

The Abbasids | Managing Prosperity

'The Nilometer helped the population of the Nile Valley to plan for food shortages and rationing in periods of drought.'

At about the same time, the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47 / 847–61), ordered the construction of another ingenious structure on the Nile: the Nilometer. This structure was used to measure the level of seasonal flooding, which in turn enabled the agricultural authorities to predict and then calculate the quantity of seasonal harvests expected and the taxes that were due for them. The Nilometer also helped the population of the Nile Valley to plan for food shortages and rationing in periods of drought, thereby ensuring that both the wealth and the health of the nation were well managed and preserved.



Name:
Nilometer

Dynasty:
Hegira 247 / AD 861 Abbasid

Details:
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
The principal component of the Nilometer is the octagonal measuring column that stands in the centre of the structure and which is scaled in cubits and inches.



Name:
Nilometer

Dynasty:
Hegira 247 / AD 861 Abbasid

Details:
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
Detail of the interior of the Nilometer showing the central measuring column.



Name:
Nilometer

Dynasty:
Hegira 247 / AD 861 Abbasid

Details:
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
Plan of the Nilometer.



Name:
Nilometer

Dynasty:
Hegira 247 / AD 861 Abbasid

Details:
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:

Detail of one of the arched openings inside the shaft of the Nilometer.



Name:
Nilometer

Dynasty:
Hegira 247 / AD 861 Abbasid

Details:
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
During the Mamluk period for example, during the flood season, the height of the water would be measured every afternoon and announced the next day. These readings were also compared with the readings of the previous year. Once the reading reached the eight-meter mark, celebrations would ensue.
