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SHORT NOTE ABOUT THE  
OLDEST SYNAGOGUE IN EGYPT



AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES  
**BEN EZRA**  
**SYNAGOGUE**

OLD CAIRO — PHONE 22695



In the time of Moses, about 1592 B.C.  
during the reign of the Egyptian King

AMERICAN JEW  
ARCHIV  
התורה והמצוה

*The author of this modest work who has the privilege of exercising his mission in this beautiful Nile Valley, so well known for its liberalism and spirit of religious tolerance is happy to present to the Leaders of the Revolution, with this book, his respectful homage of loyalty. Patriotism and profound gratitude.*

**BEN EZRA SYNAGOGUE**  
Old Cairo

## **BEN EZRA** **Synagogue**

It is situated in Old Cairo, surrounded by 29 Mosques and 20 Churches, the inhabitants are about 133.000 Mohamedans 10.000 Copts and 42 Jewish families in this locality, (Old Cairo).

Although this population of different religious yet they are united and love each other as one family.

Ben Ezra Synagogue has an interesting history as detailed hereunder :

In the time of Moses, about 1392 B.C. during the reign of the Egyptian King

Meneptah (19th Dynasty) Jews have lived in the Land of Giza (Goschen Land) close to the Synagogue in the City of Giza, where the prophet Moses used to pray and worship God.

Before Moses left Egypt he prayed there for the last time leaving unmistakable traces or mark signes which prove his existence in Egypt in those early times.

During the reign of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (606 - 538 B.C.) the Jews who returned with their prophet Jeremiah. They accidentally found the Mark of Moses close to the city of Giza and there they built a Synagogue in the name Jeremiah. Within this Synagogue was built a special place called Guenizeh or Safe Keeping, for the incomplete Torah.

The following give proof of the existence of a Jewish quarter in and around

the site of the Synagogue of the Prophet Jeremiah and Rabbi Ahraham Ben Ezra.

To the West of the Synagogue is the Abou Serga Church, there is a Crypt whose history goes back even to before Christ. Historians say that when Herod, the Roman ruler of Jerusalem, ordered that all the children, of this Kingdom, must be Killed. The Virgin Mary, Joseph and the Child Jesus, fled to Egypt and sheltered in this Crypt for three months. It is positively known that Joseph was Jew and that the logical thing for him to do was to go to his own people for a refuge for his family and himself. This fact combined with many other furnishes definite proof of a Jewish quarter around this locality over 2000 years ago.

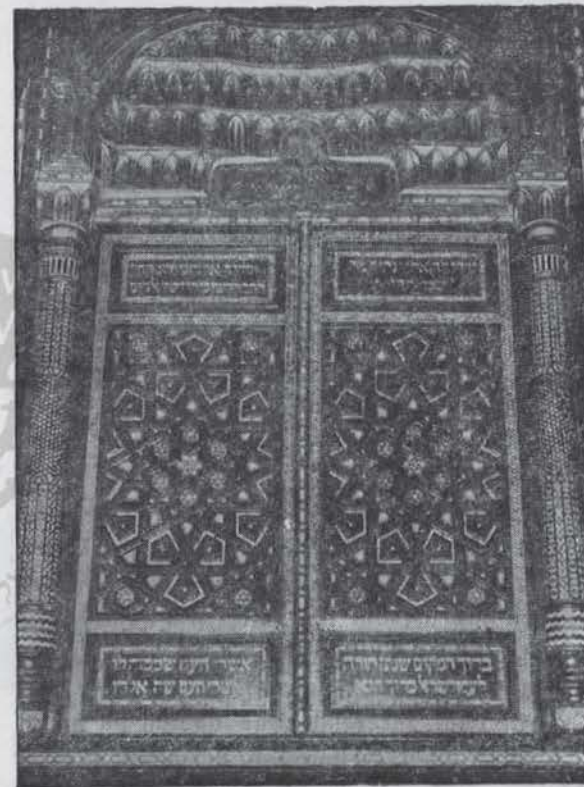
Many Historians refer to the Old Synagogue located in his area; one of them

Benjamin de Tudel, who came from Spain in 1169 A.D. said in his book, written in 1170, that he had visited the Jewish Synagogue in a place called Old Cairo and there found the Torah of Ezra the Scribe. This is further proof that the Prophet Moses lived in this locality.

