





Amenemhet III

flourished 18th century BC king of Egypt (reigned 1818–1770 BC) of the 12th dynasty, who brought Middle Kingdom Egypt (comprising also the 11th and 13th dynasties) to a peak of economic prosperity by completing a system to regulate the inflow of water into **Lake Moeris**, in the **Al-Fayyum depression** southwest of Cairo. The resulting stabilization of the water level also drained some of the marshes that had surrounded the old lake.

As part of this great work, the **labyrinth** described by the Greek historian **Herodotus** was probably built nearby. It was probably a multifunctional building—palace, temple, town, and administrative centre; ruins of the structure exist south of **Amenemhet's pyramid at Hawara, in Al-Fayyum**. To celebrate the reclamation of 153,600 acres (62,200 hectares) of land for agricultural use, Amenemhet erected two colossuses of himself nearby, later described by **Herodotus**.

Amenemhet also worked the turquoise mines at Sinai with unprecedented intensity. Permanent quarters were erected for the miners, with wells nearby and fortifications to repel Bedouin raiders. **A temple to the goddess Hathor was also built.**

Quarries throughout Egypt and Nubia, to the south, likewise were the site of much activity to support the king's building enterprises. Except for minor punitive raids, his reign was peaceful. In Nubia Amenemhet retained the empire won by his predecessors.

Artifacts of his reign have been found from as far south as the Third Cataract of the Nile to as far northeast as Byblos, an important seaport in Lebanon, an indication of Egypt's primacy as a commercial power. His was the last long and successful reign of the 12th dynasty.

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Lake Moeris

Arabic Birkat Qarun,

ancient lake that once occupied a large area of the al-Fayyum depression in Egypt and is now represented by the much smaller **Lake Qarun**.

Researches on the desert margin of the depression indicate that in early **Paleolithic times** the lake's waters stood about 120 feet (37 m) above sea level and probably filled the depression; the lake's level gradually fell until about **10,000 BC**, when it was about 15 feet (4 1/2 m) below sea level, **perhaps because its connection with the Nile River was temporarily cut off.**

Early in the **Neolithic Period (nearly 4,000–11,000 years ago)**, the lake rose again and then gradually subsided. Neolithic and Early Dynastic people made their homes on the slowly shrinking shores.

Not until the **Egyptian Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1786 BC)** were attempts made to stop the gradual silting of the channel connecting the lake with the Nile. **Probably either Sesostris II or Amenemhet III widened and deepened the channel, thus setting the lake once more in hydraulic equilibrium with the river.** The lake, which was then 55 feet (17 m) above sea level, **served both as a flood control that was able to take excess water from overly high Nile floods and as a reservoir whose waters could be used for irrigation after the Nile flood had subsided.**

In about 450 BC when Herodotus visited the lake, he assumed it to be artificial and **was told that it had been dug by King Moeris** at least 900 years before.

Large land-reclamation projects in the Fayyum region were carried out by the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt. Under Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the 3rd century BC, Lake Moeris was partially drained by means of a dam that restricted the entry of Nile water into it. The rich alluvial soil that was thus laid bare (approximately 450 square miles [1,200 square km] of it) was irrigated by canals and subjected to intensive cultivation. The population around the lake thus increased at a rapid rate, and a number of new towns sprang up.

The modern-day excavation of several of these sites has yielded a rich harvest of Hellenistic and Roman papyri. The Fayyum region continued to flourish during the first two centuries of Roman rule, but thereafter it declined. The water levels of Lake Moeris subsequently continued to decrease, leading to the shallow and relatively small Lake Qarun of modern times.

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Labyrinth of Pharaoh Amenemhet III

Pliny the Elder mentions the following as the four famous labyrinths of antiquity:

1. **The Egyptian**, of which a description is given by **Herodotus** and **Strabo**, was situated to the east of the **Lake of Moeris**, opposite the ancient site of Arsinoë, or Crocodilopolis.

According to Egyptologists, the word means "the temple at the entrance of the lake."

According to **Herodotus**, the entire building, surrounded by a single wall, contained 12 courts and 3,000 chambers, 1,500 above and 1,500 below ground. The roofs were wholly of stone, and the walls were covered with sculpture. **On one side stood a pyramid about 243 feet (74 m) high.**

Herodotus himself went through the upper chambers but was not permitted to visit those underground, which he was told contained the tombs of the kings who had built the labyrinth and the tombs of the sacred crocodiles.

Other ancient authorities considered that it was built as a place of meeting for the Egyptian nomes, or political divisions; but it is more likely that it was intended for sepulchral purposes.

