

Archives and the Metropolis

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Cairo: Its Archives and History

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Cairo is ranked as one of the top ten metropolises of the world. Its history and development over ten centuries reflect the history of Egypt in general and the process of modern state building initiated by Muhammad Ali in particular. The Archives of Cairo contain the documentation and records of the city dating back to the early decades of the sixteenth century.

This paper gives an outline of the metropolitan development of Cairo, a description of Cairo Archives and the collection of documents related to the development of the Egyptian Capital.

Cairo Metropolis

The historical development

Cairo as a metropolis is located on a remarkable site that forms the isthmus between Upper and Lower Egypt. Within that site almost all the metropolitan cities of Egypt have been founded: Memphis, Heliopolis and Babylon, capitals of ancient Egypt; Fustāt, ‘Askar and Qatā’i’, the capitals of Egypt under Muslim rule. These were predecessors of *al-Qahira* (Cairo), founded by the Fatimids in AD 969. While the ancient metropolitan cities of Egypt were located on the western banks of the Nile, Fustāt - the first settlement and capital of the Arab conquerors - was founded near the eastern banks of the Nile to the north of Babylon. It was essential for the Arabs to have access to Arabia across the Eastern Desert. Two other predecessors of Cairo, ‘Askar and Qatā’i’, were founded at the same site, northern Fustāt, and al-Qahira was founded to the north of them. The eastern boundaries of Cairo and her predecessors lay along the western hills that provide a natural defence line. The Canal of Cairo, known as Khalij, formed the western boundary of the city.¹

¹ G. Himdan, *al-Qahira* (Cairo, 1993),6-14.

The Khalij originated in Pharaonic times when a canal was dug to connect the Nile with the Red Sea. It was restored by the Emperor Trajan, but gradually fell into disuse. After the Arab conquest in AD 641 and the establishment of Fustāt, the canal was redug with a new mouth to the north of Babylon. In the eighth century it was blocked and in the tenth century restored again. By the end of the Fatimid rule the Canal was neglected and terminated at a depression south-east of the Delta, where it formed a little lake called *Birkat al-Hajj*, the first station on the pilgrimage road to Mecca. Despite the great expansion of Cairo under the Mamluks, the banks of the Canal retained a suburban character.² Salah al-Din, the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, built the Citadel of Cairo, and extended the city walls to include Fustāt and other Muslim predecessors of Cairo.³

Ottoman Cairo

By the beginning of the Ottoman Period in 1517, Cairo was a long narrow urban strip stretching between Fustāt to the south and Raydāniyya, the northern outskirts of al-Qahira, the Fatimid capital. The landscape of Cairo sloped from the Muqattam Hills, which form the eastern boundary, westwards, to the eastern banks of the Nile. Between the Arab conquest in the mid seventh century and the end of the eighth century, the course of the Nile changed several times, leaving a wide alluvial plain on its eastern banks, one to two kilometres wide to the west of Cairo between the Khalij (Canal of Cairo) and the eastern banks of the Nile. The alluvial plain was turned into fields to supply Cairo with fruit and vegetables, and served as a picnic area with its gardens and ponds. Acting as a suburb of Cairo, the alluvial plain attracted the attention of its wealthy, who established houses surrounded by gardens on land leased to them by the State. The ponds of the western suburb of Cairo were depressions in the soil that were filled by canals or the infiltration of water during the Nile floods. Sometimes ponds were dug at the initiative of a member of the ruling class. Besides coolness in the summer, these ponds offered great opportunities for entertainment especially at night. When the wealthy elite began building outside the urban core of Cairo, they showed an obvious preference for the neighbourhood of the ponds such as Birkat al-Fil and Birkat Azbakiyya. In the Ottoman period, two aristocratic residential districts developed around these two ponds.⁴

The alluvial landscape did not immediately pull the urban expansion of Cairo towards the west. Only much later, at the beginning of the eighteenth century,

2 D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs from Azbak to Ismail 1467-1879* (Cairo, 1985), 2-4.

3 For the early history of Cairo, see: A. Reymond, *Le Caire* (Paris, 1993); J. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1,001 years of the City Victorious* (Princeton, 1971); S. Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo* (1902); M. Clerget, *Le Caire: Etude de Geographie Urbain et d'Histoire Economique* (Cairo, 1934).

