

EGYPT

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Until at least the early 1960s, archives from the period before the military took over in 1952 were sometimes neglected for nationalistic reasons. Some archive custodians reportedly regarded pre-1952 history as a long period of foreign domination, the sources of which were allowed to perish. The archives were allegedly purged of controversial or embarrassing records. The state's archive section housing Turkish documents was closed down completely upon the death of its last surviving archivist. Documents pertaining to the history of revolutions and national movements were kept under lock and key in the presidential palace archives “because”, as historian Anis [q.v. 1961] declared in 1962, “they are seething with snakes and scorpions and the authorities do not want to have accidents”. Historical works dealing with the monarchy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in other than negative terms were not written. The most sensitive topic of post-1945 Egyptian historiography, however, was the relationship between Islam and history. A trend—discernible in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world during the early 1970s—of criticizing the nature of early Islamic society and the soundness of sources, was silenced or driven underground in the later decades of the twentieth century.

1952— After the July 1952 Revolution, the blind writer and literary historian **Taha Husayn** (1889–1973), called the “dean of Arabic literature”, was dismissed as rector (1942–52) of Farouk I University in Alexandria (which he founded in 1942). He continued as a part-time professor. His books were banned (some still were in 1992). In 1919 he completed the first doctoral thesis at the Egyptian University (renamed Fuad I University in 1928, later: Cairo University), on the social philosophy of historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406). He became a lecturer in ancient history (1919–25) and professor of Arabic literature (1925–) there. In 1926–27 his book *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* (1926; **sixteenth edition: 1989**), maintaining that great portions of pre-Islamic poetry were forged after the rise of Islam and doubting the historical reliability of some Koran chapters (including the one on Abraham's and Ismail's building of the sacred Kaba in Mecca), became the subject of a great controversy. A special al-Azhar University committee labeled the book blasphemous and banned it. Husayn **was forced to withdraw the book**. His resignation from the university was demanded, and his life was threatened. Questions were asked in Parliament. **Legal charges of heresy were brought against him—including charges of attacking Islam by undermining the Koran's authority and by questioning the historical validity of Muhammad's prestigious genealogy—but in March 1927 the court judged that criminal intent was absent and dismissed the case**. He publicly reaffirmed his belief in Islam and in 1927 published a revised version, *On Pre-Islamic Literature*, with the offending reference to Abraham and Ismail removed but the remainder of his argument expanded. In 1929–32 he served as the first Egyptian dean at the Faculty of Arts but in March 1932 he resigned because of the meddling of the government of Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi Pasha (1930–33) in university affairs and because he refused to endorse the honorary doctorate for a political personality proposed by King Fuad I. After a period of harassment (1932–36), he was reinstated with King Farouk I's accession (1936). From 1940 he intermittently worked at the Ministry of Education as the promotor of free education for all children. Husayn was minister of education (January 1950–January 1952) in the Wafed-led government.

Historian **Abd al-Rahman Zaki** found himself isolated because of his close connections with court circles. He switched to art history.

1954— Historian **Muhammad Sabri** (1894–1984), an expert on the 1919 Egyptian Revolution, remained silent after 1954, a period described as an “enforced hibernation”. He reportedly transferred his research efforts to less sensitive areas such as literary criticism and the medieval Arab influence in the Congo. Before World War II, his study of the 1919 Revolution had been confiscated by the government on three separate occasions and he had been requested by King Fuad I to delete some unflattering references to the Khedive Ismail (1863–79) from another of his works.

Shafiq Ghurbal (1894–1961), considered the founder of modern Egyptian historiography and the first professor of modern history at the Egyptian University (1929–[58]), reportedly disappeared from the mainstream of historical activity in 1954, although the advent of President Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime coincided with his retirement and although he occupied important posts (such as director of the Arab League's Center for Arabic Studies and president of the Egyptian Historical Society, 1947–60). In 1941 he had used his position as deputy assistant director of the Ministry of Education to call for complete

