

'Misr' The Arab Republic of Egypt - Part Three

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This is the final part of the series of articles on Egypt and it deals with religion and human rights issues today. There are boxes which give more detailed information about the country - please see pages 6, 7, 10, 11, 14 and 15.

The richness and diversity of Egypt's cultural heritage has always caused some tension. This is true today and places the Government of President Mubarak in a delicate situation. (1) As we have seen, the geographical and political position of Egypt remains critical for the world. Therefore, it is vital to keep a balance between all the pressures from both within and outside of the country. Throughout the 1990s Egypt continued to play an important role in Middle Eastern peace negotiations and no doubt will continue to do so in this new millennium.

CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

Despite the refinement and high intellectual reputation of Islam in Egypt, many ordinary and very devout Muslims practice a simpler form of their faith. This 'popular Islam' has developed over the years and is based on an oral tradition, the prayers, and the study and memorising of the Koran. In some areas Islam incorporates elements from traditional religion and other practices and has given rise to the development of cults and sects. There can even be differences in the way men and women practice Islam due to the separation of roles in the civil and mosque life.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the **Ulama** had an influential role in the Muslim community which is rooted in history. (2) Various

Governments tried to limit their power as they attempted to secularise the state and establish a civil bureaucracy that took away many responsibilities from the **Ulama**. An example of this is when, after the '1952 Revolution' and independence, the Government began to appoint officials to the mosques and **madrassa** (Koranic-religious schools). This was also done when the **Al-Azhar** University was reformed by the Government and modern faculties introduced in 1961. Until then the Department heads had been the orthodox **Ulama**.

The **Ulama's** position gradually became more precarious with the resurgence of 'Islamic activism' in the 1970s and 1980s. They were caught between their dual religious-secular role, in collaboration with the Government, and the beliefs of the 'Islamists' who wanted to purify the country according to Islamic principles. During this time the majority of **Ulama** were moderate and, while wanting the country's legal code to be Islamic, they condemned the violence used by the 'Islamist'.

ISLAM - THE 'STATE RELIGION'

According to the Constitution of 1971 Islam is Egypt's 'State Religion'. (3) The Minister for Religious Heritage (**Waqf**) and the Mufti both represent 'Official Islam' in Egypt. During the last two decades the Government has given Islam financial support. This has aided the building of mosques, training leaders and in printing copies of the Koran. In 1999 the Government gave £E40 million towards the restoration of the **Al-Azhar** University.

In c. 969 the Fatimid Dynasty established the **Al-Azhar** as a mosque-school to teach Shiite theology and it is central to Islam in Egypt. It is claimed to be the world's oldest university. (4) During the reign of Salah ad Din ibn Ayyub (Saladin, 1169-1193) the University changed from Shiite to Sunni Islam as Saladin developed the **madrassa** system. The **Al-Azhar** is probably the most influential centre of Islam in the world and adherents of the Sunni tradition refer to it on matters concerning their faith.

The actual University has fifty-five colleges with 180,000 Egyptian students and 10,000 foreign students. There are about 5,000 schools affiliated to it in Egypt and fifty 'Azhar' institutes in Africa, Asia and the former Soviet Union. The 'Da-wa' faculty (Islamic Mission) trains missionaries and teachers from all over the world. Imams and lecturers from the University also travel the world. It is a centre for the publication of Islamic books and the translation of the Koran into foreign languages.

The present Director of the University is Sheikh Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi, who was appointed by President Mubarak in 1996. After gaining a degree from the Faculty of Religion of **Al-Azhar**, he taught at the faculty and later became Rector of the Faculty of Islamic Studies. He became Mufti in 1986 and the Grand Imam in 1996.

'ISLAMIC REVIVAL'

Several 'Islamic Movements' (especially the 'Jamaat al Islamiyah' [Islamic Associations]), were founded between the two World Wars. The best known of these, and probably one of the most influential throughout the world, is the 'Muslim Brotherhood' which many consid-

ered 'mainstream' and not 'extremist'. (5) Until now the 'Brotherhood' holds key positions in many of Egyptian trades unions and other organisations - see later in the article. There are about fifty 'Movements' of different sizes and influence which began to re-emerge after the Second World War.

