

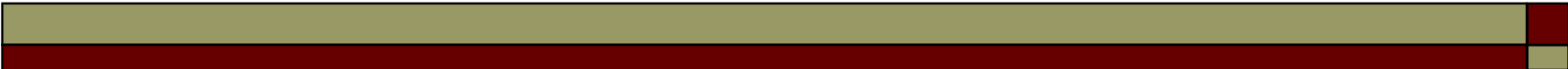
E8 Week 3 Wednesday

**From Egypt to Misr – the
Arab conquest in the 7th
cent.**

HPHP4013

From Egypt to the Near East: Phenomena
of the Mediterranean

Dr. Katharina Zinn



Literature

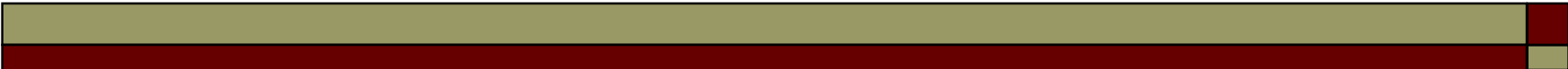
- ❑ Stephan, T. 2017. Writing the Past: Ancient Egypt Through the Lens of Medieval Islamic Thought. In: J.E. Lowry and M.S. Toorawa. *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson*. 256–270.
- ❑ O. El Daly. 2005. Egyptology: The Missing Millennium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings London: UCL Institute of Archaeology Publications.

Between being a Roman colony and becoming Misr

- **Byzantine Egypt**
- history of Egypt and Cyrenaica

- beginning with the division of the Roman Empire in 395
- ending with the Muslim conquest of Egypt in the 640s