It was the work of **Amenemhet III**, of the 12th dynasty, who reigned from 1818 to 1770 BC.

It was first located by the **Egyptologist Karl R. Lepsius** to the north of Hawara in the Fayum, and in 1888 **Flinders Petrie** discovered its foundation, the extent of which is about 1,000 feet long by 800 feet wide (300 by 250 m).

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Sesostris II's greatest achievement was his beginning of the development of the Fayyum, the rich area near the royal residence. There, where the lake in the Fayyum received its inflow from a branch stream off the Nile, the king constructed waterworks that were designed to regulate the lake's level and reclaim partly the marshy ground around its shores. The project was later extended widely by **Amenemhet III**.

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Fayum Depression

Fayyum also spelled Faiyum, or Fayum, muhafazah (governorate) of Upper Egypt, in a great depression of the Western Desert southwest of Cairo. Extending about 50 miles (80 km) east–west and about 35 miles (56 km) north–south, the whole Fayyum, including ar-Ruwayan Wadi, a smaller, arid depression, is below sea level (maximum depth 150 feet [45 m]). The muhafazah also includes a triangular tract of desert to the west, bounded by al-Jizah to the north and Bani Suwayf to the south.

The name is derived from the Coptic Phiom (“the sea”), probably inspired by the ancient **Lake Moeris** that formed there during the Pleistocene epoch when the Nile, about 60 feet (18 m) higher than today, breached the gravelly ridge that separates al-Fayyum from the Nile valley proper.

On the southeastern side of the depression is al-Fayyum, the capital of the muhafazah, formerly Madinat al-Fayyum (“City of the Fayyum”).

The present Lake Qarun in the depression is sustained by a partial diversion of the Nile into the Yusuf (Ibrahimiyyah) Canal, which follows **the ancient channel of the Nile into the Fayyum, branching out to provide irrigation water.**

The brackish lake, occupying 85 square miles (220 square km), has been successfully stocked with saltwater fish, enabling a commercial-fishing industry to develop.

The naturally protected, well-defined geographic entity of al-Fayyum was favoured by prehistoric hunters, who were probably attracted there by abundant game and equable climate. **It was an important province in the 12th dynasty (1938–1756 BC), when the capital of Egypt was situated nearby.**

There is documentary evidence (3rd century BC) of Jewish settlement there. Ptolemy II (285–246 BC) reduced the level of the lake to its present level, reclaiming much agricultural land. Greek settlers were brought to the area, creating prosperous Hellenistic communities. The ruins of these have yielded thousands of Greek, Demotic, and Coptic papyri.

When occupied by the Arabs (c. AD 640), it was apparently still a prosperous agricultural region, chiefly producing rice and flax. Vulnerable to Berber desert raiders, it later declined, although it continued for centuries to be a centre of Coptic Christianity.

Al-Fayyum muhafazah has an area of 705 square miles (1,827 square km). With the linking of al-Fayyum to the Nile valley by railroad (1874), the governorate's isolation was reduced and the way opened for development of the rich soils deposited by the Nile.

Most of the area of al-Fayyum is now settled and cultivated. Cereals, rice, beans, grapes, olives, figs, dates, honey, cotton, and sugarcane are produced. Pigeons are raised for domestic commercial use.

In the early 1970s about 9,900 acres (4,000 hectares) of desert were reclaimed for agricultural use. Attar of roses collected there is used in the perfume industry. Other industrial activities include manufacture of woolen and linen cloth, leather tanning, and tobacco processing.

Construction of a chemical plant using solar evaporation to extract sodium chloride, sulfide, chlorate, and magnesium oxide started in 1980 near Lake Qarun. Coal and iron-ore deposits have been found in the governorate.

The region has many ancient sites, including **Shedet (later Crocodilopolis), chief centre for worship of the crocodile-god Sebek**, near which al-Fayyum town now lies.

In the time of the Ptolemies, Setje was named Arsinoe after the wife of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

Since pharaonic times al-Fayyum's irrigation waters, its lifeline, have been controlled by sluices at al-Lahun across the Yusuf Canal.

Other modern centres in the great oasis include Sinnuris, Itsa, and Ibshaway. The governorate is linked by a highway across the desert to al-Jizah (Giza) and by local roads to Bani Suwayf. A branch railway off the Cairo–Aswan line serves the governorate, and narrow-gauge railways radiate from the capital into the countryside. Pop. (1986 est.) 1,527,000.

