

MUHAMMAD 'ALI DYNASTY

A family that ruled Egypt for about a century and a half (1805-1952). The following is a brief survey of the line of succession, with particular reference to the role played by the Copts during the time of each ruler. Dates refer to the years of their accession and demise or abdication.

Muhammad 'Ali, Viceroy (1805-1849)

An outstanding soldier and statesman, Muhammad 'Ali was the founder of modern Egypt and of the dynasty that ruled the country until the 1952 revolution.

Following the French invasion of Egypt (1798), the [sultan](#) sent an expeditionary force, including a contingent of Macedonian Albanians, of whom Muhammad 'Ali was an officer. After the defeat of the French and their departure in 1801, Muhammad 'Ali stayed on and watched the ensuing confusion and [struggle](#) for power between the Mamluks, the Ottoman governor, and the Egyptian people, which he exploited for his own benefit.

In 1805, having won the confidence of the inhabitants, he was asked by the *'ulemas* (the Muslim) to become their ruler, and the [sultan](#) had to confirm him as governor (*wali*). Muhammad 'Ali was subsequently able to get rid of his rivals and become the unchallenged master of the country. He now set out to transform Egypt into a powerful state self-sufficient economically, industrially, and agriculturally. He rebuilt the army and the navy, with which he achieved resounding successes and victories all around Egypt. He extended his influence into Arabia, the Sudan, Syria, Crete, and Anatolia, upsetting the political balance in the area.

With their interests seriously threatened, the foreign powers intervened, and in 1840, Muhammad 'Ali's vast empire was reduced to Egypt and the Sudan. He was also given hereditary rule of Egypt.

Muhammad 'Ali's physical and mental faculties deteriorated toward the end of his life, and he died in 1849, his son Ibrahim having predeceased him in 1848.

Among the influential Copts who served under Muhammad 'Ali, supplying him with huge amounts of money from their private sources to finance his projects, was Mu'allim JIRJIS AL-JAWHARI (d. 1810), and Mu'allim GHALI. Muhammad 'Ali also employed some Copts in key administrative positions as governors of provinces: Rizk Agha in Sharqiyyah, Makram Agha in Atfih, Mikha'il Agha in Fashn, and Butrus Agha in Bardis (Riyad Suryal, 1984, pp. 49-50).

It is said that when Muhammad 'Ali was approached by Europeans seeking to form a company to finance the building of a canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, Mu'allim Ghali pointed out to him the inherent danger of such a company to the sovereignty of Egypt.

'Abbas Hilmi I, Khedive (1813-1854)

From the beginning of his reign, 'Abbas Hilmi aimed at setting rules and policies contrary to those of his predecessors. He wanted to relieve the Egyptian economy of foreign pressure and influence by liquidating all projects of economic growth inaugurated by his grandfather, Muhammad 'Ali, which, in his opinion, rendered the economy of Egypt subservient to Europe. As a result, he closed all modern factories and all higher schools, and decreased the forces of both the army and the navy. He believed that his grandfather had opened the door wide for European influence and weakened the Ottoman empire by the destruction of its military power in Egypt.

Because of his Ottoman education and upbringing, he tended to oppose the policies of both Muhammad 'Ali and Ibrahim. Consequently, he deviated from their policies and started persecuting all their former assistants in the European projects. In this way, 'Abbas thought to return

Egypt to its Islamic and Oriental character and to free it from Western ambitions. But soon time proved his gross misjudgment.

In fact, even his relationship with the Supreme Porte of Constantinople deteriorated later because of his attempt to suppress some of its administrative privileges granted under an 1846 treaty. Owing to Britain's favorable position with Turkey, 'Abbas thought to ask the English authorities to negotiate on his behalf with the Supreme Porte and in return offered the British a project of constructing a railway line from Alexandria to [Suez](#) via Cairo. In the meantime, he insisted that this project should be regarded as an Egyptian one to avoid the infiltration of English influence into the country.