Another one is the famous Italian Jewish author Jacob de Vette'ina, who came before him.

A third is Rabbi Joseph, who said in his book, written in 1630 A.D. that the original inscription of Sambare in the Bodleian University of Oxford contains many references to the Ben Ezra Synagogue of Cairo.

Amongst these are lines written by El Makrizi who lived in the 14th century (in his book KHETAT)



"When visited the Synagogue of Old Cairo I found, in the southern side of it, the place, where the Old Torah was put many years before, Ezra the Scribe."

Dr. Soliman Shichter of the Columbia University, who came to Egypt during Lord Cromer's time, endorsed the statements of the previous writers about the Synagogue.

When they invaded Egypt 30 B. C., the Romans destroyed the Synagogue of the Prophet Jeremiah.

In the year 6-4-641 A.D. Amro Ibn el'Ass defeated the Romans in Babylon and returned all the properties which he had been taken from the rightful owners. The Copts claimed the land of Jeremiah's Synagogue on the ground that in their New Testament Jeremiah was named as one of their Prophets. Their number being greater

Makrizi who lived in the 14th century  
(in his book KHITAT)

than the Jews they convinced Amro Ibn El'Ass and the land was handed over to them.

The Copts built a church on the land referred to, by El Makrizi as the Angle Gabriel's Church, and referred to by the historians as St. Michael's Church.

Dr. Richard Gotthel,  
Columbia University.

Prof. William Worell,  
University of Michigan.

In the Book Fragments of the Cairo Genizah in the Freer collection.

And it has been destroyed by El Hakem be Amr Allah Abo Aly El Mansour El Fatimi 996 - 1021 A.D.

In 868 A.D. Ahmed Ibn Tulun became

the ruler of Egypt and he taxed the Copts 20.000 dinars in gold annually. In the year 1115 A.D. the great Rabbi Abraham Ben Ezra came to Egypt from Jerusalem and visited the Holy Palace where Moses and Jeremiah had worshipped: he then went to notabilities and told them what he knew about the Synagogue and why this land should be their own. He interviewed His Eminence the Patriarch Alexander the 56th and asked that Synagogue should be returned to the Jews. The Patriarch told Rabbi Ibn Ezra that the Arabic ruler would insist on the annual tax of 20.000 dinars in gold. After some bargaining it was that agreed so long they paid the tax, the Synagogue should be returned to the Jews.

Ben Ezra rebuilt the Synagogue which is still called after his name.

Many centuries passed, and then, in

1894, the American Historian, Professor Shichter came to Egypt and when he visited the Synagogue he found the Guenizeh in which the Old Torah had been kept. A definite proof of the existence of the Old Synagogue in that area. He also found 100.000 books of various dates, the Ben Sira's Book and the marriage document of Maimonidi's son. Professor Shichter also found traces of the Maimonidi's Synagogue which is now the St. Barbara Coptic Cemetery.

By special permission of the Jewish Congregation, Professor Shichter took part of the Old Torah back to America with him.

The Old Torah is now spread over the Western world part in the Columbia University, part in the cemetary of new York part of the British Museum and the Bod-



leian University College and further part in Austria and Torino.

