



Timeline



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EGYPT THROUGH THE AGES / 1

Egypt is both very old and very young. It's home to one of the world's most ancient civilizations but also to an incredibly fast-growing, youthful population. While this timeline can't capture the wonders of Egypt, it does introduce some of the pharaohs, foreign empires, and local nationalists that have ruled this country built around the mighty Nile. In the Jewish imagination, Egypt is often associated with leaving, with the biblical Exodus, and with the migration after 1948. But, as you'll see when you visit, it is also a place where many Jews chose to come to over the centuries and where they built a remarkable community. The dates and statistics are often approximate only.

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

THE GIFT OF THE NILE

- BCE** — 6000 Settlement begins on banks of Nile, then & now the fertile hub of country
- 3150 Menes, Egypt's legendary first king, unites Upper and Lower Egypt
- 3000 A cradle of civilization: Trade, government, agriculture, hieroglyphics develop
- 2500 The pyramids, tombs for pharaohs, built (probably by paid laborers not slaves)
Biblical account: Moses leads Israelites out of Egyptian slavery to Land of Israel
- 1570 Ancient Egypt at its peak: Remarkable temples constructed around Luxor
- 1200 Scholars suggest a small group known as Habiru (perhaps Hebrews) leave Egypt
- 669 Start of the foreign dynasties. Assyrians from Mesopotamia rule Egypt
- 586 After Babylonians conquer Jerusalem, Jeremiah leads Jewish groups to Egypt
- 525 Jews establish community near Aswan; soldiers for Persian rulers of Egypt

GREEK & ROMAN RULE, JEWS FLOURISH IN ALEXANDRIA

- 332 Alexander the Great conquers Egypt, establishes Alexandria
This city becomes intellectual & cultural center of ancient world
- 200 Alexandria also a great Jewish center, prosperous and religiously tolerant
Community influenced by traditional Jewish and Hellenistic (Greek) culture
Greek replaces Hebrew and Aramaic as major language of Egyptian Jews
The Septuagint: Jews translate Torah into Greek
- 170 Jews build replica of Jerusalem temple in Heliopolis for worship & sacrifices



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EGYPT THROUGH THE AGES / 2

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- CE**
- 73 Romans destroy Jerusalem and then the Heliopolis Temple
 - 45 Philo, "the Jewish Plato," born in Alexandria
 - 30 Roman rule begins as Cleopatra, last Ptolemaic (Greek) pharaoh, commits suicide
Jewish population in Egypt large, some claim as many as 1 million
 - 100 Rome smashes Jewish revolt in Egypt. Jewish population & influence plummet
 - 300 Christianity dominant in Egypt; has displaced traditional local religions
- ### ARAB EGYPT, ISLAMIC EMPIRES
- 641 The Arab conquest: Over time, most Egyptians adopt Sunni Islam, Arabic language
Jews' dhimmi status: protected but inferior minorities subject to special taxes
In return, Jews have religious and considerable communal autonomy
 - 882 Karaite community (follow Jewish Bible but not rabbis) established in Egypt
 - 969 Fatimid caliphate conquers Egypt, establish Cairo (Fustat) as capital
Egypt center of powerful, religiously tolerant, Fatima kingdom
Al-Azhar, one of world's first universities, established in Cairo
A golden age for Egyptian Jews. Pop. 20,000, thriving culture & scholarship
Prosperous community includes courtiers, physicians, traders & craftsmen
 - 1165 Maimonides, great religious scholar & physician to Sultan, settles in Cairo
 - 1250 Mamluks, Turkic slave-soldiers, establish kingdom in Egypt
Black death kills about 40% of Egyptians
The good times end: Jews suffer religious discrimination, population plummets
 - 1492 Following Spanish expulsion, a new Sephardi community emerges in Egypt
 - 1517 Egypt absorbed into the Ottoman Empire. Initial economic growth
Jewish community benefits from religious tolerance & economic upsurge
 - 1524 Feared attack on Cairo Jews averted, sparking new holiday: the Cairo Purim
 - 1640 A period of famines, economic stagnation begins as Ottoman Empire weakens
Pop. drops to 6000. Many follow "false messiah" Shabbatai Zevi
 - 1734 Situation for Jews declining. Anti-Jewish riots in Cairo kill many



