

International Memory of the World Register

Census of Persons "Egyptian Nineteenth Century Individual- Level Census Records" (Egypt)

2012-06

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

1. Summary:

The nominated documentary heritage, "Census of Persons" (Ti`dad al-nufus), is an aggregate archival unit preserved in the National Archives of Egypt that contains a vast and comprehensive collection of Egyptian Nineteenth Century Individual-Level Census Records. Specifically, The "Census of Persons" is a unique collection of about 7,000 hand-written census registers that include individual-level census records of the Egyptian population at several time points in the 19th century (1840s- 1880s). The importance of the census registers stems from three factors. First, the majority of the registers represent the first nationwide census in Egypt that took place under Muhammad Ali in 1846-1848, and the second (partial) census that took place under Ismail in 1868. These two censuses are two of the earliest censuses in any developing country to include information at the "individual" level for all segments of society (including females, children, and slaves). They even stand in competition to the corresponding censuses in the developed world. Although the United States, for instance, started the national modern censuses in 1790, it was only in 1850 that the first U.S. census with information on all individuals in the households (and not only the household heads) came to light. France and Britain started their series of modern national censuses in the early 1800s not much earlier than the first Egyptian census. The earliest census in India (a developing country that traditionally had an impressive statistical system under the British Occupation) took place in 1872.

Second, apart from being "old", the Egyptian census registers include a wealth of information at the individual level that is quite comprehensive even by modern standards. For each individual residing in Egypt at the time of the census (mostly in 1848 or 1868), the registers include an impressively systematic recording of a wide set of variables at both the dwelling and individual levels: (1) At the dwelling level: Address at the most detailed level (province, district, village/quarter, village section/street name, and dwelling number in Cairo and Alexandria), type of dwelling (house, ruined hut, courtyard, etc), property right on dwelling (private ownership, religious endowment), and name of property right holder. (2) At the individual level: Name, relationship to household head, gender, age, legal status (free, slave, or emancipated slave), nationality, ethnicity, religion, place of origin at the village/quarter- level, occupation, school enrollment for male children, infirmities, and physical description (in rural provinces).

Third, the Egyptian census registers are complete to a large extent. Missing registers do not constitute a large problem in most of the provinces in 1848. The 1868 census was a partial census that covered specific provinces (including Cairo and Alexandria). Besides, there are many registers for specific rural provinces that come from various years in the 1850s, 1870s, and 1880s. Many villages seem to have enumerated more than once.

As such, the Egyptian 19th Century "Census of Persons" is one of the most unique collections at the National Archives of Egypt (NAE). During the recent period (August 2009- March 2010), a project has been undertaken at the NAE aiming at digitizing a representative one- percent sample of the 1848 and 1868 census records, by actually keying the individual- level information into a database designed for this purpose. Overall, the results obtained from this pilot project are promising, and showed the feasibility of extending this project to a 100 percent sample to become usable in statistical analysis. This digitization, in addition to the scanning of the census registers, will ensure the preservation of the census registers.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Dat al-Kutub wa-l-Watha' iq al-Qawmiyya (National Library and Archives of Egypt)

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Custodian

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

The **custodian** who is responsible for preserving the documentary heritage unit is the National Archives of Egypt

2.4 Contact details

Name	Address
The National Library and Archives of Egypt	and Cornish El-Nile, Ramlet Boulaq Cairo, Egypt

Telephone:

0020225751092

Facsimile:

0020225751092

Email

chairman@nationalarchives.gov.eg

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given. The **nominated documentary heritage item** is officially called “**Census of Persons**” (Ti`dad al-Nufus)”

The **owner** of the documentary heritage unit is the Arab Republic of Egypt. The “Census of Persons” has moved to the public domain.