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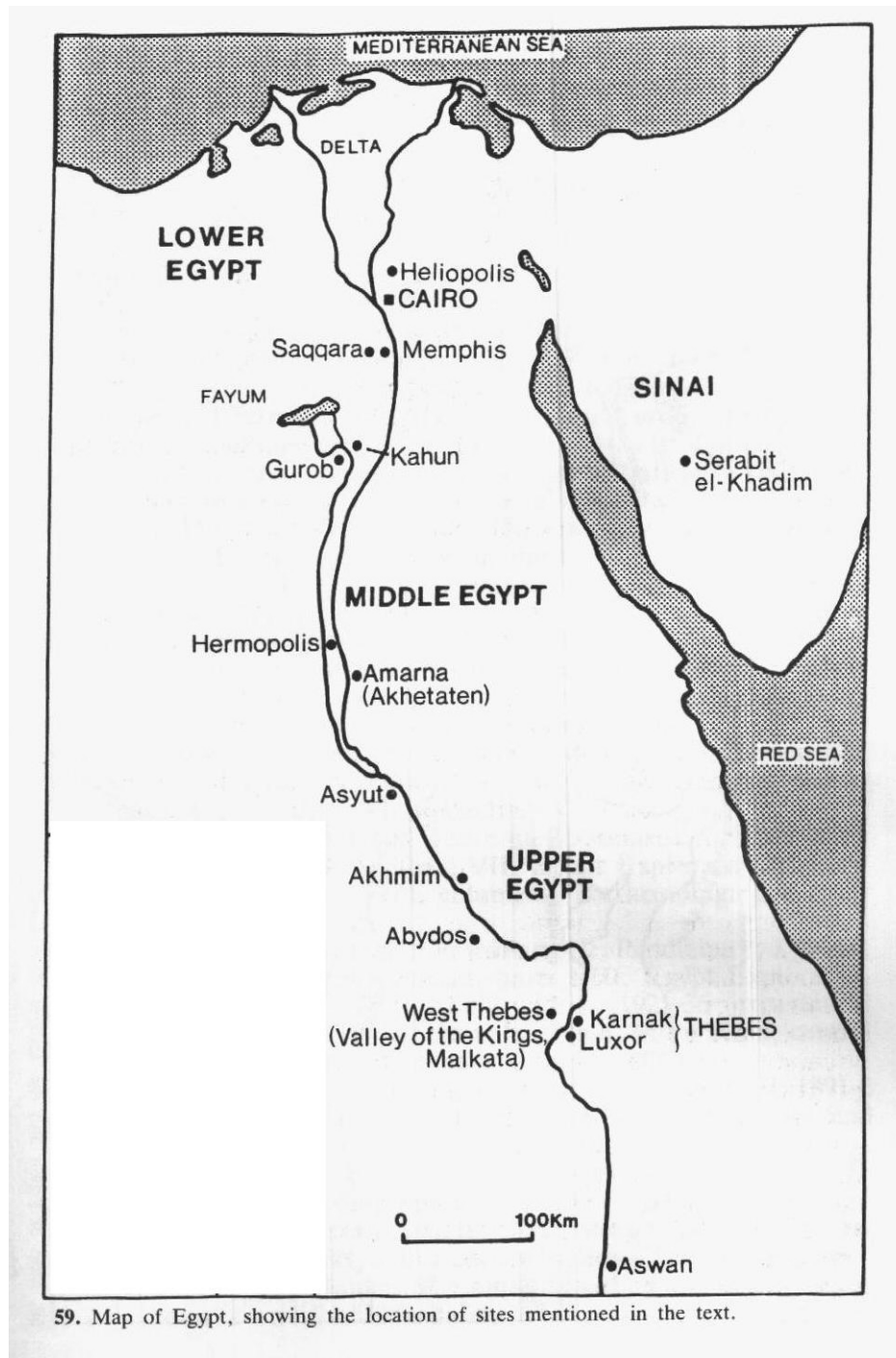
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Nearby, Sesostris built his pyramid, which exhibits great craftsmanship; part of its town, nearby, has survived, yielding town-planning evidence and documents that reveal something of Egypt's social conditions.

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Map of Ancient Egypt : Location of Lake Moeris and Fayum Depression



Note the Man Made Canal Starting Just North of the Town of Asyut Flowing North and Parallel to the West of the Nile River empties into the Fayum Depression and forms Lake Moeris. The Canal and Lake were constructed before 10,000 BC and were widened and deepened by Pharaohs Sesostris II and Amenemhet III of the 12 th Dynasty.