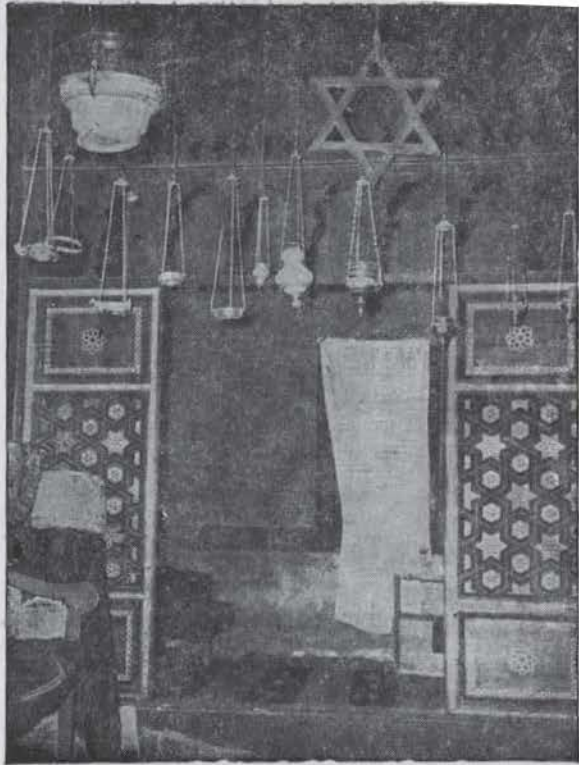
Among the attractions in and around the Ben Ezra Synagogue area are :

1. Moses Atlas which is called the Miracle Rock or Jeremiah's tomb.
2. An Old Torah (written on deer skin about 475 B.C.)
3. An arabesque ciling built in 1115 A.D.
4. The Guenizeh Place.
5. A clock of wood in which is carved Kofic writing referring to the visit of Amro Ibn El'Ass to that area.
6. A drawing of seven branched candelabra on deer skin.

7. The spring (Mikva), 900 years old dating with the Synagogue.
8. Dwellings built for the poorer Jews (by the Jewish Congeration of Cairo.

Communauté Israélite  
du Caire

To whom comes the merit of  
the actual state of the  
Synagogue and the Dwellings.



13

In all Oriental countries, including Egypt which were conquered by Amro Ebn El'Ass in 641, the Jews were granted complete freedom. This was laid down in the Roman Arabic Pact, Article 5, duly signed in 10/12/641, in Babylon by Amro Ebn El'Ass and Mokaukas (Cyrus). That freedom has been maintained up to the actual reign of the Leaders of the Revolution.

CAN JEW  
HIVES

1977-77-15

To one who denied resurrection  
Cyrus Ebn El'Ass said: "If what never  
before existed, exists, why cannot that  
which once existed, exist again?"

17

## Sayings from the Talmud

"Even when the gate of the heaven are shut to prayer, they are open to tears. Prayer is Israel's only weapons inherited from his fathers a weapon tried in a thousand battles."

"When the righteous man dies, it is the earth that loses. The lost jewel will always be a jewel but the possessor who has lost it—well may be weep."

"To one who denied resurrection Gabiha Ben Pasissa said: "If what never before existed, exists: why cannot that which once existed, exist again?"

"Life is passing shadow, say the scripture. It is the shadow of a tower, or a tree? A shadow that prevails for a while? No, it is the shadow of bird in its flight—away flies the bird, and there is a neither bird no shadow."

"Repent one day before the death. There was a king who bade all his servant to a great repast, but did not indicate the hour: some went home and put on their best garments and stood at the door of the palace; other said. "There is ample time the king will let us now beforehand". But the king summoned them of a sudden; and those who came in their best garments were well received, but the foolish ones, who came in there slovenliness, were turned away in his grace.

"Iron breaks the stone, fire melts iron, water extinguishes fire, the clouds drink up the water, a storm drives away the clouds,

man withstands the storm, fear unmans man, wine dispels fear, sleep drives away wine and death sweeps all away even sleep. But Solomon the Wise says: "Charity saves from death."

