In the history of Middle East civilization Egypt enjoys an important place since a long time. It plays a connecting link between the countries of the East and West. Egypt is located in the northeast corner of the African continent, and borders Libya to the west, Sudan to the south, and Israel proper as well as the Hamas-administered Palestinian territory of the Gaza strip to the northeast. To the north of Egypt is the Mediterranean, to the east and Red Sea. The Sinai Peninsula (seenaa), technically located on the Asian continent is located in the northeast. To the southwest of Sinai is the Gulf of Suez (Khaleej as-suways) and to the southeast of the peninsula is the Gulf of Aqaba (Khaleej al-‘aqaba). On the eastern side of the Gulf of Aqaba is Saudi Arabia, and in the north of the gulf are the Israeli and Jordanian ports of Eilat and Aqaba respectively.¹

The terms of Upper Egypt (as-as ‘eed) and Lower Egypt refer to southern and northern Egypt respectively, because Upper Egypt is upriver, and vice versa. Cairo is the largest city of Egypt and in all Africa and the Arab world, with a population of 7.8 million, and is located in Lower Egypt on the Nile, south of the beginning of the Delta. Alexandria is the second largest city, with 4.1 million people, and is located not on the Nile, but on the Mediterranean coast, west of the Delta. The Nile Delta is crucially important to Egypt’s agriculture and industry, but is also a poorer area of Egypt as compared to Alexandria.²
On the other hand, Egypt has been a refuge for civilization whenever it faced danger. The country, now known as the Arab Republic of Egypt, is culturally an ancient land. There was already much cultural activity by the time Herodotus, the great Greek historian, arrived in Egypt in 450 B.C. to record his observations about the descendants of Pharaohs. There is little agreement among modern historians about when the country was first inhabited, and by whom. Some have theorized that Africans moved into the Nile valley from the south—from Nubia—and others say that it was the Libyans from the West and the tribes from the Arabian Desert to the East who initially established outposts of human kind in Egypt. However, there was a thriving, robust civilization in Egypt by 400 B.C.; and by 3100 B.C. King Menes had formed a monarchical entity that extended from Aswan in the South to the Mediterranean in the North. Historical records of Egypt date back to Menes, who formed the first of the 30 dynasties into which Egyptian history prior to the invasion by Alexander is divided. The Pharaonic rule eventually resulted not only in the creation of such massive monuments as the pyramid of Giza (481 feet high) the sphinx and the colossi of mammon but also in seminal development in mathematics and writing.³

Modern Egypt is predominantly Muslim. Following the death of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) in 632 A.D. Arab armies swept through what is known as the Middle East. During the time of Khalifa Umar, an Arab
army led by Amr ibin al-As conquered Egypt and established an Arab Empire there. The Empire flourished and the Muslim established Cairo, a great center of power and learning. The Arabs translated Greek works and Philosophy, Science, Mathematics and Medicine; and they invented Trigonometry and Algebra (a word derived) from the Arabic, ‘Al-jabr’, meaning the reunion of broken parts. In course of time Egypt became an Arabic speaking country, with a Muslim majority. Politically, the Egyptian Arabian era may be divided into a number of dynastic periods: the Umayyad Caliphate, the Abbasid Dynasty. The Tulunid and in 969 A.D., the Fatimid Dynasty (of the shia sect), in the beginning of which Egypt passed through a golden age and enjoyed the zenith of its prosperity; the Ayyubi Dynasty and the Mamluk (slave) Dynasties (1252-1517). During some of these Egypt was ruled as a province from outside. In others, during the period of first split within the Arab Empire, Egypt’s local (but always foreign) rulers declared their independence and sovereignty. At still other times, Egypt herself became the headquarter of an Arab Caliphate and empire.⁴

After the Seljuk Turks, Egypt came to be dominated by Mamluk Sultans (1250-1517) who were of the slave origin. The greatest of these Sultans was Baybars (1260-77) who reversed the tide of Mongol invasion and also regained the lost territory from the crusaders. Two other
prominent Sultans of the Slave Dynasty were Al-Nasir (1293-1340) and Qait Bey (1468-95).^5

In 1517, when Ottoman Sultan Salim I defeated the Mamluk Sultan, Egypt passed under the Suzerainty and control of Ottomans Empire. In 1798 French armies under Napoleon Bonaparte invaded and occupied parts of Egypt, but their hold on the country did not last long and, in 1801, they were driven out by a joint British Ottoman force.^6

With the advent of an Albanian officer in the Ottoman army, Mohammad Ali Pasha and his successors (1805-63), Egypt experienced an era of prosperity and modernization. He was appointed as the Governor of Egypt by the Ottoman Sultan in 1805, but soon he snatched power from the hands of ruling Mamluks and he became the dominant power of the country. Then as now, it was the River Nile that formed the great nourishing Spine of Egypt. Muhammad Ali recognized the potential of the Nile, and so he introduced cotton from India, initiated modern irrigation, redistributed land and opened western style school. To save his personnel from the dust of lethargy, he constantly engaged his armies on the war fronts and brought about tremendous reforms in them.

However, Muhammad Ali, who has been called the "father of modern Egypt," was able to attain control of Egypt because of his own leadership abilities and political shrewdness but also because the country seemed to be slipping into anarchy. The urban notables and the ulama
believed that Muhammad Ali was the only leader capable of bringing order and security to the country. The Ottoman government, however, aware of the threat Muhammad Ali represented to the central authority, attempted to get rid of him by making him governor of the Hijaz. Eventually, the Ottomans capitulated to Egyptian pressure, and in June 1805, they appointed Muhammad Ali, governor of Egypt.

Between 1805 and 1811, Muhammad Ali consolidated his position in Egypt by defeating the Mamluks and bringing Upper Egypt under his control. Finally, in March 1811, Muhammad Ali had sixty-four Mamluks, including twenty-four Beys, assassinated in the Citadel. From then on, Muhammad Ali was the sole ruler of Egypt. Muhammad Ali represented the successful continuation of policies begun by the Mamluk Ali Bey al Kabir. Like Ali Bey, Muhammad Ali had great ambitions. He, too, wanted to detach Egypt from the Ottoman Empire, and he realized that to do so Egypt had to be strong, economically and militarily.
REFERENCES:


2. Ibid.