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

- *Inventory, Cataloguing, Registration, and Bibliographic Details*

The “Census of Persons” is an aggregate archival unit at the National Archives of Egypt. It includes 6592 registers which contain individual-level census records from various years in the period (1840s-1880s). The inventory is located in Storage Room 5 under the storage section “The Localities *المحليات*” in the National Archives of Egypt. The “Census of Persons” is registered under the code “2038”. The attached CD-ROM shows one page of the detailed catalogue of the census registers. The unit in the catalogue is the census register. For each register, the following information is recorded in the catalogue: register code, the geographical unit enumerated, the province the unit followed at the time of the census, and finally the year of the register if known¹. This information is found in the register title. The catalogue page on the CD-ROM is taken from the electronic online catalogue available through the National Archives of Egypt website. It is worth to note in this respect the impressive project undertaken by the National Archives of Egypt in (2005-2009) to construct an electronic database of the archival possessions. The link for the search webpage of the “Census of Persons” archival

¹ There is a very few number of registers for which the date is unknown.

unit is:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.eg/nae/SearchServlet?operation=details&lang=ar&UodNumber=2038>

Most of the registers come from two major censuses that were carried out by the Egyptian government in 1846-48 and 1868-69 under Muhammad Ali Pasha and Ismail Pasha respectively. There are also registers from other years in the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s that represented periodical counts of specific villages that were carried out for various reasons (mainly for taxes, military conscription, or [corvée](#) purposes).

Registers are organized on a geographical basis, with each province being represented by a number of registers. Each register refers to a geographical unit with the name of the unit and the census date (almost always) clearly identified in the title. Cairo and Alexandria registers are large in size (50 cm * 32 cm) and are organized by district. Cairo is divided into 10 districts (called thumns or eighths) in both 1848 and 1868, while Alexandria is divided into 5 districts (called rub's or quarters) in 1848 and into 8 districts (thumns or eighths) in 1868. Each district is further subdivided into quarters (shiyakhas). The registers from the city Rosetta are organized by quarter (shiyakhas) in 1848 and 1868. The number of registers in 1868 is quite few suggesting that many of the registers are missing for the city in that year. Al-Arish town in Sinai Peninsula has one register in both 1848 and 1868.

The provincial registers vary in size and shape (from having a few pages to having more than 500 pages depending on the population size of the geographical unit²) with each register representing either a village, a town, a hamlet (izba), or an Arab tribe. Each village is usually divided into sections (hissa), and the population is classified into natives, strangers, and fugitives (those who fled the village to avoid paying taxes or being drafted for the army or the corvée work). The following tables taken from Cuno and Reimer (1997) show the number of registers for each province:

3.4 History/ provenance

The "Census of Persons" was preserved at the Egyptian House of Documents "*Daftarkhana*" الدفترخانة at Cairo Citadel which was responsible for storing the governmental documents since its foundation in 1828. The *Daftarkhana* was renamed as Public Records Office دار المحفوظات العمومية in 1914, but remained in the Cairo Citadel. The "Census of Persons" remained in the Public Records Office in the Citadel even after the Historical National Archives was established in 1954. The census registers remained there until the National Archives was moved to its current location in Cornish El-Nile in 1990.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name:

Arab Republic of Egypt

Telephone

² In some provinces (such as Asyut and Al-Menoufiya) registers are bound together in a large folio. This is indexed as a single register in the catalogue although it includes more than one geographical unit.

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from

Address

Name: Facsimile Email

Dar al-Kutub wa-L-Watha'

Telephone:
0020225751092

Address

Corniche al-Nile, Ramlet Bulaq, Cairo, Egypt

4.3 Legal status

5.1. Owner of the Documentary Heritage Unit:

The Census of Persons is in the public ownership domain and is collectively owned by the *People of Egypt*.