## The man and his three Friends

"A certain man had three friends, two of whom he loved dearly, but the other he lightly esteemed. It happened one day that the king commanded his presence at court, at which he was greatly alarmed, and wished to procure an advocate. Accordingly he went to the two friends whom he loved: one flatly refused to accompany him, the other offered to go with him as far as the King's gate, but no further. In his extre-

mity he called upon the third friend, whom he least esteemed, and he not only went willingly with him, but so ably defended him before the king that he was acquitted."

"In like manner every man has three friends when Death summons him to appear before his Creator. His first friend, whom he loves most, namely his money, cannot go with him a single step: his second relation and neighbour can only accompany him to the grave, but cannot defend him before the judge; while his third friend, whom he does not highly esteem his goods works goes with him before the king, and obtains his acquittal.

## Body and Soul

"The Roman Emperor Antoninos once said to Rabbi Juda, the Prince: "On the

Great day of judgement. Soul and body, will each plead excuse for sin committed. The body will say to the Heavenly Judge "It is the soul, and not I, that he sinned. Without it I am as a lifeless, as a stone." On the other hand, the soul will say. "How can Thou impute sin to me? It is the body that has draggen me down."

"Let me tell you a parable", answered Rabbi Judab, the Prince "A king once had a beautiful garden stocked with the choicest fruits. He set two men to keep guard over it—a blind man and a lame man. I see some fine fruit younder", said the lame man one day "Come upon my shoulder" said the blind man. "I will carry you to the spot and we shall both enjoy the fruit." The owner missed the fruits, haled both men before him for punishment. "How could I have been the thief?", bueried the lame man seeing that I cannot walk?

"Could I have stolen the fruits?" retorted the blind man, "I am unable to see anything." What did the king do? He placed the lame man on the shoulders of the blind man and sentenced them both as one.

In the same way will the devine Judge of the Universe meet out judgements to the body and soul jointly:

## Vanity of Human Pleasure

A fox was eyeing longingly some luxurious fruit in every fine garden. But there was no way for him to enter. At last he spied an opening through which, he thought he might possibly get in but soon found the whole too small, to admit his body, he said. "The hole is small, but if I fast 3

days my body will become sufficiently reduced to admit me." He did so; and to his joy he now feasted to his heart's content upon the grapes and all other good things in the orchard but when he desired to escape before the master of the garden come upon him he saw, to his great consternation, that the opening had again become too small for him. Poor animal, he had a second time to fast 3 days and having may good his escape; he cast a farewell glance upon the scene of his late revels, saying; "O garden, charming art thou and exquisite are thy fruits, but of what avail hast thou been unto me? What have I now for all my labour and cunning?"

It is even so with man; naked he comes into the world, naked he must leave it. Of all his toil therein he carries nothing away with him save the fruits of his good deeds.

## Golden Rules

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Leviticus 19-18

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Rabbi Akiba said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"—this is a fundamental principle of religion.

Hillel used to say: Whatever is hateful unto thee do it not unto thy fellow.

This is the whole law; the rest is but commentary."

TALMUD



## God and man

Rabbi Agiba said : "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God : but it was by a special love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image of God."

Ben Azzai said : "Despise not a man not at anything ; for there is not a man that has not his hour, and there is not a thing that has not its place."

Hillel said : If I am not for myself, who will be for me ?

"And being for myself only, what am I ? not now, when ?"

"Separate not thyself from the community. Trust not in thyself until the day of the death. Judge not the neighbour until thou art come into his place."

Ethics of the fathers.

## Time and Eternity

“Thus said the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in thee that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord who exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, said the Lord.”

Jeremiah 9.23.24

## Ethics

“Remember also the Greater in the days of the youth, or ever the evil days come, and the years draw night, when thou shalt say. I have no pleasure in them or ever the sun and the light, and the moon

and the stars be darkened, and the Clouds return after the rain; and the dust return to the earth as it was, and spirit return to God who gave it.