This situation was indirectly affected by the outbreak of the Crimean War between Russia and Turkey. The czar offered [Britain](#) the opportunity to occupy Egypt in return for giving him a free hand to seize certain parts of Ottoman territory. Accordingly, 'Abbas hastened to accept the Turkish sultan's proposal to enter the Crimean War, by reinforcing the Egyptian army and the fortification of his own coasts against any possible incursions by the British navy. In the long run, Egypt was able to escape all hazards precipitated by this Oriental crisis.

Internally, the viceroy entertained the idea of transporting the Coptic community from Egypt to the Sudan and Ethiopia, thereby giving Egypt an unmixed Islamic color. This strange project was communicated to the Islamic religious authority for comment, and a clear *fatwa* (religious opinion) was issued refuting this idea and informing the viceroy that the Copts were the original inhabitants of the land of Egypt and that their extermination would be both wrong and impractical.

On 14 July 1854, 'Abbas was assassinated by a group of conspirators from his own family in his own palace at Banha. At the time of his death, the railway line had reached Kafr al-Zayyat; it was completed in the reign of his successor, Sa'id Pasha.

Sa'id, Khedive (1854-1863)

Unlike his predecessor, 'Abbas Hilmi I, Sa'id encouraged foreign participation in the Egyptian economy and administration, thus facilitating European infiltration. He gave various concessions to foreign companies for the development of the country, the most important being the construction of the [Suez Canal](#). Consequently, by the end of Sa'id's reign, Egypt had contracted huge debts.

Sa'id had great esteem for the Coptic patriarch, CYRIL IV (1854-1861), father of reform. He gave him permission to build a church in the Harit al-Saqqayin quarter of Cairo. He also relied on the patriarch to negotiate with Emperor Theodorus of Ethiopia an end to the dispute between the two [countries](#) over the Sudanese frontiers.

Isma'il, Khedive (1863-1879)

Through his Western education and his connections in important European capitals at the time, Isma'il acquired substantial political experience. He ruled Egypt during a critical stage of its history, through which European pressure exerted itself throughout the country.

To carry out the reforms that he had in mind, he had to have recourse to foreign aid and contracted several loans. He was therefore forced to usher the foreign presence and influence into Egypt, since he relied on European monetary sources to finance his economic and political projects.

Nevertheless, Isma'il's reign was one of cultural enlightenment. As he was intent upon setting up a modern administrative system, Copts proved of great importance during his reign. He appointed several of them to the Ministry of Finance and other administrative branches of the government.

During his reign, American missionaries started their campaign in Upper

Egypt to convert Copts to Protestantism. They succeeded in annexing two well-known families of Asyut, the Wisas and the Khayyats, to the Evangelical church. The Copts fought against proselytization. They had the full support of the khedive, who sponsored a tour for Pope Demetrius (1862-1870) in Upper Egypt to confront the missionary activity there.

Al-Jam'iyyah al-Khayriyyah (Coptic Benevolent Society) was established in 1871 to provide educational and social services to Copts. It was that society that later set up the Coptic Hospital.

When Isma'il founded the first Egyptian Parliament (1866), a number of Copts were elected members as representatives of some rural constituencies.

Tawfiq, Khedive (1879-1892)

Tawfiq succeeded his father, Isma'il, after his deposition in 1879. His reign was beset by various political crises that he was too weak to deal with, giving rise to 'Urabi's revolt (1881) and the British occupation (1882).

Lord Cromer, the High Commissioner, ran the country without any opposition from the khedive. He filled government posts with Europeans and preferred Syrian Christians to Copts, as he felt that the British were hated by Copts no less than by the Muslims. However, some Copts who had been appointed prior to the occupation rose to high rank, such as BOUTROS GHALI, who won the title Pasha.

Solidarity between Muslims and Copts was manifest during the 'Urabi revolt. When the khedive ordered the dismissal of 'Urabi as minister of war, over five hundred Egyptian representatives, including the two religious leaders, the *shaykh* of al-Azhar Mosque and the patriarch of Alexandria, CYRIL V (1874-1927), on 22 July 1882 signed a declaration of support of 'Urabi and a condemnation of the khedive's surrender to

foreign powers. Among the other signatories were Boutros Ghali and other Copts (Al-Rafi'i, 1966, pp. 439-448).

