

USAID SUPPORTED HERITAGE SITES  
IN AND AROUND CAIRO

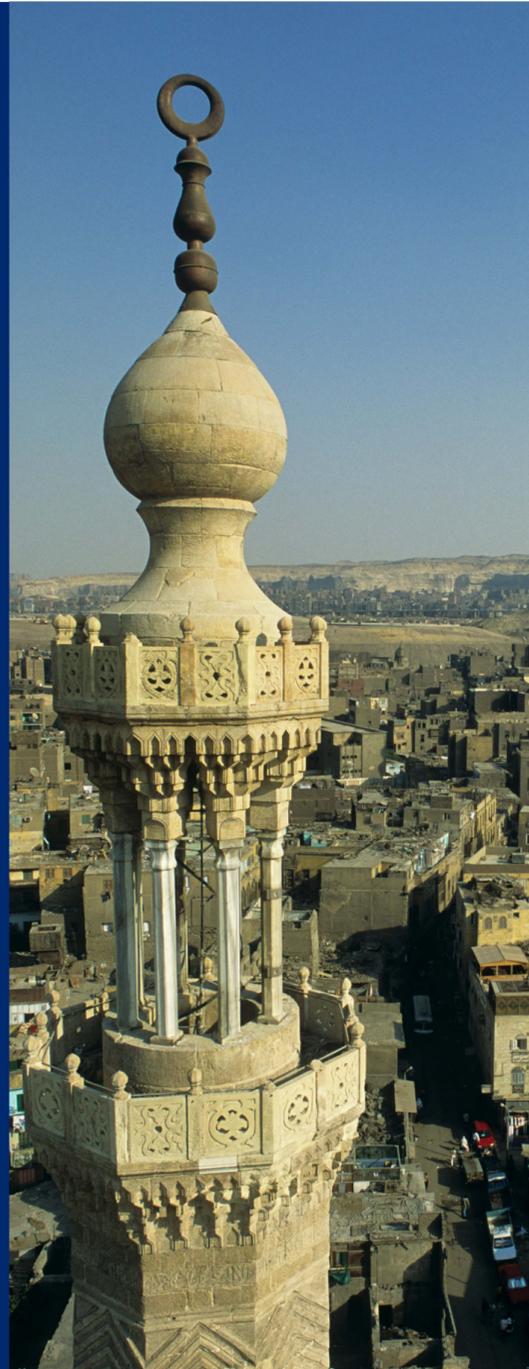


PHOTO: PATRICK GODDARD/ARCE

Cover photograph:  
Minaret of Mu'ayyad Shaykh built on  
the tower of Bab Zuwayla Gate,  
conserved with USAID assistance



**Coptic Icons (several locations)**

USAID helped fund a team to document and conserve Coptic icons, an important segment of Egypt's cultural heritage that only recently has begun to receive adequate attention from conservators and scholars. More than three thousand icons in 134 locations throughout Egypt were inventoried. Almost three hundred were fully conserved in labs created for the purpose in four different locations in Cairo and three more in Upper Egypt and Fayoum. The project was implemented in 1998-2004 in cooperation with the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), the Coptic Church, and the Institute of Coptic Studies.

**1 Haret al-Yahoud**

Beginning in 1995, USAID supported a conservation study and documentation project for the synagogues of Haim Capusi and Moses Maimonides in the district that used to be the traditional Jewish Quarter in Cairo. The work included a study of groundwater conditions in the area. Both buildings relate to important figures in the Jewish tradition, especially Maimonides, one of the most important philosophers of the Middle Ages, and the leader of Cairo's Jewish community at the time of Salah al-Din (Saladin). His synagogue was eventually restored by the SCA in 2009 – 2010.

**2 The Egyptian Museum**

USAID has supported a range of initiatives to upgrade the management and operational capacities at the historic Egyptian Museum, including a program to train Egyptian museum professionals in the U.S. and the development of a modern training facility at the Museum. USAID helped the Museum set up new galleries to display ancient royal jewelry and funerary furniture of Cheops' mother Queen Hetepheres, as well as conserve and display a monumental double statue from Karnak in Luxor that had been shattered in antiquity. Between 2000 and 2003, USAID helped to upgrade and enlarge the conservation laboratory at the Museum. USAID also helped provide Registrar Training to Museum staff, creating a team of registrars and a collections management system to enable the Museum to effectively track its estimated 200,000 objects.