5.2. Custodian of the Documentary Heritage Unit:

National Archives of Egypt located at:
The National Library and Archives of Egypt
Cornish El-Nile, Ramlet Boulaq
Cairo, Egypt

5.3. Legal Status:

- (a) Category of Ownership: The "Census of Persons" is publicly owned by the People of Egypt. The National Archives of Egypt is the representative or custodian that is responsible for the heritage unit preservation.
 - (b) Responsible Administration: The National Archives of Egypt is responsible for safekeeping of the census registers. This responsibility is exercised through preserving the registers in the stores and administering public accessibility to the material.
 - (c) Other Factors: The National Archives of Egypt is required by law to preserve the nominated documentary heritage unit.
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4.4 Accessibility

Accessibility: The "Census of Persons" is publicly accessible according to specific rules set by the archival security administration

4.5 Copyright status

Copyright Status: The copyright on the "Census of Persons" is held by the National Archives of Egypt.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

The authenticity of the “Census of Persons” is well-established. As described in section (3.2), the provenance of the census registers demonstrates how they were preserved as “governmental documents”, since the time they were “produced” by the Egyptian bureaucracy, in the Egyptian House of Documents at the Cairo Citadel. They remained there continuously (under Public Records Office) until they were moved to the current location of the National Archives of Egypt in Cornish El-Nile. Such authenticity is also established by several recently published sources that described the census registers.

The census registers were not produced “in isolation”. The census order that was issued by Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1845 is quoted in Cuno and Reimer (1997) and is shown below. The order demonstrates the enumeration instructions. Also, the detailed regulation of the enumeration procedures issued by the Department of Finance is preserved (and was recently restored) at the National Archives of Egypt.

The Census Order of 13 Dhu Al-Qa da 1261/13 November 1845

It is self-evident that among the causes of the progress and civilization of other nations is the precise enumeration of their people and the orderly administration of their interests. It is therefore necessary for Us to enumerate exactly the people of Our country so that it may be a cause of its progress in civilization, without causing the slightest difficulty to its people, and to arrive at this goal, it is incumbent upon all the provincial governors (*mudirs*); along with the supervisors (*ma murs*) of the *jifliks* and *uhdas*⁶⁰ and their agents, and their headmen (*umdas*) and shaykhs; and all of the headmen and shaykhs of the villages of Egypt in their variety,⁶¹ to set out and precisely count and record the population in registers specifically designed for this purpose. And that the lists inscribed by means of the information supplied by the headmen and shaykhs of the villages shall be accurate. And if, upon examination, there appear discrepancies or the concealment of persons—regardless of whether they are male or female—or if fraudulent methods have been used in the count, every one against whom such things are proved shall be considered an enemy of his country and of the government and shall have drawn down upon himself the penalty. Similarly, any government or other official who causes the least slackness and neglects the execution of his duties in this matter shall be held responsible and their trial shall be conducted according to the administrative law (*qanunan*)⁶² with harsh punishments according to the degree of their offence; for they are the ones who are responsible for the exact conduct of the work in a proper way. The government expresses its hope that these village headmen and shaykhs perform their duties in this regard in order that it may obtain what is desired and We pledge to compensate them for that specifically. And if they disappoint the government in this regard, We will be compelled in such instance to use means which We would prefer not to use in their regard.

5.2 World significance

The importance of the census registers stems from three factors. First, the majority of the registers represent the first nationwide census in Egypt that took place under Muhammad Ali in 1846-1848, and the second (partial) census that took place under Ismail in 1868. These

two censuses are two of the earliest censuses in any developing country to include information at the "individual" level for all segments of society (including females, children, and slaves). They even stand in competition to the corresponding censuses in the developed world. Although the United States, for instance, started the national modern censuses in 1790, it was only in 1850 that the first U.S. census with information on all individuals in the households (and not only the household heads) came to light. France and Britain started their series of modern national censuses in the early 1800s not much earlier than the first Egyptian census. The earliest census in India (a developing country that traditionally had an impressive statistical system under the British Occupation) took place in 1872.

