

# Good the british occupation of egypt 1882 research paper example

[Countries](#), [England](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

What led the British to occupy Egypt in 1882? Besides the fact that it was the result of colonial expansion, and the spirit of colonialism was fueled by British imperial hegemony, what benefits did Egypt have financially for England? In this paper, the factors that took place before the British occupation, the actual occupation itself, and its aftermath, will be discussed from the point of view of economic history. Cotton, the American Civil War, an overspending khedive, the Suez canal construction, jockeying European countries, and the cosmopolitan makeup of 19th century Egypt all play a part in the story. In fact, all of imperial history from the 18th century to the outbreak of the Second World War, albeit a physical reality of expensive wars, was also the push and tussle of economic games, of a hegemony born out of the need to take over lands before anyone else did.

The 1882 occupation was not the first time a European nation had tried to take over Egypt. Napoleon marched on Egypt in 1798 ostensibly to stop Britain's takeover of India, but they ended up occupying Egypt, but their tenure was short lived. the first time Europeans had touched the Middle East since the Crusades in the thirteenth century (Khater 7). The French invaded Algeria in 1832, and in 1882, the British entered Egypt. European control was either physical, the actual takeover of the country, or it was political and economic control of trade routes and markets (Khater 7). Although Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 was not altogether successful, which resulted in subsequent forays into Egypt to be rethought (Khater 10).

In between the French and British occupations, the country was governed by a series of khedives, or lords, who ruled the country and actually tried to build up the nation's infrastructure, albeit painfully unable to defend itself

against the land-hungry European powers. Finally, the occupation of Egypt by the British in 1882, a takeover that would last until circa 1956 when England left and Egypt became a republic ruled by Egyptians, the first time they had done so in 2, 000 years (Gadalla 63).

The occupation of Egypt is thought by many to have been Britain's answer to the economic and political crisis of 1875-1882 (Louis 651). Yet in the words of Earl of Cromer's (first British Viceroy of Egypt), the occupation was part and parcel of the imperial political machine: for even he concedes in a statement written in 1908, " the [Egyptian] army was in a state of mutiny; the treasury was bankrupt; every branch of the administration had been dislocated; the ancient and arbitrary method, under which the country had for centuries been governed, had received a severe blow, whilst, at the same time, no more orderly and law-abiding form of government had been inaugurated to take its place" (Cromer xvii-xvii). In the paternal gestures that are indicative of colonialism, the European patrimony sweeps in to rescue the indebted fallen siblings of the South.

In Milner's primary source account of the occupation he wrote in 1892, he speaks of the country as an " appanage of Europe," which is merely a way of saying that Egypt was a gift (Qtd. in Louis 651). Milner typifies the British point of view making the point that the occupation benefited Europe and Britain that depended on the trade and the markets that had been set up between Europe and the northern African states: ". . . in which thousands of European lives and millions of European capital were at stake, and in which of all European nations Great Britain was, by virtue of its enormous direct trade and still more enormous transit trade, the most deeply interested."

Again using paternalistic language, Milner makes it seem as if it were a common effort of Europe's beneficence that "dragged" Egypt out of its bankruptcy, and saved it from a "reign of blank barbarism" (qtd. in Louis 651). The line tethered by the status quo is representative of Milner's remark, "Let it always be remembered that Great Britain did save Egypt from anarchy, and all European nations interested in Egypt from incalculable losses in blood and treasure, to say nothing of the deep dishonour which those losses would have brought on civilized mankind" (Qtd. in Louis 651). Milner's comments are not without warrant, for he was thinking of the European population and the economy it supported, which from 1838 was around 8,000 to 10,000 but by 1881, on the eve of the British entrance was more like 90,000 (Louis 652). It was as if the occupation, economically speaking had been planned, and in fact, a *fait accompli* even before the British landed with their troops in 1882.

