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# The History and Religious Heritage of Old Cairo: Its Fortress, Churches, Synagogue, and Mosque

*By Gawdat Gabra*



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Recipient of the 2013 PROSE Awards Architecture & Urban Planning honorable mention

Just to the south of modern Cairo stands the historic enclave known as Old Cairo, which grew up in and around the Roman fortress of Babylon, and which today hosts a unique collection of monuments that attest to the shared cultural heritage of ancient Egyptians, Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

In this lavishly illustrated celebration of a very special place, renowned photographer Sherif Sonbol's remarkable images of the fortress, churches, synagogue, and mosque illuminate the living fabric of the ancient and medieval stones, while Gawdat Gabra describes the history of Old Cairo from the time of the ancient Egyptians and the Romans to the founding of the first Muslim city of al-Fustat. Stefan Reif focuses on the Jewish history of the area, exploring the famous Genizah documents found in the Ben Ezra Synagogue that tell so much about everyday life in medieval Egypt. Gertrud van Loon looks at the early Coptic Christian churches, some of the oldest in the world, and Tarek Swelim describes the arrival of the Muslims in the seventh century, their establishment of al-Fustat on the edge of Old Cairo, and the building of the Mosque of 'Amr ibn al-'As, the oldest mosque in Africa.



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Cairo is not only the crossroads of civilizations and the cradle of Arab nationalism and of Islam, it is also a multi-dimensional mosaic of religions and religious heritage. Carolyn Ludwig has captured these textured layers of past and present in this delightful book that focuses on Old Cairo. The pictures are magnificent. Each alley and byway comes alive. The scholarly articles artfully explain and envelope the history and majesty of the mosques, churches, and synagogue. Ms. Ludwig draws the reader into the mystery and allure of Cairo."--Daniel Kurtzer, former US ambassador to Egypt

"Old Cairo encompasses a rich treasure of history, tradition, and culture and houses the world's most profound collection of ancient Egyptian, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic heritage, representing every historical era. This deeply informative and illustrated volume explains and illuminates the aesthetic and the religious importance of Old Cairo: the authors have crafted a very timely book for anyone interested in Old Cairo's rich religious tradition, an excellent eye opener to a shared cultural history that is seemingly crucial for all of us to be cognizant of."Dr Ali Gomaa, Grand Mufti of Egypt

"A wonderful book with lovely photographs that take us into the heart of this special area . . . . The text is detailed and scholarly, while Sherif Sonbol's photographs and Morris Jackson's design are exquisite, bringing the area and its history alive. This book is truly a collaborative effort, fitting for an area so rich in the history of so many people."--Egypt Today

#### About the Author

CAROLYN LUDWIG is the author of *Jewels in Our Crown: Churches of Los Angeles* (2003) and editor of *The Churches of Egypt* (AUC Press, 2007). She lives in Los Angeles and is a frequent visitor to Egypt.

SHERIF SONBOL is a highly regarded Egyptian photographer. He has contributed photographs to numerous illustrated books, including *The Churches of Egypt* (AUC Press, 2008) and *The Nile Cruise* (AUC Press, 2010).

GAWDAT GABRA is the former director of the Coptic Museum and the author, coauthor, or editor of numerous books on the history and culture of Egyptian Christianity, including *The Treasures of Coptic Art* (AUC Press, 2006) and *The Churches of Egypt* (AUC Press, 2007). He is currently visiting professor of Coptic studies at Claremont Graduate University, California.

GERTRUD J.M. VAN LOON specializes in Coptic art and archaeology. She holds a PhD from Leiden University. She is currently a fellow at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. She is the coauthor of *The Churches of Egypt* (AUC Press, 2007).

STEFAN REIF is professor emeritus of medieval Hebrew studies and fellow of St John's College at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of many books and articles, including most recently *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo*, *Problems with Prayers*, and *Charles Taylor and the Genizah Collection*.

TAREK SWELIM earned his PhD in Islamic art and architecture from Harvard University. He has taught at the American University in Cairo, and is the author of diverse publications on Mamluk, Ottoman, and Roman architecture. He is a lecturer and guide, leading tours for prestigious American institutions throughout Egypt, North Africa, and the Middle East.

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#### **Sandra Phillips:**

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information today can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a knowledge or any news even a concern. What people must be consider while those information which is from the former life are hard to be find than now is taking seriously which one is acceptable to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you understand it as your main information you will see huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen with you if you take *The History and Religious Heritage of Old Cairo: Its Fortress, Churches, Synagogue, and Mosque* as the daily resource information.

#### **Charles Baker:**

Exactly why? Because this *The History and Religious Heritage of Old Cairo: Its Fortress, Churches, Synagogue, and Mosque* is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap it but latter it will zap you with the secret it inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who also write the book in such remarkable way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This phenomenal book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book have got such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking method. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I have been you I will go to the reserve store hurriedly.

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