

PLACES IN EGYPT: OVERVIEW*

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Abstract

Introduction to set of modules providing background information to some significant places in Egypt that are represented in the online text, image and map collections of the Travelers in the Middle East Archive (TIMEA). Describes the division of Egypt into Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt, and Middle Egypt. Part 1 of a 4-part course on identifying places in Egypt, including major cities, archaeological sites, and regions.

The contemporary cultural, social, and geographic division of Egypt into UPPER EGYPT and LOWER EGYPT dates from before 3100 BCE, when Egypt was divided into two kingdoms. The Pharaoh Menes united the two kingdoms around 3100 BCE, and established a northern capital at Memphis and a southern one in Abydos.

Although the nomenclature is confusing, Upper Egypt is the southern part of the country, whereas Lower Egypt is in the north. This is because the Nile flows north; going “up” the river, then, is technically going south. These two divisions—with an additional MIDDLE EGYPT helping to locate sites in this vast region—are still used today.

LOWER EGYPT refers to the region north of what is modern day Cairo. It is at this point that the Nile splits into numerous branches, making a very fertile delta area. UPPER EGYPT traditionally referred to the region from modern Cairo south to what is now the southern end of Lake Nasser, roughly located at Abu Simbel at the border with modern day Sudan. However, this course will also use the category of MIDDLE EGYPT to aid in locating sites; Middle Egypt will refer to the region between Memphis (just south of Cairo) and Abydos, just north of the Thebes region.

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