But Egypt was not just a placeholder for European expansion and it held, as it does today a rich Muslim and Coptic Christian "polyglot capitalist community embraced not only Armenians, Jews, Greeks, and others from the eastern Mediterranean, but British, French, and Italians, newcomers as well as old" (Louis 652). Egypt at this time was a hodgepodge of groups each vying to compete with one another in an economic *tete-a-tete*. Under Muhammad Ali, Egypt had experienced economic growth by the mid-eighteenth century. In May 1882 just before the British occupation the population of the country was 6,831,131, of which 90,000 were Europeans (Owen 216). The fact that there was a census at all, according to Owen, "represented a remarkable achievement on the part of the government's

embryonic statistical service and provided a useful basis for further developments during the British period when an improved administrative system was used to generate wealth of data of a so scope far in excess of that to be found anywhere else in the Middle East (Owen 216). However, at the level of the local economic markets, which was an economy supporting the local economy, the economic investments of Muhammad Ali would take a downturn after 1849. Muhammad Ali would take a downturn after 1849. Locals were losing out to the ever-increasing hegemony of European control (Louis 652). The finagling of the French and their machinations " influenced the calculations which from 1875 led to Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882 and her continued control thereafter" (Louis 30).

As Khater points out, by the mid 1850s Egypt was placed in a ever complicated game of various jockeying European countries, including France, Britain, and Russia all of whom had their own economic and political influences with the great Ottoman Empire. Get over the might of the Ottoman Empire, and England could secure an easier trade route between her island in the Northeast of Europe to India. Also, there as the influence of Iran, Algeria, and Tunisia too (Khater 40). Physical advantages were given by the British " ensconced in Egypt." Of course it gave England the chance to push the French out of the way, but more importantly the occupation of Egypt was a means to an end and not an end in itself, for it gave them " greater security for the Suez Canal route to India" — opened in 1869 — which was a bargaining chip to negotiate with the Ottoman Empire to keep back the Russians into Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean coast (Louis 12). Cyprus, acquired in 1878, strengthened her further. In 1892 Lord

Salisbury, Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, made the position abundantly clear (Louis 12).

So by taking over the public debt, and taking over about eighty percent of exports of sugar, cotton, and other high priced commodities, Britain was Egypt's major lender and had taken over by investing in public works, railways, to the match the work and go beyond the investments the Egyptian rulers had done. While the British officially had occupied the country in 1882, " from 1876, with the establishment of outside financial control, Egypt effectively lost control of her affairs to foreigners" (Louis 113). And it was cotton that was the trigger on the rifle, for the American Civil War had jacked up the price in the early 1860s, when supplies from the southern states of America were disrupted by civil war (Abul-Magd 694). The Khedive Ismail, who was really a puppet of Turkey, did not really do a good job of checking commodity prices, and he spent like he was in a bull market, when in reality the country was in recession (Hudson 26). Britain was able to cripple Egypt by taking advantage of its financial woes. On May 2, 1876 European powers pressured Isma'il to draft an edict creating the European controlled " Public Debt Administration" (Khater 40). But Britain did not like the idea that other countries would play a part in managing Egypt's debt, so on November 18, 1876 they placed all of Egypt's finances under French and British control (Khater 40). It was the mismanaging of Egypt's finances by Khedive Ismail that paved the road for Britain's takeover. In the treaty it was written that " If the payments of the revenue devoted to the debt be insufficient to meet the half-yearly charges, the special Public Debt Department will demand from the Treasury . . . . If the funds in hand constitute a surplus over the

amount necessary for the payment of the interest and the sinking fund, the special Treasury of the Public Debt will pay this surplus at the end of each year to the general Treasury of the Exchequer. The Treasury of the Public Debt will submit its accounts, which will be examined and reported upon according to law" (Qtd. in Khater 42).

But this agreement was short-lived, and Britain came in as savior of Egypt's money problems, with a 6, 000 man army in tow (Hudson 30). Louis writes that " all major military actions were displayed, including events of the Indian Mutiny, the bombardment of Alexandria and the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir during Britain's invasion of Egypt in 1882" (279). With the Khedive's backing, British troops landed on 16 August and defeated Egyptian nationalist forces in the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir (13 September). The economic boon was immediate and Alexandria, especially profited from the influence of British power, and the Suez canal brought in hotels, cafes, wo hotels, " a theatre where vaudevilles are performed with spirit, a pretty Roman Catholic chapel, a mosque for Arab workmen, a hospital and a telegraph office, a long and well built street with well-stocked shops, a large square, and a public garden [and a] fountain supplied with Nile water" (qtd. in Golia 68). As British played tourist, often taking advantage of the boost in the tourist industry brought on by the opening of the Suez canal (Hudson 2013 30). Thus continued the occupation of Egypt (Louis 654). Steamers came in with tourists who contributed to the economy (Hudson 2013 31). And to make the transition smoother, and to keep communication lines open amongst her holdings in both the Middle East and on the subcontinent, " Improved communications certainly facilitated the global growth of Imperial economic activity" (Louis