**3 Old Cairo**

The Old Cairo area, famous for its Coptic monuments, includes a wealth of ancient structures. It was the site of a huge fortress from Imperial Roman times, still partly preserved, and it includes a major Greek Orthodox church, Egypt's first mosque, and its oldest synagogue. With USAID assistance, a master plan was created in 1998 envisioning how to best present this concentration of historic buildings to the thousands of people who visit every year. High groundwater seriously threatened the structural integrity of monuments in the area. USAID assistance helped to lower the groundwater level — thus preserving the foundations and making the lower levels of important flooded monuments accessible. USAID installed a drainage system in and around the monuments, and upgraded the sewage system in the neighboring residential areas. Archaeological monitoring during these works led to important discoveries concerning the history of the site. In the Coptic Museum, USAID helped fund the conservation of some of the finest and most important wall paintings in the Museum's collection. Another USAID-assisted project conserved early mediaeval wall paintings in the southern sanctuary in the nearby church of Abu Sarga.

**4 Giza Plateau**

In 1995, USAID launched an Archaeological Field School for Egyptian antiquities inspectors to offer hands-on training to staff directly involved in day-to-day management of archaeological sites in Egypt. The school is currently based on the Giza Plateau and run by the Ancient Egyptian Research Associates. More than 250 graduates have been trained. The school has enabled archaeologists from around Egypt to work closely with professionals from all over the world, and has helped to build a capable and highly proficient cadre of Egyptian archaeologists. The Pharaonic monuments on the famous Giza Pyramids plateau were threatened by rising groundwater levels. To protect the antiquities from further deterioration, USAID helped design and implement a groundwater lowering system. The project will be completed by mid-2012.

**This map profiles USAID/Egypt's cultural heritage management activities in and around Cairo.**

It is intended as a practical guide to exploring Cairo's many historical layers, and understanding the role USAID and its partners have played in ensuring their accessibility and preservation. The majority of programs profiled here were carried out between 1995 and 2005, representing a comprehensive, broad-based conservation program covering multiple historical periods, cultural and religious traditions, and geographical areas. All activities were funded by USAID, and carried out in partnership with the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) and Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). USAID assistance helped to document, preserve and restore works of art and calligraphy, architecture from various periods, and archaeological artifacts representing thousands of years of Egypt's history. These activities help to preserve a magnificent cultural heritage, thus promoting tourism and community-driven economic growth. USAID-led restoration and conservation programs were undertaken in over 70 sites throughout Egypt, many of them in Cairo. Additional information regarding these activities is available by referencing [egypt.usaid.gov](http://egypt.usaid.gov), [www.arce.org](http://www.arce.org), as well as in the comprehensive book *Preserving Egypt's Cultural Heritage* published by ARCE in 2010.



### 1 Sabil of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha (Tusun Pasha)

Muhammad 'Ali, "the Father of Modern Egypt" who ruled between 1805 and 1849, erected this building in 1820 to commemorate his prematurely deceased son Tusun. The *sabil* distributed free drinking water from its underground cistern to the city's inhabitants. It also communicated the ruler's political power; the architecture is the first in Cairo of the pure "Ottoman baroque" style, breaking with local tradition. USAID-funded assistance between 1998 and 2004 completely restored and protected the monument, which was in danger of collapse. Now open to visitors, the *sabil* houses a permanent self-guided interpretative exhibition.

### 2 Architectural Complex of Lady Nafisa al-Bayda

Nafisa al-Bayda was brought to Cairo as a slave and ended up married to the most powerful man in Egypt. In 1797 she bought an old commercial complex (*wakala*) that consisted of shops, storerooms, and living units on the upper floors, all built around a huge rectangular courtyard with a large gateway to the main street. Nafisa completely remodeled it, and added a *sabil-kuttab* in the corner, a charitable space that included an elementary school and a source of free drinking water. The architecture merges local mediaeval traditions with influences from Istanbul, and exemplifies the style that until recently defined the urban landscape of Cairo. USAID's comprehensive conservation program for the site included restoration of the *sabil-kuttab* and the facade and gateway to the *wakala*. In 2005, a self-guided permanent interpretative exhibition was installed in the *sabil-kuttab*.