“This is the end of the matter; all has been heard: fear God and keep. His commandment for this is the whole duty of man.

ECCLESIASTES 12, 1-2, 7



*This booklet serves no doubt every  
visitor to Ben Ezra Synagogue, because it  
describes its history and its importance.*

### **REFERENCES**

*I Read this booklet to day 31st October  
1954 to Ibn Ezra Synagogue Cairo and  
was much impressed with historical date  
(Major) M. Beman 4 RAAC (Brut).*

**SENIOR SERVICE CHAMPLAIN  
Rome Area Allied Comm. CMF**

*This booklet serves no doubt as our  
enlightment to our Jewish men who are  
privileged to visit this historic Synagogue.*

31 10 54

**J. BATESNIK S C.F. (5) Major  
n.d.f. in E.F.**

*This attractive booklet contains a fresh deal of valuable information in a very small space and will be found more useful in answering the queries of intelligent tourists.*

H. DEVONSHIRE  
(Mrs. R. L. DEVONSHIRE)  
Member of the Royal Asiatic Soc.  
Member of the Société Asiatique  
Member of the Soc. Royal de Géograph. d'Egypte  
Author of "Qample in Cairo" etc.

*Monsieur*

*Je suis heureux de constater que vous avez pris l'épreuve de résumer dans cette notice la passionnante histoire de votre Synagogue que vous racontez de façon si intéressante quand vous la montrez aux visiteurs. De cette façon les touristes concerveront un momento de leur visite.*

JACQUES KEMAN  
Président du Tribunal Mixte de Cairo  
R. A. S.

*This booklet serves no doubt every visitor to Ben Ezra Synagogue because it throughs light on the history of the Jews.*

Director of Coptic Museum  
Dr. BAHOUR LABIB  
Old Cairo

7.4.54



This booklet serves no doubt every visitor to Ben Ezra Synagogue because it tells in a few pages the history of the Synagogue in a very small space. It is a most valuable information for every tourist who visits the Synagogue. It is a most interesting and useful booklet for every tourist who visits the Synagogue.



Monsieur  
 Je suis heureux de constater que vous avez pris l'initiative de rédiger dans cette notice la passionnante histoire de votre Synagogue que vous raconter de façon si intéressante quand vous la montrerez aux visiteurs. De cette façon les touristes concevront un moment de leur vie.

Imp. WAHBA, Cairo  
 2/4/73

**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

**date** September 17, 1979  
**to** Foreign Affairs Department  
**from** George E. Gruen  
**subject** Egypt Today: Some Impressions

The following is a brief preliminary assessment of the situation in Egypt. It is based on a week of intensive discussions in Cairo and Alexandria in July with a broad spectrum of individuals ranging from government officials to dissident intellectuals, including one who has since been arrested. It is supplemented by additional information received from knowledgeable sources in Israel, Jordan and the United States. Since much of the information was on a not-for-attribution basis, there are few direct quotations in this report. (Questions relating specifically to the Jewish community are dealt with in a separate memo.)

1. Peace is very popular in Egypt. While the 99% approval Sadat received in the referendum overstates the case, his peace policy has the backing of a substantial majority of the population, including the army. (The army's crucial role is discussed below, Par. 11.)

2. The meaning of peace is understood differently or at least is given a different emphasis in Egypt and in Israel. For the Israelis peace means recognition of their legitimacy, normalization of relations and prospects for economic and technical cooperation. As Mohammed Sid-Ahmed, a leading leftist intellectual in Egypt put it, for the Israelis peace means finally "getting out of the ghetto" of isolation in the Middle East. For the Egyptians peace is essentially a domestic matter, as illustrated by the signs in Arabic and English proclaiming that "peace equals progress and reconstruction." It is not so much peace with Israel as peace of mind -- removing the burdens of a wartime economy --

that enjoys such widespread support. A critical question is whether the anticipated "peace dividend" will prove as much an illusion in Egypt as it was in post-Vietnam America.

