revolution, Saad Zaghloul as well as many other leading personalities, Mohamed Abdu and El-Manfaloty for example completed their studies at Al-Azhar. The most significant incident was the meeting of both Muslim Ulama and Christian priests in the porticos of Al-Azhar addressing people from the pulpit of Al-Azhar .

When the 1952 revolution took place, Al-Azhar was one of the society that has been modernized and developed so that it can effectively carry out its illuminating role for the welfare not only of Egypt, but also of the Arab and whole Islamic world.

Contact Al-Azhar

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Arabic Language

Egyptian Dialect