

The dispersion of egyptian jewry research paper

[Sociology](#), [Population](#)



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Introduction

The Egyptian Jewish community is comprised of two groups of people: indigenous Arabic-speaking Rabbanites and Karaites who have Judeo-Arabic culture, of which some claim to have had their residence in Egypt since the pre-Islamic era [CITATION Emi00 I 2057]. Most of them reside in Cairo's Jewish quarter, in the port district of Alexandria, and in several provincial towns [CITATION Emi00 I 2057]. The two groups dispersed to various nations for social and political reasons. This research paper will explore the dispersion of the Egyptian Jewry with emphasis on the factors that contributed to the dispersion.

Economic reason for the dispersion

The Karate Jews of Egypt were part of a small minority within Judaism who denounce the validity of the Talmud as a source of Jewish law. The Karaites resided in Egypt for over 1, 000 years, mostly in Cairo's harat al-yahud al-qara'in (Beinin 36). They became part of Cairo's ethnic division of labor, mostly goldsmiths and jewelers, hence the persistence of this significant

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historical role in the names of firms in Cairo's gold market, such as al-Sirgani. Wealthier Karaites began to move to the middle-class districts of ' Abbasiyya and Heliopolis in the 20th century and to take up aspects of bourgeois, Franco-phone, cosmopolitan culture. The daily lives of the Karaites of harat al-yahud al-qara'in were hard to differentiate from those of their Muslim neighbors but their religious beliefs and practices remain distinct[CITATION Ame49 | 2057].

Zionism and dispersion

At the turn of the 20th century organized Zionist activity began in Egypt. The Egyptian Zionism in the 1920s and 1930s participated more on cultural and charitable work for instant financially support the Hebrew University of Jerusalem which was not considered a threat to loyalty to Egypt until the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt in Palestine. Majority of Egyptian Jews were fairly comfortable and content during the 1930s, hence few wanted to jeopardize their position by staunchly supporting Zionism. Prior to 1948, the few Egyptian Jews who associated themselves with political Zionists seldom displayed this by migrating to Palestine. Thus between 1917 and 1947, only four thousand and twenty Jews had migrated Palestine from Egypt a majority of whom were Moroccans, Ashkenazim or Yemenis who had only lived in Egypt temporarily [CITATION Ame49 | 2057].

A significant base of support in Egypt for Zionism was garnered by Palestine agents who arrived in Egypt 1943. They informed the Egyptian Zionist of the persecution and execution of European Jews prompting them to discuss and make conclusions concerning their future informed by the suffering of their

Jews brothers and sisters in Europe. The message particularly got to the French-educated youth inclined to the international united front against dictatorial oppression in the 1930s and 1940s who were prone to recruitment into one of the communist groups of the day[CITATION Ame49 | 2057].

A core factor in the dispersion of the Egyptian Jews was the youth movement. The youth movements were the most vibrant components of Zionism since they advocated for the regeneration of a radical Jewish vision through regeneration through relocation to Palestine and working in the agricultural physical labor in agricultural Jewish protectorates - settlement (hityashvut), pioneering (halutziut), immigration (' aliyah), and self-realization (hagshamah atzmit). The ha-Shomer ha-Tza' ir (The young guard) which was linked to the Kibutz ha-Artzi federation was the most disciplined and ideologically committed of the youth movements. Others were Betar (Trumpeldor covenant) and Bnai ' Akivah (Sons of Rabbi Akiva) which was associated with the labor wing of the National Religious Party[CITATION Som87 | 2057].

Impact of Egyptian politics on dispersion

The formal and public articulation of the relationship between the Egyptian state and Jewish residents portrayed a strain and constriction of the right of Egyptian Jews to express themselves. An article in al-Kalim in 1949, the only Jewish communal periodical that was still allowed to publish protested that Jews born in Egypt, even some whose families had lived in Egypt for as long as for 500 years, experienced hardships in establishing their citizenship and acquiring passports. Such grievances paved way for those who were not

content with the sidelined treatment by the Egyptian government to seek refuge in countries that were more accommodating such as France[CITATION Gud89 | 2057].

However, the Karaite community used every opportunity availed to try and demonstrate loyalty to Egypt and its political order. Much of the issue of al-Kalim for May 16, 1951, was dedicated to the wedding of King Faruq and Narriman Sadiq. The Egyptian public was by then angered by Faruq's embarrassing public behavior shunned his second marriage because his first wife, Queen Farida, had been quite popular. This outright display of celebration of the royal wedding could have been a preemptive gesture to wade off accusations of disloyalty or an expression of the traditionally warm relationship between the royal palace and elite Jews[CITATION Eri00 | 2057].

1956 marked the outbreak of Suez/Sinai War during which the principal of the Karaite elementary schools, Mourad El-Kodsi, was interned. The government gradually diminished the Karaite community's control over its schools until they were nationalized in 1962 [CITATION Joe98 | 2057]. The community's Arabic newspaper, al-Kalim, also shut down after the 1956 war. The demise of its chief rabbi and the community institutions as a result of the 1956 war contributed to the rapid decline of the Karaite community since they no longer had a sense of belonging. The poorest members of the community or exceptional families of means who could transfer their assets out of Egypt were the first ones to leave[CITATION Joe98 | 2057]. Business and property owners stayed for a little longer.

After the first Arab-Israeli war, a small number of Karaites began to depart from Egypt and start their lives anew in Israel. The Karaites were resistant to the idea of transforming from urban merchants and craftsmen to rural farmers and physical laborers, the ideal of labor Zionism and the likely fate of new immigrants to Israel[CITATION Joe98 | 2057]. Towards the end of the 1973 the convoluted military positions of Egypt and Israel in Arab-Israeli War forced the parties to come up with an agreement on the disengagement of forces. This was achieved through indirect talks between Egypt and Israel orchestrated by U. S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger between January 1974 and September 1975 resulting in two Sinai interim agreements and a partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from Egyptian territory occupied since 1967[CITATION Enc07 | 2057]. Anwar al-Sadat announced a new open door economic policy, remade ties with the United States, and negotiated the first agreements between Israel and an Arab state since 1949 which offered Egyptian Jews in Israel an opportunity to construct a new social role for them. This helped in stemming the vilified image of Egypt among most Egyptian Jews particularly those that had been dispersed due to threats of hostility[CITATION Man04 | 2057].

In conclusion the Jewish community in the Egypt has declined over time mainly as a result of the Jews to different parts of the world out Egypt. Various economic, social and political factors have contributed to the Egyptian Jewry dispersion. Earlier in the history of the Egyptian Jews the major factor that led to their dispersion was economic empowerment as rich Jews moved to more cosmopolitan cities in search of better opportunities. Another major factor that contributed to the dispersion was the Zionism

where some Egyptian to Palestine in solidarity to Zionist politics. Finally the deterioration of the relations between the Egyptian government and the Jews significantly contributed to the Egyptian Jewry dispersion.

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