'Abbas Hilmi II, Khedive (1892-1914)

The fifth member of the Muhammad 'Ali dynasty to rule Egypt, 'Abbas Hilmi acceded to the throne at the age of eighteen. His reign was eventful because of the role he played in the national movement and his policy in relation to the British occupation of Egypt. Unlike his father, Khedive Tawfiq, he resented the idea of being a puppet in British hands. He, therefore, dismissed Mustafa Fahmi Pasha on 15 January 1893. This was the first cabinet to include Boutros Ghali Pasha as a minister, who was to become prime minister in November 1908.

At the outset of 'Abbas Hilmi II's reign, there was disagreement between the members of the COMMUNITY COUNCIL, on the one hand, and Pope Cyril V, on the other, over the methods of reform.

The council asked for the removal of the pope to DAYR AL-BARAMUS, where he stayed for approximately one year before returning to his seat in Cairo through the intervention of some Copts opposed to the council.

During 'Abbas Hilmi's reign, a group of Coptic intellectuals started to mobilize Coptic public opinion in support of certain sectarian requirements that were opposed by Boutros Ghali, thus leading to radical trends in the political movement. This reached its climax with the assassination of Boutros Ghali by a Muslim fundamentalist and triggered sectarian riots.

In 1911 the Copts held a congress at Asyut (see COPTIC CONGRESS OF ASYUT) to discuss their sectarian demands. Another congress, known as the EGYPTIAN CONFERENCE OF HELIOPOLIS, organized by Muslim personalities and some Copts, was held in Cairo. It sought a solution to the sectarian crisis and put an end to the riots.

The British occupation forces took the opportunity to muzzle the press, ban political meetings, and liquidate the nationalist movement.

Hussein Kamil, Sultan (1914-1917)

When World War I broke out in 1914, 'Abbas Hilmi II was on a visit to the [sultan](#) in Constantinople. The British seized the opportunity to depose him, on the grounds of his loyalty to their enemy. They installed his uncle Hussein Kamel with the title Sultan, the first Egyptian ruler to carry this title. Egypt was declared a British protectorate, and martial law was imposed. The economic resources of the country were put in the service of the British army, as Egypt became a military base. This inflamed public feelings against the British, culminating in the eruption of the 1919 revolt.

Hussein Kamel died in October 1917, after a reign of three years. His son declined to succeed him to the throne, which was therefore offered to his brother, Fouad.

Fouad I, King (1917-1936)

Following the death of Hussein Kamel, his brother, Fouad, occupied the throne from 1917 to 1936. As a young man, Fouad had accompanied his father, Isma'il, in his exile to Italy, where he finished his education at the military academy, after which he was appointed artillery officer in the army and later military attaché at the Turkish embassy in Vienna.

Fouad's reign was characterized by his autocratic approach to parliamentary life. After the promulgation of the 1923 constitution, he retained the right to dismiss the government, suspend the constitution, and dissolve Parliament. The WAFD government was replaced by various authoritarian cabinets. When the constitution was restored, negotiations with [Britain](#) were resumed to pave the way for the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty.

Two major positive achievements were fulfilled during King Fouad's reign: the establishment of the first Egyptian university, which revitalized the intellectual life of the country; and the foundation of the Misr Bank in 1920, which helped to counterbalance the excessive domination of foreign capital.

In addition to playing a prominent part in the 1919 revolution under [Sa'd Zaghlul](#), the Copts were active in the political and parliamentary life of the country, with such well-known names as MAKRAM EBEID and WISSA WASSEF. They found conditions favorable for pursuing social and cultural activities by setting up benevolent societies and educational organizations.

Farouk I, King (1936-1952)

The last monarch of the Muhammad 'Ali dynasty, Farouk succeeded his father, Fouad, in May 1936, as a young man straight back from school in England. Farouk's reign coincided with various political and social movements that eventually led to the 1952 revolution. Among these may be mentioned Young Egypt (*Misr al-Fatah*) and the Muslim Brethren (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*), both of which adopted fascist ideologies within an Islamic framework. The reaction to these movements was manifest in the formation of the short-lived Coptic Nation Association (Jama'at al-Ummah al-Qibtiyyah).