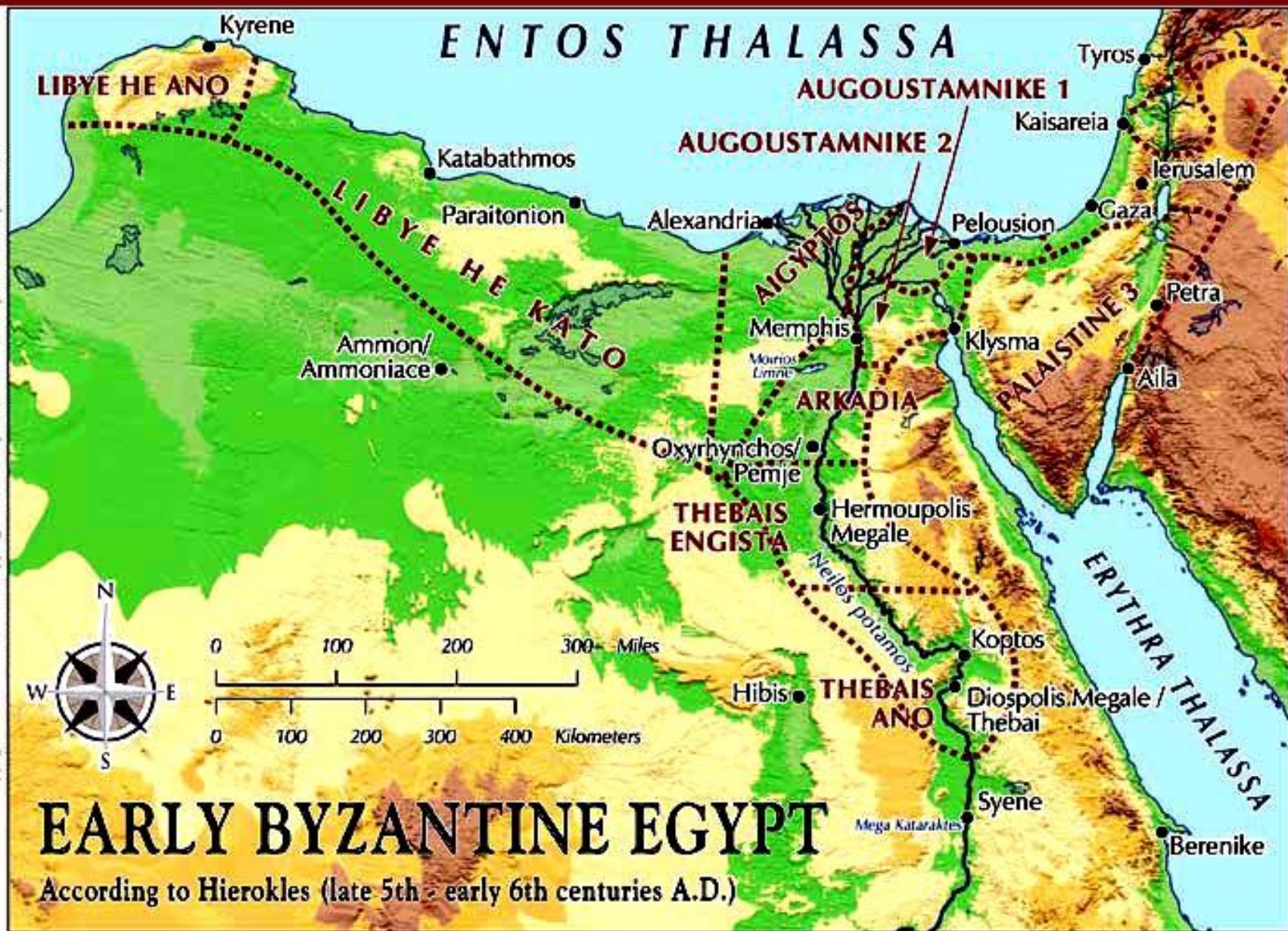
Byzantine Period

- ❑ Diocletian last reigning Roman emperor to visit Egypt, in 302 CE
- ❑ No clear divide between Roman and Byzantine period
- ❑ crucial changes in last decade 3rd cent. + first 3 decades of 4th
- ❑ end of persecution of Christians → restoration of the property of the church



Byzantine Period

- ❑ 313 new system of calculating and collecting taxes
- ❑ other important administrative changes
- ❑ founding of Constantinople (now Istanbul) on May 11, 330 changed role of Egypt
 - Constantinople as imperial capital + eastern counterpart to Rome → undermining Alexandria's traditional position as the first city of the Greek-speaking East
 - diverted the resources of Egypt away from Rome and the West: Egyptian grain supply fed Constantinople → important political and economic link
 - Egypt integrated into structure of B. empire → central role in political history of the Mediterranean world



EARLY BYZANTINE EGYPT

According to Hierokles (late 5th - early 6th centuries A.D.)