From the 1950s until today, the 'Islamic Movements' have developed for several reasons. These include: a wish to free Egypt from the domination of foreign non-Muslim powers; Egypt's defeat in the June 1967 war and its consequences; Sadat's tolerance towards political parties in the 1970s; the rise of 'Islamic Associations' in universities, [continued on page 8](#)

(1) On the 26th. September, 1999, Hosni Mubarak was re-elected as President with 93.97% of the vote in the referendum. He was the only candidate and will serve a fourth six-year term of office.

(2) See note (13) of issue 352 - *The Ulama*, Arabic for Scientists, are Islamic scholars and teachers. They were mainly from the *Al-Azhar Mosque/University* in Cairo and took on a major role in the 18th and 19th. centuries.

(3) 'The 1971 Constitution stipulates in article two that "Islam is the State religion" and the "the principles of Islamic law are the main source of legislation." Article 40 and 46 affirm that the State guarantees freedom of belief and religious practice and that "all citizens are equal for the law...irrespective of race, origin, language, religion or belief".' ('International Fides Service', 18/02/2000)

(4) '*Al-Azhar*' means the 'shining one' and is named after Fatima, Mohammed's daughter.

(5) See FootNote (3) on page 6 of the last issue, no. 353, about the 'Muslim Brotherhood'.

Picture above: The high rise life of modern Cairo



MAJOR FEATURES OF THE WESTERN DESERT

The **Western Desert** (Libyan Desert) is about two-thirds of Egypt's land surface (262,800 sq.mi. [680,651 sq.km.]). The highest point is Mount Babayn (3,622 ft. [1,104 m.]) on the al-Jilf al-Kabir Plateau (3,300 ft. [1,006 m.]) in the south-west. Except for the oases the population is made up of small groups of nomadic and semi-nomadic herdsman. The majority of the people (mainly Awlad 'Ali) have settled along the coast and rely on herding, agriculture, fishing and handicrafts for a living. Those who live in the oases are ethnically and culturally distinct, such as the people of Siwa. The **Al Wadi al Jadid** ('New Valley') area is the south-west of Egypt corresponding with the Governorate of the same name. (A)

The oases vary in size and are often groups of small oases which are close together. The water supply is from deep wells (often artesian) which are drilled to increase the arable land that can be cultivated. The water source can be up to 500 mi. (800 km.) away and it travels through the sandstone aquifers. Intensive irrigation has lowered the water table and is causing the salination and infertility of the soil. Ideas to combat this have been suggested, including taking water from Lake Nasser.

The oases produce a tremendous variety of crops such as cotton, cereals, rice, beans, grapes, figs, olives, dates, citrus fruits, and sugarcane. Siwa alone has 300,000 date palms and 70,000 olive trees. The livestock kept is mainly goats, sheep and camels. In some places there is massive land reclamation and the Government is selling off parcels of land for intensive crops production. Examples of this are such as: in the early 1970s about 9,900 acres (4,000 hectares) of land was reclaimed at **Al-Faiyum**; and in the last five years cultivated land at **Farafra** increased from 3,000 to 22,000 acres (1,214 to 8,903 hectares).

Many of the oases have industries based on the natural resources found there. These are minerals such as sodium chloride, sulphur, magnesium,

phosphate, and iron-ore. The **Farafra Oasis**' population has increased from 5,000 to 14,000 since 1995.

The oases are what remains of a prehistoric savannah. They are a historical catalogue of Egypt with buildings and ruins from the Pharaohs, Persians, Romans, Copts and a long Muslim association. Their secrets are still being uncovered, such as the tomb of a 26th. Dynasty (c. 525 B.C.) Provincial Ruler which has been found at **Bahereya**. Oases, as they were known, are disappearing as paved roads (which follow the old caravan routes), electricity, TV and intensive farming encroach. The original inhabitants are losing their traditional farming-irrigation methods, customs, crafts and architecture.