3. Sadat must demonstrate that peace pays tangible dividends to the Egyptian people. Anis Mansour, editor of October and a close confidante of Sadat, assured me that the Egyptian government was aware of the problem and has been trying to lower the level of expectations from the unrealistic euphoria that accompanied the peace treaty. The return of El Arish to Egyptian administration with much fanfare was a sign of the value of the peace process in restoring Egyptian national dignity. While pride is not as easily quantifiable as improvement in economic standard, it is an important element in the Egyptian's sense of his identity and worth. Sadat has skillfully used the attacks and economic sanctions against Egypt by the other Arab League members to rally popular support for him in Egypt by noting that his distant Arab critics became rich from oil while the Egyptians sacrificed their lives and treasure in four wars with Israel. Sadat has also played upon Egyptian national pride in emphasizing the unity and primacy of Egyptian civilization -- whose cultural greatness reaches back to the Pharaonic period, in contrast to the internal divisions and young upstart character of the regimes in Jordan, Libya, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

4. But pride is not a substitute for economic progress. As the January 1977 riots against the removal of subsidies on basic foodstuffs dramatically demonstrated, the Egyptian regime must provide its people with bread as well as circuses. This realization in both Washington and Cairo has led to significant infusion of American aid and a liberalization of Egyptian economic policy to encourage private initiative and foreign investment. Some tangible results are already visible: Since my last visit to Cairo, two weeks after the

riots, there has been a tremendous building boom in the capital. New overhead highways and hotels as well as factories and housing are under construction. Many of the sidewalks which were completely falling apart have been repaired, with larger tiles replacing the smaller, more attractive but less utilitarian ones, and even the phone service has improved from impossible to barely tolerable. New taxis have been imported, the highway from Cairo to Alexandria is filled with trucks carrying foodstuffs and industrial materials, and one sees an increasing number of tractors and other mechanized vehicles being used on the farms along the road.

5. It is hard to tell how much of the economic boom has yet reached the masses. The average Egyptian still earns considerably less than \$300 a year, and a "good salary" for a young architect is 42 Egyptian pounds a month, or less than \$60. Inflation has been running at around 25 percent annually, and the current population of 40 million is increasing by 1 1/4 million per year. Housing is the number one domestic problem in Cairo -- as it is in Jerusalem -- and the population increase causes a steady influx from the farms to the cities, aggravating the unemployment and housing problems. The Egyptians, I was repeatedly told, are a patient people. But the question remains whether Sadat or a successor will not begin to look for a scapegoat -- e. g. Israeli "intransigence," American and Jewish niggardliness -- if there is not reasonable progress in raising living standards and lessening the reportedly widening gap between the poor masses and the newly affluent who are profiting from the liberalized economy. (A visible sign of the affluence: the two elaborate wedding processions I saw wending their way nightly through the lobby of the Nile Hilton. Cost per wedding: between \$25,000 and \$30,000.)

6. On the economic side, bureaucracy, mismanagement and lack of firm

leadership are the main problem. Sadat is not an economist and is not really interested in the subject. American experts believe that what Egypt needs is an economic czar with sufficient power directly from the President to knock heads together and see that programs are implemented. At present the various ministers dealing with economic affairs are well intentioned but lack the necessary power to overcome entrenched bureaucratic lethargy. Prime Minister Mustafa Khalil reputedly has the economic background to do the job (Ph. D. in economics from the University of Illinois, taught economics and had practical business experience in both the private and public sector), but Khalil has been more interested in the peace negotiations and foreign affairs in general and has not given economic management the attention it requires.