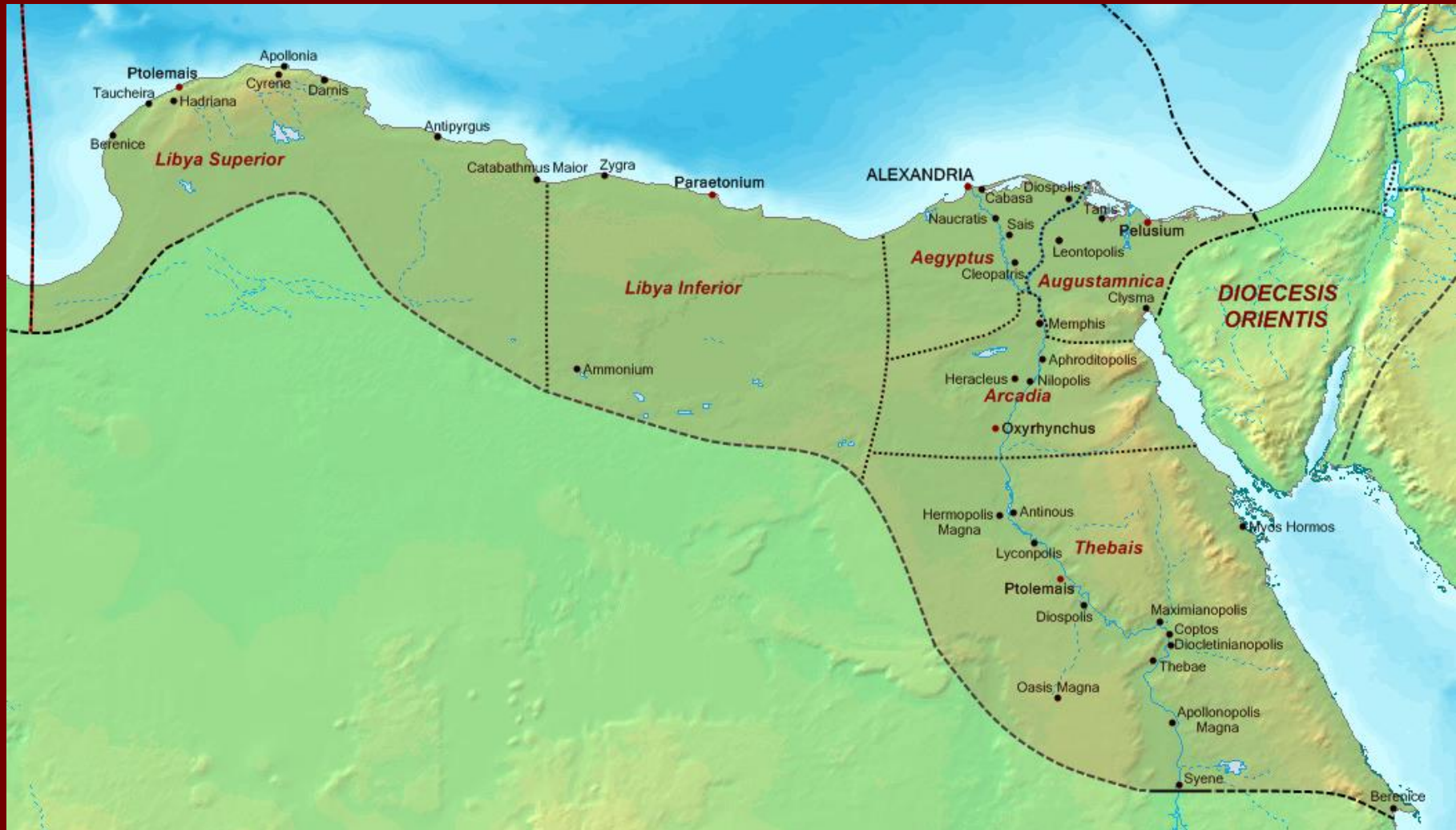
**Provincial boundaries are uncertain
and in many places very uncertain.**

Map by Tom Elliott for the Ancient World Mapping Center
University of North Carolina (www.unc.edu/awmc)

Byzantine Period

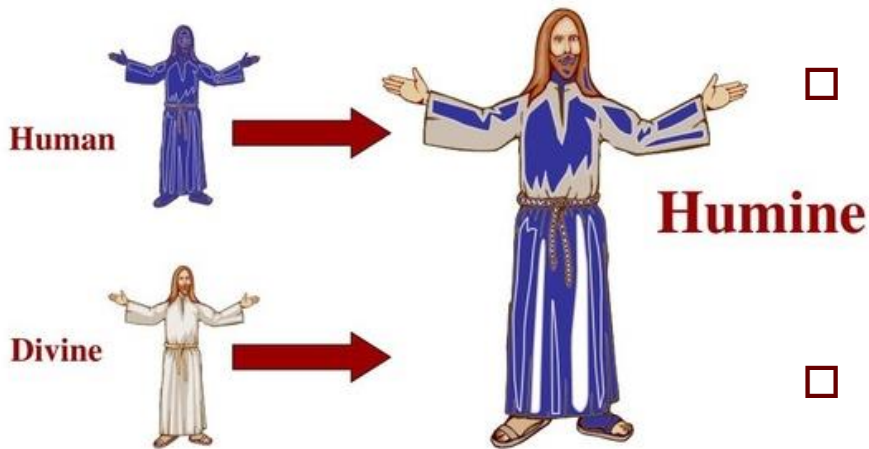
- ❑ key understanding the importance of Egypt: Christian church dominates secular as well as religious institutions
→ powerful role in every political issue
- ❑ head of the Egyptian church, the patriarch of Alexandria, became the most influential figure within Egypt + person who could give the Egyptian clergy a powerful voice in the councils of the Eastern church
- ❑ 4th century - Egypt divided for administrative purposes into a number of smaller units but the patriarchy was not,
→ power outweighed that of any local administrative official