Second, apart from being "old", the Egyptian census registers include a wealth of information at the individual level that is quite comprehensive even by modern standards. For each individual residing in Egypt at the time of the census (mostly in 1848 or 1868), the registers include an impressively systematic recording of a wide set of variables at both the dwelling and individual levels: (1) At the dwelling level: Address at the most detailed level (province, district, village/quarter, village section/street name, and dwelling number in Cairo and Alexandria), type of dwelling (house, ruined hut, courtyard, etc), property right on dwelling (private ownership, religious endowment), and name of property right holder. (2) At the individual level: Name, relationship to household head, gender, age, legal status (free, slave, or emancipated slave), nationality, ethnicity, religion, place of origin at the village/quarter-level, occupation, school enrolment for male children, infirmities, and physical description (in rural provinces). As an example on the richness of the information recorded in the census registers it must be noted that the school enrolment data in 1848 is perhaps the oldest data available on schooling in any non-Western country.

Third, the Egyptian census registers are complete to a large extent. Missing registers do not constitute a significant problem in most of the provinces in 1848. The 1868 census was a partial census that covered specific provinces (including Cairo and Alexandria and most of Upper Egypt). Besides, there are many registers for specific rural provinces that come from various years in the 1850s, 1870s, and 1880s. Many villages seem to have enumerated more than once.

As such, the loss of the Egyptian census registers will constitute a huge loss to the humanity. These registers provide an extremely rare opportunity to take a close look at a pre-modern non-Western population in its very early steps on the path of modernization. If lost, the registers are basically irreplaceable for there are no other comparable census records that exist for any non-Western country during that period of time to the best of our knowledge. This last statement can be said with even much more confidence if we restrict the attention to the Middle East.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

1 Time

The 1848 Egyptian census is one of the oldest censuses in any non-Western country to include information at the individual-level on all segments of society including females, children, and slaves. The 1868 census, the second Egyptian census, is also one of the earliest censuses in the non-Western world. As mentioned in section (4.2), the Egyptian census records stand in competition even to the censuses from the developed world including those from the U.S., France, and Britain. The genuine feature of the time the Egyptian census records were produced is that they give a detailed snapshot of a pre-modern population in its early development phases, a feature one does not encounter in the contemporary Western censuses. Hence, it brings a totally unexplored area to light.

2 Place

The Egyptian census records provide a wealth of information on one of the largest Middle Eastern countries in terms of population around mid 19th century. It gives a detailed snapshot on all the places in Egypt at that time including small and remote villages, and extinct hamlets. Having such detailed information on an Islamic country from this period is absolutely unique and has no comparable substitute in any other Islamic country.

3 People

The census records give a “vivid” description of the people who were living at that time. The people one encounters in these census records are not only the “notables” or the “rich” whom one always encounters in other historical sources, but they are mainly the ordinary masses who are usually neglected in the historical sources. The description is quite detailed for it provides a clear “summarized” picture of the lives of these masses: their dwellings, their households’ structures, and their occupations. One observes the farmers, the carpenters, the beggars, the slave traders, the workers in Muhammad Ali’s newly established factories, the students in the religious schools, and the slaves. The information is not restricted to the household heads (as was the case with the U.S. censuses for example until 1850) but is generalized to every member in the household. In sum, the “life” of the 19th century Egypt, which may be representative of the Middle Eastern Islamic societies, is brought to us through these census records.

4 Subject and theme

The subject of the census registers is the idea of the “modern” census with its focus on collecting information on every individual including females, children, and slaves. This theme represents a true historical breakthrough compared to the medieval tax and military registers which were always restricted to the adult free male population.

5 Form and style

The genuine feature of the style of the census registers lies in its systematic and stylized recording of the individual-level information. The recording of the information is systematic regardless of the place the census is taking place in or the identity of the census taker. This demonstrates the highly sophisticated nature of the Egyptian bureaucracy at that time.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

The collection is rare in two senses. On the one hand it exists only in one original copy and on the other hand it is rare because Egypt was one of the first countries completing such an operation and publishing it.

6.2 Integrity

The Egyptian census registers are complete to a large extent. Missing registers do not constitute a large problem in most of the provinces in 1848. The 1868 census was a partial census that covered specific provinces (including Cairo and Alexandria).