- freedom of academic inquiry in the universities, independent from all control by his own ministry. A few months after the 1954 Revolution, **Ibrahim Abduh**, associate professor at Fuad I University's Institute of Journalism and author of many books on the history of the Arabic press, was dismissed and, after a satirical piece of his was banned, he went into exile. He then worked as a journalist in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and returned to Egypt to set up a private publishing house. He was reportedly amnestied by President Anwar al-Sadat.
- In [September] historian **Ahmad Shalabi** (?1914–), an assistant professor at the Cairo teacher-training college Dar al-Ulum (House of Sciences) sympathizing with the fundamentalist Muslim Brothers and criticizing military rule, was dismissed. He was also prevented from teaching in Iraq. He finally went to teach at the Islamic University of Indonesia, Yogyakarta (1955–63). In the 1960s he set up a department of history and Islamic civilization at the Islamic University of Omdurman in Sudan.
- 1954–66 In October 1954 **Sayyid Qutb** (1906–66), a former senior civil servant in the Ministry of Education (1933–51) and the leading ideologue of the Muslim Brothers, author of several books with an Islam-centred view of history, was arrested and charged with conspiracy against the president after a Muslim Brother had attempted to assassinate Nasser. Sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, he was severely tortured but finally released in 1964 after a personal intervention of the Iraqi president. Upon his release, Qutb published *Milestones* (1964), his most controversial book written in prison. It became a bestseller. This resulted in his rearrest in 1965. He was sentenced to death on the same charge on 22 August 1966, hanged on 29 August, and buried in a secret plot in an unmarked grave. His writings were banned in Egypt, Syria, and Israel. In 1948–50 he had traveled in the United States after he had written a series of articles critical of Egyptian politics (1945–48). Upon his return Qutb became a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.
- 1960–65 In the early 1960s, **Rifat al-Said**, historian of the Egyptian communist movement, journalist for *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Talia*, was imprisoned because of his membership in the Egyptian Communist Party (ECP). When the ECP was dissolved and the communists joined the Arab Socialist Union (the only legal political party) in 1965, he was released. Later he became the secretary of the Central Committee of the Tammuz Party, the ECP heir. In 1978 he had reportedly been considered for investigation, following a draft law designed to curb Sadat's critics.
- 1961 **Muhammad Anis**, professor at Cairo University, probably Egypt's leading historian in the 1960s, discontinued all lectures for a period of one month in protest against a ruling of the Center for African Studies that no master's or doctoral theses would be accepted on a historical subject more recent than fifty years ago. Ghurbal [q.v. 1954–] apparently supported his opinion. In 1974 Anis decided to leave Egypt because of his close association with the Nasser era.
- 1966 **Abd al-Rahman al-Rafii** (1889–1966), politician, cabinet member in 1949, self-taught historian of Egypt's national movement, nominee for the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1964, wished to reprint his study *The Urabi Revolt and the British Occupation* (Cairo 1937; fourth edition: 1983). In the book he expressed the opinion that the leader of the 1879–82 revolt, Colonel Ahmad Urabi, should have left politics to politicians (a conclusion probably unwelcome to President—and Colonel—Nasser). Unlike the first, 1937, edition, the reprint apparently had to be privately financed (like several of his other works). As early as the 1930s, several of his publications had been discouraged by the government and he had sometimes been denied access to important documents.
- 1970–81 During Sadat's presidency, **Hasan Hanafi** (1935–), a professor of the history of philosophy at Cairo University (1962–), could reportedly not directly criticize Islamic dogmatism. During Sadat's presidency, clerical pressures reportedly led to the withdrawal of many mummified pharaohs from their display cases in the Cairo Museum. The official explanation was that offending religious sensibilities had to be avoided.
- 1973– *Al-Ushfur* (The Sparrow), a 1973 film by **Youssef Chahine** (1926–) about Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, was held up for two years by the Egyptian censors. His 1978 film *Alexandria... Why?*, about a love affair between a Jewish man and a Muslim man and another between a wealthy Arabic man and a young English soldier, was cut on two places, including a reference to the Israeli flag, but escaped more serious censorship allegedly because it was released during the Camp David negotiations with Israel. In Lebanon and many other Arab countries, however, the film was banned, inter alia because of its satirical presentation of the Free Officers of the 1952 Revolution. When the ban was lifted, several scenes were cut, including a scene in which a group of Jewish war refugees arrived in New York and a scene portraying the burning of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946 by Jewish terrorists (because an Israeli flag was shown).
- [1976–78] Between [1976] and [1978], **Bezalel Porten**, a professor at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, was repeatedly denied permission by the Cairo Museum trustees to study the Aramaic papyri of Elephantine Island (near Aswan) stored in the museum's manuscript collections. He was finally allowed to enter Egypt in 1978, following the signing of the Camp David Agreements. He visited the island and had