Diocese of Egypt



Byzantine Period

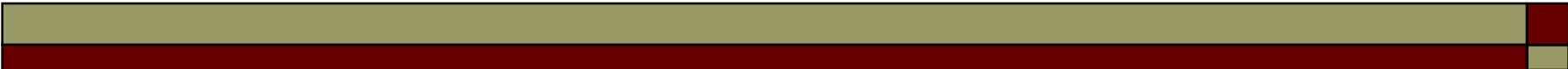
MONOPHYSITISM



- turbulent history to follow: struggles of patriarchs of Alexandria to maintain their position within patriarchy + outside (Constantinople)
- Coptic Christianity stands socially, politically, and culturally between Hellenism and native Egyptian culture
- Not following doctrine of Council of Chalcedon in 451 (Christ exists in two natures, inseparably united) → own path: monophysitism (insistence on the singularity of the nature of Christ)

The Byzantine monastery near Assiut Egypt. Excavated May 2023





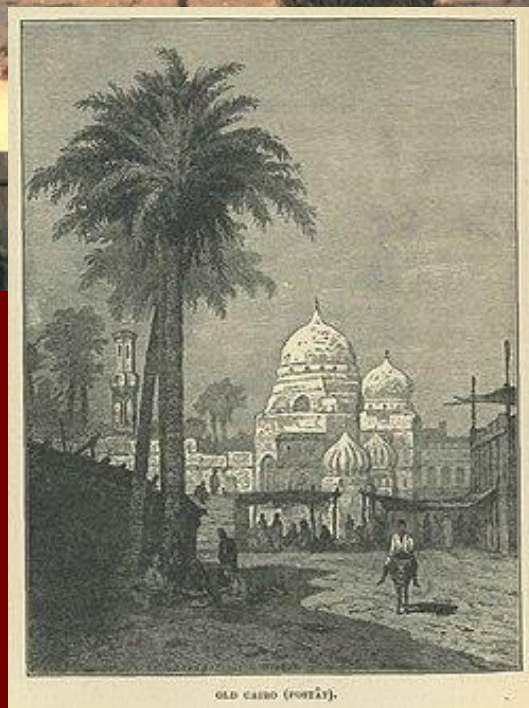
Byzantine Period

- ❑ Struggle to defend Egypt against Constantinople
- ❑ Persian invasion: advanced to the Nile delta and captured Alexandria (619 – 628) ended with peace treaty between Persia and Byzantium
 - decade of violent hostility to the Egyptian Coptic Christians
 - refused ordination of bishops
 - massacred hundreds of monks

Islamic conquest in 639

- ❑ Lower Egypt ruled by governors acting in the name of the Rashidun Caliphs, then the Umayyad Caliphs in Damascus
- ❑ 747 the Umayyads overthrown.
- ❑ Al-Askar (Fustat) was named capital and housed the ruling administration