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EGYPT THROUGH THE AGES / 3

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE WEST

- 1798 France invades Egypt but repelled by British & Ottoman troops in 1801
- 1805 An Enlightened Despot: Muhammad Ali seizes power
Inspired by west, he establishes modernizing dynasty
Agriculture, infrastructure, education, govt, army reforms
Power of Ali & his descendants increasingly limited by French & Britain influence
- 1869 Suez Canal built. This vital transport hub creates new economic opportunities
It also helps bankrupt Egyptian govt. and brings Egypt under western influence
Economic opportunities attract Jews from Ottoman Empire and Europe
An era of Jewish peace, prosperity, & population growth in Egypt begins
Modern (French) Jewish schools established; literacy rates rise dramatically
- 1882 Britain occupies Egypt. Direct control of country until 1922, indirect until 1950s
- 1898 Egyptian pop. 9.7 million. Most are Sunni Muslims, 10% Christian (mainly Coptic)
Two Egypts: Multi-cultural Cairo & Alexandria but most still live in rural areas
Land inequality: Most land owned by large-scale owners, peasant majority poor
Jewish pop. 25,200. Play significant role in culture, commerce, professions
Jewish life based in Cairo & Alexandria. A few Jews in smaller towns
The most urban, educated Jewish community in any Islamic country
Sephardi elite speak French, send children to British schools
Ashkenazi immigrants initially poorer but increasing prosperity and influence
Diverse communities speaking Arabic, French, Ladino, Yiddish, Italian
Cairo Geniza, vast manuscript collection, transferred from Ben Ezra Synagogue

ARAB NATIONALISM ...

- 1916 Britain & France secretly carve up control of Middle East
- 1919 Egypt formally British "protectorate." Egyptian revolution against Britain begins
- 1922 "Semi-independence." King Fuad rules; Britain retains control over Suez Canal
Zionism movement grows; many Jewish-Egyptian nationalists, left-wingers



timeline

EGYPT THROUGH THE AGES / 4

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- 1928 Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic, anti-imperialist political movement, founded
Poverty and government corruption contribute to political unrest
Egyptian population: 15.8 million
- 1936 *Jews' position remains good but Egyptian unrest over Palestine increases*
- 1945 *First modern anti-Jewish riots in Cairo, over 30 killed and many injured*
- 1947 *Anti-Zionist riots after UN adopt Israel partition plan*
Pop. has grown to 65,639. Many Jews are not Egyptian citizens, leaving them vulnerable as anti-foreigner laws passed
Famous Jewish actress & singer Leila Mourad converts to Islam
- ...LEADS TO NASSER & A MODERN EXODUS OF EGYPTIAN JEWS**
- 1948 Egypt, Syria, Jordan, & Iraq attack new State of Israel
Failure in war weakens rule of King Farouk. State of emergency declared
Govt. accuses local Jews of disloyalty: Attacks, arrests, property confiscations
25,000 Jews leave in next two years; 14,000 go to Israel
- 1952 Gamal Nasser leads coup by army officers. King abdicates, Egypt a republic
- 1953 Major but ultimately unsuccessful land reforms launched
- 1954 Nasser takes control. Bans political parties, suppresses Islamic & leftist groups
He adopts a pan-Arabist, pro-Soviet, anti-British, anti-Israel approach
- 1954 *The Lavon Affair: Israeli agents plant bombs in western-frequented parts of Cairo, blame Egyptians & call on Britain to keep control over Suez Canal*
- 1956 Britain & US withdraw finance to help Egypt build the massive Aswan Dam
Nasser responds. Nationalizes Suez Canal & closes Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships
Israel, Britain & France invade, seeking to regain Canal & bring down Nasser
US pressure forces withdrawal. Britain humiliated; Nasser triumphant
- 1957 *Jews deported, harassed. Population drops to 8,500*
- 1958 Nasser the champion of Pan-Arabism: Egypt & Syria unite as United Arab Republic
- 1961 The union doesn't stick. United Arab Republic dissolved
Nasser launches program of economic centralization, industrialization