### 3 Bab Zuwayla City Gate

This important historic structure is the monumental fortified southern gateway to the Fatimid city of Cairo. It was masterfully built of dressed stone blocks from 1087-92. From 1415-20, Sultan Mu'ayyad Shaykh built the adjacent mosque and added tall minarets to the two rounded towers of Bab Zuwayla. After an extensive preparatory and documentation phase, USAID conserved the towers, minarets, and wooden gates at the site, which opened to the public in 2003 complete with a self-guided exhibit.

### 4 Prayer Hall and Sabil of Sultan Farag Ibn Barquq

This small monument was built in 1408-1409 by a Burgi Mamluk-era sultan. Its lavish decoration reproduces on a reduced scale features of the other, larger mosques in the locally-developed Mamluk style. Seventeen different kinds of decorative stone adorn the prayer hall. A USAID-funded study and documentation process enabled subsequent structural interventions and conservation work at the site, and the building now serves as a descriptive center for visitors to the area.



MAPS AND DESIGN BY JAROSLAW DOBROWOLSKI, 2012  
PHOTOGRAPHS ©/O USAID BY JAROSLAW DOBROWOLSKI,  
MATJAZ KACIČNIK, AND CHIP VINCENT

## USAID SUPPORTED HERITAGE SITES IN HISTORIC CAIRO

### 5 The Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i

This courtyard mosque built in 1160 by a vizier to the Fatimid Caliph was probably the first in Cairo to be located over a row of shops where rents paid for the upkeep of the building. In 1300, Amir Bakimur al-Gukandar added a spectacular wooden *minbar* (pulpit) that is still in place. USAID helped to produce a detailed existing condition survey of the mosque, and subsequently led specialized conservation of the pulpit. Since the 1970s, the mosque suffered severe damage from raised groundwater that flooded its lower floor. In 2002, USAID helped lower groundwater around the monument through a project using innovative micro-tunneling. The dewatering enabled the SCA to subsequently carry out comprehensive conservation of the mosque, which continues to serve the local community.

### 6 The Mosque of Amir Aslam al-Silahdar

The mosque, one of the highlights of the Mamluk style in Cairo, was built in 1344-45 by the sword-bearer to the famous Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad, and, like many mediaeval mosques in Cairo, it includes the mausoleum of its founder. USAID assisted with the renovation of the severely deteriorated building. The work, completed in 2009, was carried out in cooperation with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture as part of a larger project of urban and social development of the Darb al-Ahmar neighborhood. The mosque continues to serve the local community.

### 7 Bayt al-Razzaz: the Rice-Merchant's House

This large urban palace is an example of a traditional rich merchant's residence in Historic Cairo, and it fills an entire city block. It combines two earlier houses built in many stages between the 15th century and late 18th century, and includes more than 180 rooms and spaces, many of them containing remarkable interior decoration. USAID assistance included an existing conditions study and conservation action plan, protective emergency restoration, and a comprehensive restoration of the eastern courtyard section between 2004 and 2007.

### 8 Traditional 19th-century Houses

Although not listed as protected monuments, many of the approximately 5000 domestic buildings in Historic Cairo are of considerable architectural merit and historical value. USAID helped to safeguard a number of houses, consisting of a complete urban block, by providing, with the inhabitants' participation, necessary structural interventions, repairs to water, sewer and electric installations, and general maintenance work. The houses remain domestic residences today, with shops and/or workshops on the ground floor.

### Architectural Inscriptions in Cairo (city-wide)

USAID helped produce a comprehensive database of Arabic inscriptions from pre-modern buildings in Cairo that is an invaluable source of historical information. Between 1998 and 2006, almost 3,300 inscriptions on 509 buildings were recorded, photographed, and stored in a digital database that enables easy access to the data.