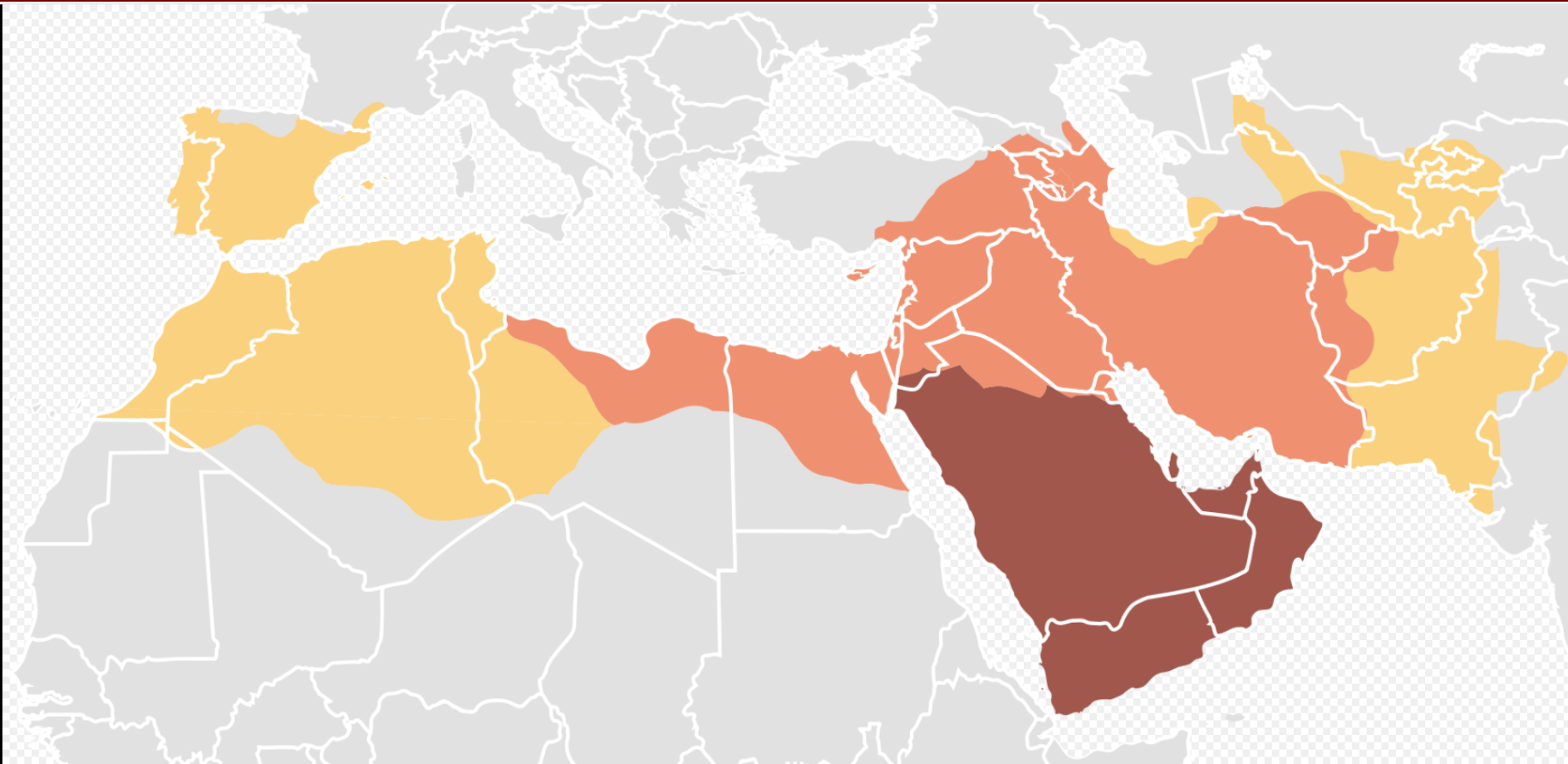
al-‘Askar العسكر	
Capital of Egypt, 750–868	
Nickname: City of Cantonments or of Sections	
	
Historical location in Egypt Coordinates:  30°01'26"N 31°14'52"E	
Currently part of	Old Cairo
Abbasid Caliphate	750–868, 905–969
Tulunid Emirate	868–905



Islamic conquest in 639

- ❑ conquest led to two separate provinces under one ruler: Upper and Lower Egypt
- ❑ governed by the military
- ❑ followed the demands handed down by the governor of Egypt
- ❑ Egypt ruled by many dynasties from the start of Islamic control in 639 until the early 16th century
- ❑ . The Umayyad period lasted from 658 to 750. The Abbasid period which came after was much more focused on taxes and centralizing power. In 868, the Tulunids, ruled by Ahmed ibn Tulun,

The Caliphates



The age of the first few caliphs ■ Muhammad, 622–632 ■ Rashidun Caliphate, 632–661 ■ Umayyad Caliphate, 661–750

Islamic Egypt

- ❑ Umayyad period from 658 to 750
- ❑ Abbasid period after – focused on taxes and centralizing power
- ❑ 868 – 884: Tulunids, ruled by Ahmad ibn Tulun, expanded Egypt's territory into the Levant.
- ❑ citizens defected back to the Abbasids and in 904 they would reclaim power from the Tulunids
- ❑ 969 – 1171: Egypt came under the control of the Fatimids