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EGYPT THROUGH THE AGES / 5

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- 1967 Six Day War a huge defeat for Egypt. Israel seizes control of Sinai and Gaza Strip
Nasser's standing in Arab world plummets
More Jews leave after suffering arrests, abuse
- 1970 Nasser dies. Replaced by close confidant and fellow army officer, Anwar Sadat
- 1971 *Just 400 Jews remain. In last 30 years, 65,000 have left, incl. 35,000 to Israel*
Aswan Dam completed with Soviet help, major boost to industrialization
- MILITARY RULERS MARCHING IN A NEW DIRECTION?**
- 1972 Sadat expels Soviet advisers and looks to rebuild relations with west
Tries unsuccessfully to liberalize economy, attract western investment
- 1973 *Seeking return of lost territories, launch surprise Yom Kippur War with Israel*
Do not recover lands but inflict heavy casualties on Israel
- 1975 The Suez Canal is reopened for first time since 1967 war
- 1977 End of food subsidies lead to "bread riots"
Sadat shocks many by visiting Israel, beginning peace talks
- 1979 *Peace treaty with Israel leads to return of Sinai Peninsula*
In response, Egypt suspended from Arab league but gains major aid from US
- 1981 Sadat assassinated by Islamic extremists. Replaced by Hosni Mubarak
Egypt remains poor, authoritarian state ruled by military leaders
Economy remains centralized. Massive debts, urbanization, poor education
- 1984 *Last Jewish wedding in Egypt takes place. By 1996, pop. is down to about 100*
- 1988 Naguib Mahfouz wins Nobel Prize for Literature
- 1991 Egypt joins US-led Gulf War. In return, receives massive aid and loans
Moving to the global market: Privatization & economic reforms launched
- 1992 Islamic attacks on government and western targets increase
- 1999 Ahmed Zewail first Egyptian to win Nobel Prize in scientific field (chemistry)



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EGYPT THROUGH THE AGES / 6

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

GROWING PAINS

- 2005 Egyptian pop. 77 million, doubled since 1970, and growing fast
One of world's youngest populations, high youth unemployment
Economic liberalization leads to growth but corruption, inequality rises
Moving to a democracy? Muslim Brotherhood win 20% of seats in parliament
Growing Islamic political might & terrorism alarms army rulers
- 2009 Global financial crisis hits Egypt. Soaring food prices
- 2010 But tourism at a high: 14.7 million tourists compared to just 2.9 million in 1995
- 2011 The Arab Spring. Protests break out throughout Arab world. Mubarak resigns
- 2012 First democratic elections won by Mohamed Morsi of Muslim Brotherhood
- 2013 Street protests, economic downturn, liberal concerns about Islamic rise
Hundreds killed as army retakes political control. New president Abdul el-Sisi
- 2014 Constitution bans parties, including Muslim Brotherhood, based on religion
Islamic State supporters increase attacks in Sinai and on Coptic Christians
- 2015 Morsi sentenced to death. Later dies in jail while appealing sentence
- 2016 Massive IMF loan as financial crisis deepens. 28% of pop. below poverty line
A cold peace: Egypt-Israel agreement holds but strong public anti-Israeli feelings
- 2018 Cairo population 21 million; was 2.5 mil in 1950
Govt. allocates funds to restore Jewish heritage sites in Egypt
Non-Jews join Cairo's Sha'ar Hashayamim synagogue to celebrate Hanukkah
Literacy rate 71% (was 38.2% in 1976). Life expectancy 71.5 years (48 in 1960)
- 2019 Egypt's population 99 million, the largest in Arab world
Jewish population 15-100