4 Clerget, *Le Caire. vol. 1*, 194; Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, 709; N. Hanna, *An Urban History of Bulaq in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods* (Cairo, 1983), 2-4.

the area between Khalij and the pond of Azbakiyya witnessed the boom of its final urbanisation.⁵

The Ottoman period in Cairo witnessed some large-scale projects that contributed to shaping and organising certain quarters. The boundaries of Cairo did not continue to expand as they had under the Mamluks. The French Expeditionary Forces 1798-1801 made their headquarters at Azbakiyya, and introduced some strategic modifications on the physical form of Cairo. Orders were issued to remove the street gates, and a large thoroughfare was built to connect the French headquarters with the Khalij. Planned urbanisation of the alluvial western suburb was achieved in the nineteenth century under the rule of Muhammad Ali and Khedive Ismail.

The making of modern Cairo

Muhammad Ali (1805-48) initiated a policy of modern state building that involved economic changes, reorganisation of government institutions, and introduction of modern education to serve an ambitious political objective. Under him, Egypt emerged as a regional power with a strong modern army and navy.⁶ Muhammad Ali contributed to modern urban development of Cairo. Hygiene was one of his concerns and his achievements in the urbanisation of Cairo were mainly directed by hygiene considerations. He removed the cemeteries of Azbakiyya, levelled the rubbish mounds within and around the city's urban landscape, filled the ponds, cleaned the streets, gave them names and provided street lighting. The street built by the French to connect Azbakiyya with Khalij was modernised and became a centre of European trade, as well as the residence of the European government servants employed by Muhammad Ali. In 1837 a plan to develop the Azbakiyya quarter was initiated, to create a European style national park surrounded by fine buildings, foreign consulates, schools, a hospital and European-style hotels. Cairo's architectural character was changing to cope with Muhammad Ali's policy of modernisation: architecture in the Greek, European and Turkish style was adopted initiating a new chapter in Cairo's urban development.⁷

The radical urban development that created modern Cairo was made by Khedive Ismail after his visit to the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1867. The Khedive was very impressed by the character of the French capital, and decided to give Cairo a European orientation in time for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Invitations to this event had been sent to prominent European guests, and the Khedive wanted Cairo to look European.

5 For details, see: Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, chapter 3.

6 A.L.S. Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge, 1984).

7 Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*, 81-88.

Neither Ismail nor his grandfather, Muhammad Ali, could realise their dream of modernisation within the urban core of Cairo with its traditional historical character. It was the plain to the west of Cairo, between the Khalij and the Nile, that made it possible to plan modern urban expansion. Ismail initiated a short term scheme to remodel Azbakiyya quarter. Two streets were laid down to connect the western extension of Cairo with the urban core: Muhammad Ali street connecting Azbakiyya with the Citadel, and Abdul-Aziz street connecting the quarter with Abdin, where Ismail ordered a modern palace to be built as an official residence. Another street named after Clot Bey crossed the Coptic quarter, joining Azbakiyya with Bab al-Hadid where the railway terminal was located. A new opera house was built on the model of Milan's *La Scala*, and statues were ordered to decorate the public squares.⁸

The quarter to the south of Azbakiyya known as *al-Luq*, lightly urbanised and inhabited by marginal social groups, marshy and full of rubbish mounds, was turned into a modern urban quarter. Ismail initiated a plan for the Ismailiyya, a new name given to the quarter. The rubbish mounds were levelled, swamps and ponds were filled and the area was planned on a European style to become a new aristocratic residential quarter in between 'Abdin Palace and the Nile.

Ismailiyya quarter pulled urbanisation westward to reach the Nile banks, and Ismail initiated the urban expansion of Cairo across the Nile to the western banks. He engaged a French company to erect Qasr al-Nil bridge joining the east bank with Zamalik island, and another bridge joining the island with the west bank was built by a British company. Both bridges were opened in 1871. Khedive Ismail initiated the first step in the urbanisation of the Nile's west bank by building two palaces, one at Zamalik Island and one at Giza, to be followed by others built by him and high ranking officers. Orman, a botanic garden, was founded by the western bank of the Nile at Giza. Ismail also created two suburbs; Abbasiyya to the northeast of Cairo and Hilwan as an aristocratic resort connected with Cairo by a special railway.

Two significant developments were achieved under Ismail as regards modern Cairo's infrastructure, water and gas supplies. Two French companies were given concessions in 1865, Cordier Water Company and Lebon Gas Company (later engaged in both gas and electricity in the early 1890s).