262). The telecommunications boom of the 19th century had made Europe a wired place. For example, in 1882, France, England, and Germany had control over 28, 000 telegraph offices which in that year transmitted some 77 million messages” (Louis 259).

In 1890, Egyptians began to try to find ways to improve their situation. Amin writes, “ If Egyptians wish to improve their condition, they must start at its source” (Qtd. in Khater 62). Qasim Amin in *The New Woman: A Document in the Early Debate on Egyptian Feminism* wrote “ When they saw that Westerners enjoy a good life, broad independence, self-determination, and other prerogatives that they themselves are not permitted and without which life has no value, there awoke in them a yearning to catch up and a desire to earn some of that happiness” (qtd. In Khater 62). And there was rumble by the turn of the century brought on by the women’s movement which gets tossed around in the vernacular as a return to an economy of the village where “ The division of labour is merely a human creation.,” and Egyptians talk about how they “ still witness people like the Nubians whose men sew clothes for themselves and the household while the women work in the fields. Some women even climb palm trees to harvest the dates (Qtd in Khater 76). Civil unrest, labor reformations, and the irony of Britain’s positive contribution to the railways and other infrastructure improvements paved the way for the eventual exodus of England. Also, the sugar market took a downturn and by 1905 had declared bankruptcy (Abul-Magd 704).

With the twentieth century came a rash of nationalism, and more pressure was put on colonial powers to evacuate their rich holdings. During the first two decades of the twentieth century Cairo was quickly becoming a booming



commercial and industrial center, albeit set back by the fire of 1952 (Goldschmidt 196). Between 1950 and 1952 riots had begun to break out resisting British rule, and it was not until 1956 that the last British official left Egypt for good and the country became an independent Republic. With independence, a hold on Egypt that had begun in 1798 was lifted, and a new set of challenges overtook the nation, many of which are still being wrestled with today, as evidenced by the unrest of demonstrations in Tahir Square and the question of the country's future political economic advancement into the uncertainty of modernity (Richmond 224).

## **Works Cited**

Abul-Magd, Zeinab. " Rebellion in the Time of Cholera: Failed Empire, Unfinished Nation in

Egypt, 1840-1920." *Journal of World History* 21. 4 (2010): 691-719.

The Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 2 Vols., (New York: Macmillan, 1908), Vol. I. xvii-xviii.

Retrieved online from the Modern History Sourcebook.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1908cromer.html>

Gadalla, Moustafa. *Egypt: A Practical Guide*. Greensboro, N. C: Tehuti Research

Foundation, 1998. Print.

Golia, Maria. " Egypt's Golden Age of Transport." *Middle East*, May 2008, pp. 68-69).

Goldschmidt, Arthur, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni. *Re-envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*.

Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005. Print.

<https://assignbuster.com/good-the-british-occupation-of-egypt-1882-research-paper-example/>

Hudson, Roger. "Ashore in Alexandria." *History Today* Feb 2013, pp. 26-27.

Hudson, Roger. "A Trip to the Sphinx." *History Today* November 2013, pp. 30-31.

Khater, Akram F. *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*. Boston, MA:

Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011. Print.

Louis, William R, Nicholas P. Canny, Alaine M. Low, P J. Marshall, A N. Porter, Judith M.

Brown, and Robin W. Winks. *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Oxford [England: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

Owen, Edward R. *The Middle East in the World Economy: 1800-1914*. London u. a:

Tauris, 1993. Print.

Richmond, J C. B. *Egypt, 1798-1952: Her Advance Towards a Modern Identity*. New York:

Columbia University Press, 1977. Print.