- relatively free access to the papyri, but his freedom to work in the museum was progressively restricted after Sadat's death (1981). Later a new application to study the papyri was rejected again. As early as the 1950s, the Nasser government had not welcomed the idea of a search for ancient Jewish remains at Elephantine Island because Egypt was officially at war with Israel at that time.
- 1979 In February the People's Assembly approved a motion confiscating all the works of Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240), an Arab of Andalus (Spain) writing on Islamic mysticism. The government printing house was instructed to stop work on a new edition of his *Meccan Revelations* and to confiscate the volumes already distributed.
- In April Egypt was not invited to the Federation of Arab Historians Congress in Benghazi, Libya, because it had signed the Camp David agreements with Israel.
- 1981– U.S. historian **Peter Gran** (1941–) was repeatedly denied a visa to Egypt because, according to the Ministry of Interior, as a freelance journalist in the Middle East in 1981 he had written reports which defamed Egypt. Gran had published *The Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760–1840* (Austin 1979) but he denied that he had ever worked as a journalist. In 1996 he was an associate professor of history at Temple University, Philadelphia.
- 1981 In September **Latifa al-Ziyat**, assistant history professor at the Girls' Faculty, Ayn Shams University, Cairo, and chairwoman of the Committee for Preserving the National Culture, was removed from the university and detained together with hundreds of others in a purge of intellectuals. In November she was probably still in prison.
- 1985– Act 102 of 1985 confined the role of the al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy to censoring books related to the Koran and Sunna only, but this role had reportedly expanded to include books discussing historical and intellectual issues in Islam from viewpoints differing from those of the academy. **Al-Azhar reportedly prevented two major television series, one about Ibn Khaldun and one about Imam Muhammad Abduh, Egypt's mufti at the turn of the twentieth century.**
- 1985 In April a judge ruled that a 150-year-old unexpurgated version of *A Thousand-and-One Nights*, a thousand-year-old Arabic classic, was pornographic and ordered it to be confiscated.
- 1990s In the early 1990s, archeological sites in the Nile Valley, and tourists visiting them, became targets for terrorism.
- 1992 On 8 June **Farag Foda** [also: Fuda, Fudah, Fouda, Fawda] (1945–92), doctor of agricultural economics, **cofounder of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights** and founder of the political party Party of the Future, was shot and killed by two members of al-Gamaa al-Islamiya (the Islamic Group). In May an ad hoc committee of clerics from al-Azhar had decided that “everything he did was against Islam”. The killers reportedly cited this fatwa (religious decree) as their justification for killing him. Foda had published books and articles on the history and politics of Islam, especially *The Wafd and the Future* (1983), concerning, inter alia, the 1919 Revolution, and *The Neglected Truth* (1985), in which the Islamic vision of history was attacked. Al-Azhar's council published *Who killed Farag Foda?* In December 1992 Foda's collected works were banned, **but later much of his work was reprinted.** One of his killers was executed in February 1994.
- 1993– In March 1993 **Nasr Abu-Zeid** (1943–), professor of Arabic literature at Cairo University, was denied promotion to full professor after a member of the review committee, Abd el-Sabour Shahin, called his writings an insult to Islam. Despite protests of the department professors, this minority report was endorsed by the university. In a mosque in April Abd el-Sabour Shahin publicly accused Abu-Zeid of apostasy. In May seven Islamist lawyers accused Abu-Zeid of apostasy under the Hisbah rule (Islamic personal status law allowing Muslims to file suits against those alleged to have violated religious law) because he had called for a historical interpretation and recontextualization of the Koran in his writings, particularly in *Criticism of Islamic Discourse* (1992, 1996), a semantic study of Islamic texts (in which he also repeated a 1988 attack against Islamic investment companies on behalf of one of which Abd el-Sabour Shahin had acted as a religious adviser before its collapse). In January 1994 the Giza Family Court ruled the case inadmissible but in June 1995 the Cairo Court of Appeals overturned the decision, declaring Abu-Zeid an apostate, and therefore ordering the divorce from his wife. In August 1996 the Court of Cassation confirmed the judgment. After the 1995 verdict, the militant Islamist group al-Jihad issued a death threat against Abu-Zeid and in September 1995 he and his wife went into exile in Spain and then the Netherlands, where he taught at Leiden University. In September 1996 the Giza Court of Urgent Cases suspended implementation of the divorce order (this was confirmed in December). In later years he remained under threat of death.
- 1996 In April thirteen Muslim Brothers, including **Gamal Abd al-Hadi**, a lecturer in Islamic history at al-Azhar University, were arrested, tried by a military court in June, and charged with membership in an illegal organization which “aimed to overthrow the regime”. Eight of them were sentenced to three years' imprisonment but al-Hadi was acquitted.
- 1998 In January the artistic production police raided Sinai publishers and confiscated fifteen copies of two

books by **Khalil Abdel Karim**, *The Yathrib Society* (Yathrib being the pre-Islamic name for Medina) and *The Rabaa Songs on the Companions of Prophet Mohammed*, apparently because the Islamic Research Academy labeled them as blasphemous.

- 1999 Among the books banned at the American University of Cairo at the request of government censors was *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (originally French 1984; London 1985), a history of the Muslim Brotherhood by French historian **Giles Kepel**.

Also see France (1947: Rodinson; 1951: Raymond), Indonesia (1994: Spielberg), Kuwait (1992: Anis), Malaysia (1996: Husayn).

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