Little was done after Ismail in the field of urbanisation except filling the Khalij to form an avenue, carried out by the Cairo Tramway Company in 1896. In 1905, a Belgian real estate company established a new suburb of Heliopolis

⁸ Ibid., 89-100.

north-east of Cairo, at the same time as a British concern laid the foundations of al-Ma'adi suburb four kilometres to the south of Cairo.⁹

The urban landscape of Cairo in the twentieth century was marked by expansion northward to Faggala, Zahir and Shubra, and north-eastward to Abbasiyya, Heliopolis, Matariyya, and later Madinet Nasr. Urbanization of the western bank of the Nile was initiated in the 1950s and developed through the last three decades giving a new dimension to Greater Cairo.

Contradictions of development

Ottoman Cairo which was a small urban rectangle became a neglected part of the modern metropolis. The modern European-style urban core made by Khedive Ismail and developed across the river to the west of the Nile and the north of Cairo became a centre of gravity for all urban development schemes. Until the 1950s, the quarters of old Cairo lacked necessary services such as water supply, electricity, sewage and drainage. The wealthy merchants and notables of the old city moved to the west or the north-east where the modern quarters are located. The street of al-Khalij made invisible borders between two different cities, old and modern. While old quarters of Cairo were the centre of traditional industries and old bazaars trading in textiles, spices, metalwork and other goods demanded by lower middle and poor classes, the modern quarters became centres of business, banks, insurance and trading companies, the Stock Exchange, hotels, department stores, fancy restaurants, theatres, cinemas and entertainment.¹⁰

The social demography of Cairo reflects the contradiction between old and new, traditional and modern quarters of Cairo. Poor quarters are located at the eastern, northern and southern outskirts of the city, comprising the most densely populated quarters of old Cairo, Shubra, Bulaq and Imbaba, inhabited by workers, artisans, retail dealers and low-ranking government servants. The rank and file of the bourgeoisie inhabit the modern quarters between old Cairo and the western banks of the Nile, such as Azbakiyya, Bab al-Luq, Garden City, Zamalik, Ruda, Duqqi, Agouza, Muhandisin, Ma'adi, Heliopolis and Madinet Nasr. In between these socially polarized quarters that reflect the gulf between poor and rich Cairenes, there are quarters inhabited by the lower middle class such as Munira, Faggala, Zahir, Abbasiyya and some parts of Shubra and Rodel-farag, where some merchants, government servants, and army officers live.¹¹

9 A. Zaki, *al-Qahira* (Cairo, 1943), 177-192.

10 Himdan, *al-Qahira*; 76-88.

11 Reymond, *Le Caire*, chapter 16; F. Musailhi, *Tatawwur al-'Asrma al-Misriyya* (Cairo, 1988).

The Great Wen

The urban development and population growth of Cairo since the nineteenth century had some detrimental effects. Between 1882 and 1986, the population of Egypt increased sevenfold (from 6,700,000 to 50,400,000), but the population of Cairo increased twentytwofold in the same period (from 400,000 to 9,000,000). In 1882, the population of Cairo was 5.7 per cent of Egypt's population; the percentage swelled to 17.1 per cent in 1986.¹² In a little more than a century, Cairo became a megalopolis suffering all kinds of development problems in areas such as housing, services, transportation, and pollution analogous to Third World countries.

Cairo Archives

Tradition and heritage

The archives of Cairo reflect the great city's long history and form an integral part of the city's metropolitan development. Egypt has one of the oldest central administrations and hierarchical bureaucracies in the world. From ancient to modern times, all documents and records were kept by the State departments concerned in the capital. The archaeological findings of different ages show great quantities of papyrus documents related to Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, Roman, Byzantine and Muslim Egypt. Private documents relating to trade and business were also found in Cairo, dating back to the Middle Ages, reflecting the interest of private communities in keeping archives of their own. The Ottomans started their rule by documenting the Mamluk land tenures and related land tax, to serve as basis for the first cadastral survey conducted by them. The main Islamic law courts (*mahkama Shar'iyya*) kept records dating back to the sixteenth century, the beginning of Ottoman rule.

