

= Fustat =

Fustat ( also Fostat , Al Fustat , Misr al @-@ Fustat and Fustat @-@ Misr , and in Arabic : ??????? , al @-@ Fus??? , Coptic : ??????? ) , was the first capital of Egypt under Muslim rule . It was built by the Muslim general ' Amr ibn al- ' As immediately after the Muslim conquest of Egypt in AD 641 , and featured the Mosque of Amr , the first mosque built in Egypt and in all of Africa .

The city reached its peak in the 12th century , with a population of approximately 200 @, @ 000 . It was the center of administrative power in Egypt , until it was ordered burnt in 1168 by its own vizier , Shawar , to keep its wealth out of the hands of the invading Crusaders . The remains of the city were eventually absorbed by nearby Cairo , which had been built to the north of Fustat in 969 when the Fatimids conquered the region and created a new city as a royal enclosure for the Caliph . The area fell into disrepair for hundreds of years and was used as a garbage dump .

Today , Fustat is part of Old Cairo , with few buildings remaining from its days as a capital . Many archaeological digs have revealed the wealth of buried material in the area . Many ancient items recovered from the site are on display in Cairo 's Museum of Islamic Art .

= = Egyptian capital = =

Fustat was the capital of Egypt for approximately 500 years . After the city 's founding in 641 , its authority was uninterrupted until 750 , when the Abbasid dynasty staged a revolt against the Umayyads . This conflict was focused not in Egypt , but elsewhere in the Arab world . When the Abbasids gained power , they moved various capitals to more controllable areas . They had established the center of their caliphate in Baghdad , moving the capital from its previous location of Damascus . Similar moves were made throughout the new dynasty . In Egypt , they moved the capital from Fustat slightly north to the Abbasid city of al @-@ Askar , which remained the capital until 868 . When the Tulunid dynasty took control in 868 , the Egyptian capital moved briefly to another nearby northern city , Al @-@ Qatta 'i . This lasted only until 905 , when Al @-@ Qatta 'i was destroyed and the capital was returned to Fustat . The city again lost its status as capital city when its own vizier , Shawar , ordered its burning in 1168 . The capital of Egypt was ultimately moved to Cairo .

= = Origin of name = =

According to legend , the location of Fustat was chosen by a bird : A dove laid an egg in the tent of ' Amr ibn al- ' As ( 585 ? 664 ) , the Muslim conqueror of Egypt , just before he was to march against Alexandria in 646 . His camp at that time was just north of the Roman fortress of Babylon . Amr declared the dove 's nest as a sign from God , and the tent was left untouched as he and his troops went off to battle . When they returned victorious , Amr told his soldiers to pitch their tents around his , giving his new capital city its name , Mi?r al @-@ Fus??? , or Fus??? Mi?r , popularly translated as " City of the tents " , though this is not an exact translation .

The word Mi?r was an ancient Semitic root designating Egypt , but in Arabic also has the meaning of a large city or metropolis ( or , as a verb , " to civilize " ) , so the name Mi?r al @-@ Fus??? could mean " Metropolis of the Tent " . Fus??? Mi?r would mean " The Pavilion of Egypt " . Egyptians to this day call Cairo " Mi?r " , or , colloquially , Ma?r , even though this is properly the name of the whole country of Egypt . The country 's first mosque , the Mosque of Amr , was later built in 642 on the same site of the commander 's tent .

= = Early history = =

For thousands of years , the capital of Egypt was moved with different cultures through multiple locations up and down the Nile , such as Thebes and Memphis , depending on which dynasty was in power . After Alexander the Great conquered Egypt around 331 BC , the capital became the city named for him , Alexandria , on the Mediterranean coast . This situation remained stable for nearly a

thousand years . After the army of the Arabian Caliph Umar captured the region in the 7th century , shortly after the death of Muhammad , he wanted to establish a new capital . When Alexandria fell in September 641 , Amr ibn al @-@ As , the commander of the conquering army , founded a new capital on the eastern bank of the river .

The early population of the city was composed almost entirely of soldiers and their families , and the layout of the city was similar to that of a garrison . Amr intended for Fustat to serve as a base from which to conquer North Africa , as well as to launch further campaigns against Byzantium . It remained the primary base for Arab expansion in Africa until Qayrawan was founded in Tunisia in 670 .

Fustat developed as a series of tribal areas , khittas , around the central mosque and administrative buildings . The majority of the settlers came from Yemen , with the next largest grouping from western Arabia , along with some Jews and Roman mercenaries . Arabic was generally the primary spoken dialect in Egypt , and was the language of written communication . Coptic was still spoken in Fustat in the 8th century .

Fustat was the center of power in Egypt under the Umayyad dynasty , which had started with the rule of Muawiyah I , and headed the Islamic caliphate from 660 to 750 . However , Egypt was considered only a province of larger powers , and was ruled by governors who were appointed from other Muslim centers such as Damascus , Medina , and Baghdad . Fustat was a major city , and in the 9th century , it had a population of approximately 120 @,@ 000 . But when General Gawhar of the Tunisian @-@ based Fatimids captured the region , this launched a new era when Egypt was the center of its own power . Gawhar founded a new city just north of Fustat on August 8 , 969 , naming it Al Qahira ( Cairo ) , and in 971 , the Fatimid Caliph al @-@ Mo 'ezz moved his court from al @-@ Mansuriya in Tunisia to Al Qahira . But Cairo was not intended as a center of government at the time ? it was used primarily as the royal enclosure for the Caliph and his court and army , while Fustat remained the capital in terms of economic and administrative power . The city thrived and grew , and in 987 , the geographer Ibn Hawkal wrote that al @-@ Fustat was approximately one third the size of Baghdad . By 1168 , it had a population of 200 @,@ 000 .

