

# EGYPT

GP 63,271,000 ~ JP 100

## History

Jews have lived in Egypt since Biblical times, and the conditions of the community have constantly fluctuated with the political situation of the land. Israelite tribes first moved to the Land of Goshen (the northeastern edge of the Nile Delta) during the reign of the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep IV (1375-1358 b.c.e.). During the reign of Ramses II (1298-1232 b.c.e.), they were enslaved for the Pharaoh's building projects. His successor, Merneptah, continued the same anti-Jewish policies, and around the year 1220 b.c.e., the Jews revolted and escaped across the Sinai to Canaan. This is the biblical Exodus commemorated in the holiday of Passover. Over the years, many Jews in Eretz Israel who were not deported to Babylon sought shelter in Egypt, among them the prophet Jeremiah. By 1897 there were more than 25,000 Jews in Egypt, concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria. In 1937 the population reached a peak of 63,500. In 1945, with the rise of Egyptian nationalism and the cultivation of anti-Western and anti-Jewish sentiment, riots erupted. In the violence, 10 Jews were killed, 350 injured, and a synagogue, a Jewish hospital, and an old-age home were burned down. The establishment of the State of Israel led to still further anti-Jewish feeling: 2,000 Jews were arrested and many had their property confiscated. Rioting over the next few months resulted in many more Jewish deaths. Under these circumstances, most Egyptian Jews fled the country, and the majority settled in Israel. In the wake of the Sinai Campaign, a war that again resulted in rioting and the arrest of Jews, the community declined considerably. By 1957 it had fallen to 15,000. In 1967, after the Six-Day War, there was a renewed wave of persecution, and the community dropped to 2,500. By the 1970s, after the remaining Jews were given permission to leave the country, the community dwindled to a few families. Jewish rights were finally restored in 1979 after President Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David Accords with Israel. Only then was the community allowed to establish ties with Israel and with world Jewry. The majority of Jews reside in Cairo, but there is still a handful in Alexandria. In addition there are about 15 Karaites in the community. Nearly all the Jews are elderly, and the community is on the verge of extinction.

## Communal and Religious Life

Shaar Hashamayim is the only functioning synagogue in Cairo. Of the many synagogues in Alexandria only the Eliahu Hanabi is open for worship.

## Israel

Since the signing of the peace treaty in 1979, Israel and Egypt have maintained diplomatic relations with an Israeli embassy in Cairo and a consulate general in Alexandria. Aliya: Since 1948, 37,518 Egyptian Jews have emigrated to Israel.

## Sites

The 800-year-old Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, the site of the famous Cairo Gnizah, has been restored to its former grandeur.