Islamic Egypt

- ❑ 1174 - 1244: under rule of Ayyubids (ruled from Damascus) → fought against the Crusader States during the Fifth Crusade
- ❑ Overthrown by Mamluks in 1252 (ruled until 1517)
- ❑ 1517: Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire under the Eyālet-i Mısr province

From Km.t to Misr

مصر

miSr

Egypt

Misr

- ❑ modern Arabic name Misr = origins in the ancient Hebrew word Mizraim, with the suffix ‘-aim’ most likely referring to two Egypts: Upper and Lower
- ❑ pronounced Masr in the local Egyptian dialect
- ❑ means country or province
- ❑ word can also mean fortress → reference to the natural boundaries that have protected the country over the millennia

Misr

- ❑ Egypt = affectionately named Misr El Mahrousa (the Protected) by early Arab travellers
 - referring to protective boundaries
 - religious meaning: lands protected by God
- ❑ Also called Om el Donia (Mother of the World) reflection of her being one of the earliest and oldest recorded civilizations (since 13th cent AD)
- ❑ deep-rooted belief that Egypt helped birth some of the other major civilizations

The reception of ancient Egypt in the medieval Muslim world

- ❑ prevailing view: conversion of Egyptians first to Christianity and then Islam ended interest in their own heritage
- ❑ BUT: continued to study their own past with great pride
- ❑ Many medieval Arab scholars visited Egypt, studied heritage and ancient scripts → many scholarly attempts to decipher hieroglyphs
- ❑ Fame of Egypt as land of science, wisdom, and mysticism → welcoming environment for reception of ancient Egyptian thought / arts among medieval Muslim scholars + the general public
- ❑ medieval Muslim reception fills gap of about a thousand years in history of Egyptology

Arabic as lingua franca of science and knowledge

- spread of Islam → Arabic used by Muslims and non-Muslims along with Arabs and non-Arabs alike.
- These sources may be classified as:
 - Accounts of travellers and geographers;
 - Historical and hagiographic writings;
 - Books on deciphering ancient scripts;
 - Accounts and manuals of treasure hunters;
 - Books on alchemy

The reception of ancient Egypt in the medieval Muslim world

- Nearly all writers interested in hieroglyphs = alchemists (also called Sufis or Mystics):
 - Jabir = Abū Mūsā Jābir ibn Ḥayyān (Arabic: **أَبُو مُوسَى جَابِرِ بْنِ حَيَّانَ**)
→ died c. 806–816, purported author of Jabirian corpus (c. 215 treatises) = part of Hermetic writings (going back to Hermes Trismegistus – a syncretic combination of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth)



The reception of ancient Egypt in the medieval Muslim world

- Nearly all writers interested in hieroglyphs = alchemists (also called Sufis or Mystics):
 - Dhu Al-Nun – Dhūl-Nūn Abū l-Fayḍ Thawbān b. Ibrāhīm al-Miṣrī (Arabic: ذُو النُّون المصري; d. Giza, in 245/859 or 248/862), often referred to as **Dhūl-Nūn al-Miṣrī** = early Egyptian Muslim mystic and ascetic
 - surname "al Misri" means "The Egyptian", born in Akhmim said to be of Nubian descent
 - celebrated for legendary wisdom –venerated in traditional Sunni Islam as saint



The reception of ancient Egypt in the medieval Muslim world

- Nearly all writers interested in hieroglyphs = alchemists (also called Sufis or Mystics):
 - Ibn Waḥshiyah (Arabic: ابن وحشية), died c. 930
 - Nabataean (Aramaic-speaking, rural Iraqi)
 - agriculturalist, toxicologist, and alchemist
 - born in Qussīn, near Kufa in Iraq.
 - author of the Nabataean Agriculture (Kitāb al-Filāḥa al-Nabaṭiyya), an influential Arabic work on agriculture, astrology, and magic





- A stela of King Amenemhat II (ca 1928-1895 BCE) of the Twelfth Dynasty, as copied in Alu 'l-Qasim al-Iraqi's Al-Aqalim. Source: The British Library, MS Add 25724, folio 50a; reproduced in El-Daly, Egyptology: The Missing Millennium, figure 24.

Different lines of reception

- a lot of public and academic interest: role of Cleopatra as a scholar
- her contributions in terms of science and diplomacy → role as an intellectual