7. There is a tendency to announce grandiose plans with big figures and then to forget about follow-up. Some believe that this style of flamboyant Arabic rhetoric serves the useful purpose of keeping hope alive in the Egyptian people, who are in any case sufficiently cynical to discount a large measure of any public promise. This style applies in the political as well as the economic arena. Egypt has a rhythm and a pace all its own, I was repeatedly reminded, and neither Americans nor Israelis should expect the frantic tempo of New York or Tel Aviv in carrying out policies and programs. (We aren't all that efficient either!) Thus Egyptian officials may be quite sincere when they say they welcome American investment and even joint projects with Israel to "cement the peace," and then are slow to follow through.

8. Normalization with Israel is not being impeded, Egyptians insist, but is proceeding according to the prescribed schedule in the peace treaty. When some of his foreign ministry advisors urged President Sadat to defer his visit to Haifa until after the Havana non-aligned summit, he insisted on

proceeding as planned. Israeli officials dealing with the Egyptians have found them sensitive to being pushed too fast and the Israeli authorities are screening requests from Israelis to visit Egypt. Academic exchanges and direct tourist traffic will have to wait until the expected opening of diplomatic relations in February 1980, a month after the completion of the first stage of Israeli withdrawal in Sinai ( to the Ras Muhammad-El Arish line).

9. The economic sanctions against Egypt by other Arab states have not been as serious as expected. While direct governmental aid has been cut off, quiet investment in Egyptian enterprises continues, most Arab airlines still fly to Cairo, and Egyptians continue to be recruited eagerly by other Arab states to fill jobs from the menial to the highly professional, joining the more than a million Egyptians already serving in other Arab countries -- including the variously estimated 40,000 to 200,000 in Libya -- who are sending nearly \$2 billion annually to their relatives back home. Oil revenues are going up because of increased prices as well as the added production that Egypt will receive when the Sinai oilfields are handed over by Israel. The decline in Arab tourism has been more than made up by Americans and other foreigners (not to mention the anticipated Israeli influx); Suez Canal revenues are up and will further increase when the widening and deepening of the Canal is completed; and world-famous Egyptian cotton, in the past mortgaged to the Russians for arms, is now earning hard currency in the West. While Sadat is asking for more American aid, about \$1.9 billion of the \$4.3 billion in U. S. appropriations through this September remains unspent through a combination of stringent AID requirements and Egyptian bureaucratic inertia.

10. Domestic opposition to Sadat's policy comes from three elements. The first are the Communists and leftist intellectuals who oppose his departure from socialist economic doctrine, his increasingly anti-Soviet stance and his separate



peace with Israel. Criticism on the last point is shared by some Foreign Ministry career officers and senior officials of the Nasser period who believe Sadat has gone too far too fast in making peace with Israel and that he should have insisted on closer linkage to a comprehensive settlement and tried harder to maintain good relations with other Arab states. Most of this middle group have resigned or been dismissed. Opposition on the right comes from the remnants of the Ikhwan (the Muslim Brotherhood) who oppose peace with Israel as well as some aspects of Sadat's social legislation, e. g. the recent law increasing women's rights in marriage and divorce, his support of family planning, and his modernization program. Both the right and the left are kept under close watch. Sadat publicly declared recently that in Egypt religion and politics do not mix. Criticism of the peace process is not published in Egypt and more than 50 leftists were arrested in August, including some Egyptian nationalists who would not have been considered extremists or security threats by American standards. The recent elections were also rigged to prevent the election of any significant opponents of Sadat's policy. Western observers believe that Sadat would have been wiser to allow a measure of free public criticism, since he enjoys overwhelming popular support anyway, and the healthy venting of views was preferable to driving the opposition underground. The rightwing religious opposition is still largely inchoate and lacks central organization or a charismatic leader like Hassan al Bana provided in Egypt's past. (Khomeini is not regarded as a model for Sunni orthodox Egypt.) What is troubling are reports that for the first time the rightwing religious groups have begun a dialogue with the leftists, whom they in the past shunned as atheists. Neither group poses a serious threat as long as Sadat retains the loyalty of the army.