The city was known for its prosperity , with shaded streets , gardens , and markets . It contained high @-@ rise residential buildings , some seven storeys tall , which could reportedly accommodate hundreds of people . Al @-@ Muqaddasi in the 10th century described them as Minarets , while Nasir Khusraw in the early 11th century described some of them rising up to 14 stories , with roof gardens on the top storey complete with ox @-@ drawn water wheels for irrigation .

The Persian traveler , Nasir @-@ i @-@ Khusron , wrote of the exotic and beautiful wares in the Fustat markets : iridescent pottery , crystal , and many fruits and flowers , even during the winter months . From 975 to 1075 , Fustat was a major production centre for Islamic art and ceramics , and one of the wealthiest cities in the world . One report stated that it paid taxes that were equivalent to US \$ 150 @,@ 000 per day , to the administration of Caliph Mo 'ezz . Modern archaeological digs have turned up trade artifacts from as far away as Spain , China , and Vietnam . Excavations have also revealed intricate house and street plans ; a basic unit consisted of rooms built around a central courtyard , with an arcade of arches on one side of the courtyard being the principal means of access .

= = Destruction and decline = =

In the mid @-@ 12th century , the caliph of Egypt was the teenager Athid , but his position was primarily ceremonial . The true power in Egypt was that of the vizier , Shawar . He had been involved in extensive political intrigue for years , working to repel the advances of both the Christian Crusaders , and the forces of the Nur al @-@ Din from Syria . Shawar managed this by constantly shifting alliances between the two , playing them against each other , and in effect keeping them in a stalemate where neither army could successfully attack Egypt without being blocked by the other .

However , in 1168 , the Christian King Amalric I of Jerusalem , who had been trying for years to launch a successful attack on Egypt in order to expand the Crusader territories , had finally achieved a certain amount of success . He and his army entered Egypt , sacked the city of Bilbeis ,

slaughtered nearly all of its inhabitants , and then continued on towards Fustat . Amalric and his troops camped just south of the city , and then sent a message to the young Egyptian caliph Athid , only 18 years old , to surrender the city or suffer the same fate as Bilbeis .

Seeing that Amalric 's attack was imminent , Shawar ordered Fustat city burned , to keep it out of Amalric 's hands . According to the Egyptian historian Al @-@ Maqrizi ( 1346 ? 1442 ) :

Shawar ordered that Fustat be evacuated . He forced [ the citizens ] to leave their money and property behind and flee for their lives with their children . In the panic and chaos of the exodus , the fleeing crowd looked like a massive army of ghosts .... Some took refuge in the mosques and bathhouses ... awaiting a Christian onslaught similar to the one in Bilbeis . Shawar sent 20 @,@ 000 naphtha pots and 10 @,@ 000 lighting bombs [ mish 'al ] and distributed them throughout the city . Flames and smoke engulfed the city and rose to the sky in a terrifying scene . The blaze raged for 54 days ....

After the destruction of Fustat , the Syrian forces arrived and successfully repelled Amalric 's forces . Then with the Christians gone , the Syrians were able to conquer Egypt themselves . The untrustworthy Shawar was put to death , and the reign of the Fatimids was effectively over . The Syrian general Shirkuh was placed in power , but died due to ill health just a few months later , after which his nephew Saladin became vizier of Egypt on March 2 , 1169 , launching the Ayyubid dynasty .

With Fustat no more than a dying suburb , the center of government moved permanently to nearby Cairo . Saladin later attempted to unite Cairo and Fustat into one city by enclosing them in massive walls , although this proved to be largely unsuccessful .

In 1166 Maimonides went to Egypt and settled in Fustat , where he gained much renown as a physician , practising in the family of Saladin and in that of his vizier ?a?i al @-@ Fa?il al @-@ Baisami , and Saladin 's successors . The title Ra 'is al @-@ Umma or al @-@ Millah ( Head of the Nation or of the Faith ) , was bestowed upon him . In Fustat , he wrote his Mishneh Torah ( 1180 ) and The Guide for the Perplexed . Some of his writings were later discovered among the manuscript fragments in the geniza ( storeroom ) of the Ben Ezra Synagogue , located in Fustat .

While the Mamluks were in power from the 13th century to the 16th century , the area of Fustat was used as a rubbish dump , though it still maintained a population of thousands , with the primary crafts being those of pottery and trash @-@ collecting . The layers of garbage accumulated over hundreds of years , and gradually the population decreased , leaving what had once been a thriving city as an effective wasteland .

= = Modern Fustat = =

Today , little remains of the grandeur of the old city . The three capitals , Fustat , Al @-@ Askar and Al @-@ Qatta 'i were absorbed into the growing city of Cairo . Some of the old buildings remain visible in the region known as " Old Cairo " , but much of the rest has fallen into disrepair , overgrown with weeds or used as garbage dumps .

The oldest @-@ remaining building from the area is probably the Mosque of Ibn Tulun , from the 9th century , which was built while the capital was in Al @-@ Qatta 'i . The first mosque ever built in Egypt ( and by extension , the first mosque built in Africa ) , the Mosque of Amr , is still in use , but has been extensively rebuilt over the centuries , and nothing remains of the original structure .

It is believed that further archaeological digs could yield substantial rewards , considering that the remains of the original city are still preserved under hundreds of years of rubbish . Some archaeological excavations have taken place , the paths of streets are still visible , and some buildings have been partially reconstructed to waist @-@ height . But the site is difficult and dangerous to access because of the nearby slums . However , some artifacts that have been recovered so far can be seen in Cairo 's Museum of Islamic Art .