Despite this deeply rooted bureaucratic heritage, and consistent interest in documentation and the keeping of archives, the country and its metropolis had no central archives before 1829, when Muhammad Ali established the *Daftarhane* (Record Office). Before that time, documents and records were kept by the department or officer concerned, who could take them with him in case of retirement or dismissal. Only the records and documents related to the treasury and central administration were kept permanently by the Viceroy's office. These included land tenure, tax-farming (*iltizam*), stipends of the military and government servants, and correspondence exchanged with Constantinople. The Shari'a Court records were kept separately by the courts concerned.

12 Himdan, *al-Qahira*; 240-45; F. Shorter, *Cairo's Leap Forward: People, Households and Dwelling Space* (Cairo, 1989).

The making of Cairo Archives

The creation of a modern state initiated by Muhammad Ali, with the subsequent reorganisation and institutionalisation of administration, made it essential to establish the *Daftarhane*.¹³ The destruction of the Deputy Viceroy's (*Katkhuda Bey*) office, in the Citadel, by a fire in June 1820, which damaged a considerable part of the central records and documents, induced Muhammad Ali to build a secure dedicated repository for the archives. The *Daftarhane* was built on the site of the old Mamluk Mint adjacent to the Citadel of Cairo, a two storey stone building with strong walls and a watchtower for guards. It contained 41 strong rooms 5.25 metres high, the number being increased later to 69, all with narrow strong windows, furnished with wooden shelves.

Inaugurated in May 1829, the Archives were affiliated to the Treasury up to 1844, when it became a division of the Viceroy's Department. Three years later, it was attached to the Department of Finance, and in 1876 became a department within the Ministry of the Interior, then back again to the Ministry of Finance in 1905. The Archives became a part of the Ministry of Culture for two years 1977-79, then became a department of the Ministry of Finance. It is still functioning as current archives of financial and judicial documents. Since 1933, collections of documents from the nineteenth century and earlier have been moved from Cairo Archives, then known as *Dar al-Mahfuzat al-'Umumiyya* (Public Record Office), to the newly established Royal Historical Archives.

A traditional way of keeping records and documents was adopted by the *Daftarhane* for sixteen years from 1830 to 1846, when the Statute regulating the Archives was promulgated by the Viceroy. Before implementation of the Statute, documents were held by the department of origin for two years, then moved to special strong rooms in the Archives. One or more strong rooms were assigned for the documents coming from each department, which were placed there without any indexing or classification. Lack of archival experience was behind this traditional system, as the first archivists were clerks from the Treasury. Accumulation of archival materials in this way made them inconvenient to use, and a modern system needed to be introduced.

M. Rouser, a French teacher at the School of Book-Keeping in Cairo, was ordered by Muhammad Ali in 1844 to devise a suitable way to reorganise the Archives. He submitted his proposals for reorganisation in the form of a statute, which was studied carefully by a consultative body and the Viceroy issued a decree of implementation. The Statute laid down the foundations of archival order of the *Daftarhane*. Cairo Archives continued to apply the system made by

13 All information on the *Daftarhane* and the development of Cairo archives is based on two unpublished works in Arabic: S.A. Shafa'ah, 'Maya wa Khamsun "Aman" Umr al-Daftarhane al-Misriyya' (1979); I. Omar, *Dar al-Mahfuzat al-'Umumiyya bil-Qal'ah* (MA thesis, Cairo University, 1987).

Rouser with some insignificant amendments introduced in 1895, 1907, 1921 and 1953, dealing with the period of retention of the documents at the department of origin and adding new categories of documents to be kept permanently or temporarily in the Archives.

According to the Statute of the Archives, documents and records were held by the department of origin for five to fifteen years, depending on the class of documents as defined by the regulations of the current archives. A special committee with membership from divisions of the departments concerned and representatives of the acquisition division of the Archives meets regularly to identify unnecessary documents for destruction and others of historical value for removal to the Archives for retention.

The archives were arranged in six sequences: personal name, geographic, alphabetic, chronological, subject and numerical. Records of tax-payers in urban areas, files of government servants and pensioners, and records of military conscription were listed in alphabetical order of surname. Geographic classification was applied to records of urban buildings and records of land ownership in rural areas, by location such as districts and streets in cities, by provinces and villages in the country, in alphabetical order. Chronological arrangement was used for personal status records such as birth, death, marriage and divorce. Subject classification was generally used for major categories of the documents and contents of repositories. Numerical classification was generally used for all categories of records, utilizing the numbers of the document, shelf and repository successively.

The Statute of the Archives also regulated acquisition, access, and security measures to be observed by the archivists. In the last amendment of 1953, the Archives of Cairo were given authority over current archives in all government departments including arrangements for classification and indexing, paving the way for the introduction of a unified archival system.