The search for a true Egyptian identity polarized two distinct tendencies: to consider Egypt as part of the Mediterranean world, with its roots in ancient Egyptian civilization, and to emphasize Egypt's Islamic past. In addition, a new current of Arab nationalism led to the foundation of the Arab League in March 1945.

In 1948 the outcome of the Palestine war damaged Farouk's standing, and the country was seething with the rumors of corruption in high places. The Cairo fire of 26 January 1952 was the beginning of a series of

events that culminated in Farouk's abdication and the proclamation of the Egyptian republic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 'Abd al-'Azim Ramadan. *Tatawwur al-Harakah al-Wataniyyah fi Misr*, 1936-1948. Beirut, 1974.
- 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti. *'Abja'ib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wa-al-Akhbar*, vol. 4. Cairo, A.H. 1297.
- 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i. *Fi A'qab al-Thawrah al-Misriyyah*, 3 vols. Cairo, 1946-1951.
- . *'Asr Isma'il*. 2 vols. Cairo, 1948.
- . *Al-Thawrah al-'Urabiyyah wa-al Ihtilal al-Injilizi*. Cairo, 1966.
- Ahmad Abd-al Rahim Mustafa. *Misr wa-al-Mas'alah al-Misriyyah 1875-1882*. Cairo, 1965.
- Chriol, Valentine. *The Egyptian Problem*. London, 1920. Cromer, Lord. *Modern Egypt*. 2 vols. London, 1908. Elgood, P. G. *The Transit of Egypt*. London, 1928. Ghorbal, S. *Muhammad 'Ali al-Kabir*. Cairo, 1944.
- Hanotaux, G. *Histoire de la nation Egyptienne*. Paris, 1931-1940. Iqbal Ali Shah. *Fouad King of Egypt*. London, 1936.
- Jerrold, B. *Egypt Under Ismail Pasha*. London, 1879. King, J. W. *Historical Dictionary of Egypt*. London, 1984. Landau, J. *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*. New York, 1954. Latifah Salim. *Misr fi al-Harb al-'Alamiyyah al-ula*. Cairo, 1982. Lloyd, Lord. *Egypt Since Cromer*. 2 vols. London, 1933. MacCoan, J. C. *Egypt Under Ismail*. London, 1899.
- Manassa Yuhanna. *Tarikh al-Kanisah al-Qibtiyyah*, pp. 508-510. Repr. Cairo, 1983.
- Marlowe, J. *Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1800-1953*. London, 1954. Mikha'il Sharubim. *Al-Kafi fi Tarikh Misr al-Qadim wa-al Hadith*. Cairo, 1900.
- *Précis de l'histoire de l'Egypte*. Cairo, 1932-1935.
- Qallini Fahmi (Pasha). *Mudhakkirat 'an Ba'd Hawadith al-Madi*, vol.

1. Cairo, 1931.
- Ramzi Tadrus. *Al-Aqbat fi-al-Qarn al-'Ishrin*, vol. 2. Cairo, 1911. Riyad Suryal. *Al-Mujtama' al-Qibti fi Misr fi al-Qarn al-Tasi' 'Ashar*. Cairo, 1984.
- Sabry, M. *L'Empire egyptian sous Ismail*. Paris, 1930.
- Safran, N. *Egypt in Search of Political Community*. Cambridge, Mass., 1961.
- Scholch, A. *Egypt for the Egyptians*. London, 1982.
- Tawfiq Iskarus. *Nawabigh al-Aqbat wa-Mashahiruhum fi al-Qarn al-Tasi' 'Ashar*, vol. 2. Cairo, 1913.
- Tignor, R. *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914*. Princeton, N.J., 1966.
- Ya'qub Nakhlah Rufaylah. *Tarikh al-Ummah al-Qibtiyyah*, pp. 282-87. Cairo, 1899.
- Youssef, A. *Independent Egypt*. London, 1940.

RA'UF 'ABBAS HAMED

Tags: [History](#)