11. Accurate information on views within the Egyptian army is obviously difficult for a foreigner to obtain. Western sources and Egyptians believe that the army is still strongly behind Sadat. The need to maintain the backing of the army is no doubt a major reason why Sadat, who yielded on other points in the

course of the lengthy negotiations with Israel, absolutely refused to give one inch with regard to Israeli withdrawal from territory in Sinai or the maintenance of any Israeli civilian settlements in Sinai. Even the Israeli offer of some territory in the Negev for equivalent space in Sinai was rejected. The essential reason, I was told, is one of pride. The Egyptian army suffered its greatest humiliation in the Sinai and the only way to restore their prestige, they felt, was to regain all of Sinai. Yamit was anathema, even while the prospect of thousands of Israelis visiting or living in Cairo or Alexandria did not bother them, since neither city had been captured by Israel. Sadat emphasizes that the army needs new equipment not to fight Israel but to deter Soviet and other challenges, e. g. from Libya, in Africa. High Israeli officials concede that it is preferable that Sadat receive American rather than Russian weapons and advisors, adding that in the context of peace, Egypt and Israel could work together to help maintain regional security. The potential dilemma for the United States is how to provide sufficient weapons of high enough calibre to keep the Egyptian army satisfied without providing weapons of such quality and quantity as to tempt Sadat or a potential successor to use his army in an Arab attack on Israel if the peace negotiations turn sour or Israel gets embroiled in a major clash with Syria.

12. What does Sadat expect from the autonomy talks? Sadat is reportedly less in a hurry than is the Carter administration. He is willing to be patient and is not particularly worried about meeting specific deadlines as long as his general strategic objectives are advanced. For example, he was quite prepared to sit out 1976 after Ford and Kissinger told him -- after the Sinai II agreement of 1975 -- that no further progress was possible during the American presidential year. The Carter efforts toward a comprehensive approach in 1977 in fact echoed a similar pledge made to Sadat by the Nixon administration. Sadat's position on

the Palestinians has also evolved. He has become disillusioned with Yasir Arafat and his principal aide, Abu Iyad, since they failed to bring about a moderation in the PLO position. Overruling his advisors' objections, Sadat has offered to have Egypt negotiate not only for Gaza but even for the West Bank, should Hussein refuse to join the talks. In deference to President Carter, Sadat has agreed that the Palestinian homeland need not be totally independent and should be linked to Jordan. Sadat hopes that within the five years of the autonomy negotiations either Hussein, whom he doesn't personally like, or moderate Palestinians will emerge who will enable him to get the Palestinian question off his back.

13. Sadat is also prepared to work out a compromise with Israel on Jerusalem which will keep the city physically unified. Sadat's plan to erect a mosque, a synagogue and a church on Mt. Sinai is part of his broader vision of having the three monotheistic religions working together to combat the threat of atheistic Communism. This ecumenical approach also provides a framework for maintaining the religious element within the Egyptian identity without encouraging the type of fundamentalist fanaticism that rejects Sadat's goal of Western-style modernization and has already led to Muslim-Coptic clashes in various places in Egypt.

14. Sadat is unlikely to do anything in the near future that will jeopardize his opportunity to obtain total Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and to strengthen the economic, political and military support of the American Congress and public he has so assiduously and skillfully cultivated since 1973.

15. But it should always be kept in mind that Mohammed Anwar el-Sadat is a consummate actor, a master of surprise and a strategist who has sharply shifted direction when it suited him to do so. His kicking out of the Russians, his signing

of the peace treaty with Israel, and his offer of asylum to the Shah demonstrate his readiness to pursue a course of action he believes correct, irrespective of the criticism it evokes. These are the marks of a statesman. Yet Sadat operates within certain economic and political constraints and he is mortal. An Egyptian diplomatic analyst told me firmly that "the Egyptian-Israeli peace process is 95 percent irreversible." That is reassuring, but having long studied the unpredictable Middle East I still worry about that other 5 percent.