Now, the premises of Cairo Archives at the Citadel are composed of four buildings: the *Daftarhane* of Muhammad Ali with 69 rooms in a two storey building, the *Darbhane* (Mint) building which served as an annex with 22 rooms, *Seray al- 'Adl* building adjacent to the Mint with 44 rooms, and the five storey building known as the New Building established in 1937, with 46 rooms. In total there are 181 rooms, comprising what is now known as *Dar al-Mahfuzat al-'Umumiyya* (the Public Record Office) housing state documents from the Ottoman period to recent times. Between 1933 and 1995, however, most of the documents relating to the Ottoman period and the nineteenth century were

gradually moved to the Royal Historical Archives established by King Fuad in 1933, renamed the National Historical Archives in 1954.¹⁴

The National- Historical Archives

King Fuad realized that it was necessary for the dynasty to achieve an acceptable international image by re-interpreting the history of the makers of modern Egypt, Muhammad Ali and Ismail. An ad hoc committee of high ranking officials and scholars was established in 1925, and several European historians were recruited to write books on the achievements of the Muhammad Ali dynasty. The king's interest in history made it essential to collect documents on Egypt from European archives as well as making the Egyptian documents available. Since the European historians who had been recruited could not read Arabic or Turkish, Egyptian documents needed for their research had to be translated into French. A team of competent translators was hired by the Palace, and the Egyptian documents of the nineteenth century were moved from Cairo Archives at the Citadel to the Royal Cabinet in 'Abdin Palace. A special building within the confines of the palace was assigned to what came to be known in 1933 as the Royal Historical Archives. The new archives housed collections of transcribed European and American documents on nineteenth-century Egypt collected from the archives of London, Paris, Wien and Washington, besides Arabic and Turkish Egyptian documents covering the period from the French expedition to the end of Ismail's reign, 1798-1879.

The creation of the Royal Historical Archives in 'Abdin Palace marked a significant development in the history of Cairo archives. Despite the fact that it was functioning as a historical research section in the royal palace, it provided indispensable archival services that were not available in the Public Record Office of the Citadel. A considerable number of Turkish documents was translated into Arabic. At the same time, subject classification of these documents was carried out. Firmans issued by the Ottoman Sultans to the viceroys of Egypt between 1597 and 1914 were collected, translated and classified. A card index covering 153 subjects in chronological and alphabetical order based on the major collection of Egyptian documents was prepared and made available. The Royal Historical Archives of 'Abdin was divided by language into three main sections; European, Turkish and Arabic. The archivists were mainly Europeans, and the translators were Turko-Europeans and Levantines. Access to the Royal Historical Archives was restricted to European researchers and Egyptians granted special permission.

With the coming of a new republican regime and the elimination of the monarchy, the historical archives of 'Abdin was given a hard time. The new

¹⁴ All information on the National Archives of Cairo are based on the author's personal experience, and a report by Z.S. Najm, 'Dar al-Wathaiq al-Misriyya fi Thalatin Aman 1954-1984', *al-Mu'arrikh al-Misri*, Department of History, Cairo University, vol. 2 (1988), 201-223.

regime resented all royal things beginning with the archives. The building which housed the archives was needed to serve as the headquarters for the military police. The staff were dismissed and the documents were moved randomly to an inconvenient place within 'Abdin premises, where they were piled in small, damp rooms and remained there, neglected for four years. Naturally, rodents did a remarkable job.

In June 1954, a decree was issued to found the National Archives to collect historical archival materials, keep them in proper order and make them available for researchers. The decree was not implemented until 1956 when 'Abdin Archives reopened under the title of National Archives in the same damp place. A staff of only five persons were assigned to implement this; they needed two years to clear part of the mess before they could make some documents available for researchers. Sometimes it was left for the researchers to sort through piles of documents and find out what they needed.

The restoration of the historical archives of 'Abdin to their condition as they had been under the monarchy took ten years of hard work by a limited number of personnel with little or no technical experience. A new classification was made in 1969. The language-based classification adopted by the royal archivists was abandoned, and documents were classified into five major categories:

- (a) documents and records of sovereign state departments;
- (b) documents of the public services departments;
- (c) documents of production departments and institutions of economic nature;
- (d) documents of the provincial administration;
- (e) documents of private institutions.

No detailed sub-classification or even indexing was made to show the contents of each category. Documents produced by certain departments were classified under another one, no subject or chronological classifications were made, and a researcher had to spend unlimited time in order to get what he or she needed for research.

Once the inadequate reorganisation was made, the National Archives were moved from 'Abdin to the Citadel in 1969, then again to a new building in Bulaq by the Nile's east bank in 1986. Inappropriate transportation caused more damage to document collections. Certain valuable documents were missing or misplaced. Limited and ineffectual efforts were made to restore some of the damaged items, but thousands are left untouched due to lack of modern restoration equipment and technical expertise.

Housed in new premises at Bulaq with sufficient storage capacity, the National Archives acquired all the collections of documents related to the Ottoman Period and all other documents of the nineteenth century. These collections were moved from *Dar al-Mahfuzat al- 'Umumiyya* (the Public Record Office) in the Citadel. The entire contents of repositories were moved and found a new home at the National Archives of Bulaq, except family status records such as birth, death, marriage and divorce records, military conscription records, and judicial files. These continued to be held by the Public Record Office at the Citadel in addition to records of taxation and finance. Dar al-Mahfuzat is now functioning to hold the documents of the Ministries of Finance and Justice that are required to be kept permanently. Documents produced by other departments are transferred to the National Archives after being kept in the place of origin for 15 years. Acquisition of documents by the National Archives is decided by a committee of experts according to historical value. No documents can be destroyed by departments of origin unless that is authorized by the National Archives.

Cairo Documents in the National Archives

The National Archives contains all the primary sources necessary to study the history of Cairo from the sixteenth century to the 1950s. Records of Shari'a Courts and documents of *Waqfs* are the main sources for Ottoman Cairo. *Sijillat al-Mahkama al- Shar 'iyya* (Islamic law court records) deal with various aspects of urban, economic and social development of Cairo in the Ottoman period. Besides functioning as a judicial institution, Shari'a Courts were acting as a registration office. Commercial agreements, appointment of guilds shaykhs, prices of goods, value of currency and exchange rates, taxes levied by the treasury, marriage contracts, distribution of shares of inheritance, measures pertaining to the Nile flood and the deeds of *waqfs* (endowment), all had to be registered at the Shari'a Courts and included in the court records.

Waqfs documents are an invaluable source for study of the urban development of Ottoman Cairo. In *Waqf* documents a full description of the institution subject to endowment was usually given, including details of the building and its facilities, costs of construction, location and the names of the beneficiaries. These documents help scholars to trace urban development of Ottoman Cairo, study the styles of architecture and form conclusions as regards the urban life and social conditions of the Cairene communities.

The records of the Cairo Governorate, *Sijillat Muhafazat Misr*, give detailed information on nineteenth-century Cairo. They contain records of urban reorganisation carried out by Muhammad Ali and Ismail, major public works, medical and social services, handicraft guilds, foreign communities, and police work.

The documents of the Ministerial Council, *Majlis al-Wuzara'*, cover various aspect of the development of Cairo from the time of the British Occupation in 1882 to the end of the 1950s. These mostly deal with urban reorganisation, public works, public utilities, and the urban expansion in the suburbs of Cairo.

The records of the 1846 and 1868 census give an image of the demographic development of Cairo. They provide detailed information on the population of Cairo households, ages, occupations, place of origin and religion. The census carried out under the British Occupation within each decade, initiated in 1897 and continued through the twentieth century, lack such detailed information on the population of Cairo.

Research on Cairo archives

Research on Cairo archives is very difficult. No detailed indexing or cataloguing of the archives in general or the documents of Cairo metropolitan history in particular has been undertaken. Using the archival materials of Cairo requires unlimited time, patience and luck. The copying service is very poor, and limited to 50 pages for each item ordered by a researcher. Access to the archives requires permission that takes three weeks for Egyptian researchers and two to three months for foreigners.

The poor service in the Cairo Archives is a complicated issue caused by a number of factors. Instead of being an independent institution, the archives have been attached to various departments and in each case treated as a minor section. Minimal funds were assigned for the archives as well as unqualified personnel. Qualified and well trained archivists are limited in number and poorly paid, and quit their job as soon as they can find a better post. Besides, the strong rooms are in a very bad condition, damp and rodents are causing more damage to the archival materials, and the fire prevention system is inefficient. A lot of work has to be done to modernize the archives and its service.