AL-FAIYUM OASIS (Faiyum, Fayoum or Fayum) **Al-Faiyum** is in the Faiyum Depression 70 mi. (103 km.) south-west of Cairo. It occupies the bed of the ancient Lake Moeris, which evaporated, and covers an area of 700 sq.mi. (1,800 sq.km.) at 150 ft. (45 m.) below sea level. **Water** comes from the Nile through the Bahr Yussuf (Joseph's Canal - 17th. c. [also for irrigation]). There are natural springs (Al-Siliyin, Al-Sha'ir, Biahmu and Al-Mandarrah) and Lake Qarun (16 ft. to 39 ft. [5 m. to 12 m.] deep, 85 sq.mi. [220 sq.km.]) with saltwater fish and a commercial-fishing industry.

BAHEREYA OASIS (Bahareya, Bahariyah or Al-Bahriya) (B) **Bahereya** is 250 mi. (402 km.) from Cairo, 224 mi. (360 km.) south-west of Giza and 112 mi. (180 km.) west of Asyut. **Other distances:** Kharga 379 mi. (610 km.), Dakhla 255 mi. (410 km.), Farafra 112 mi. (180 km.), Siwa 218 mi. (350 km.). It has 268 mineral and sulphur springs.

DAKHLA OASIS (Dakhila, Ad-Dakhila or Ad-Dakhilah) (B) **Dakhla's** capital is Mut which is 459 mi. (739 km.) from Cairo. **Other distances:** Kharga

124 mi. (200 km.), Farafra 143 mi. (230 km.), Bahereya 255 mi. (410 km.), Siwa 472 mi. (760 km.). **Water** comes from wells, Mut Wells (up to 109° f. [43°C.] and 4,016 ft. [1,224 m.] deep), Ayn al-Qasr Wells (up to 113° f. [45°C.]

FARAFRA OASIS (Farafrah or Al-Farafirah) (B) **Farafra** is 362 mi. (582 km.) from Cairo, 267 mi. (430 km.) from Kharaga, 143 mi. (230 km.) north-west of Dakhla and 112 mi. (180 km.) north of Bahereya, 329 mi. (530 km.) from Siwa.

KHARGA OASIS (Al-Kharijah) (B) **Kharga** is in a depression 112 ft. (34 m.) above sea level 374 mi. (602 km.) from Cairo, 144 mi. (232 km.) south of Asyut. **Other distances:** Dakhla 124 mi. (200 km.), Farafra 267 mi. (430 km.), Bahereya 379 mi. (610 km.), Siwa 596 mi. (960 km.). **Paris Oasis** (Baris) is part of **Kharga** and is 56 mi. (90 km.)

south. **Water** comes from springs and wells (Bulaq Wells, Jenah Well, Nasser Wells).

SIWA OASIS (Wahat Siwah or Sekht-am ['palm land' in ancient Egyptian]) **Siwa** is 467 mi. (752 km.) west from Cairo, 190 mi. (306 km.) south of Marsá Matruh. **Other distances:** Kharga 596 mi. (960 km.), Dakhla 472 mi. (760 km.), Farafra 329 mi. (530 km.), Bahereya 218 mi. (350 km.). It is 59 ft. (18 m.) below sea level; 51 mi. (82 km.) long; and between 1.25 and 12.5 mi. (2 and 20 km.) wide. Siwa itself is 6 mi. (10 km) long by 4-5 mi. (6-8 km) wide. 10 mi. (16 km.) north-east is the **az-Zaytun** (Zeitun) **Oasis**, and to the west a 50 mi. (80 km.) long chain of oases and salty pools. The road from Marsá Matruh was built in 1986. **Water** comes from

200 natural springs and 3 salt lakes (Maraqi, Siwa and Zaytun). Siwa is the largest and most populous oasis 7,299 (1986), 15,000 (2000) in the main settlement of Shali at centre of the oasis, with two old walled settlements at Siwa and Aghurmi.

QATTÀRA DEPRESSION (Munkhafad al-Qattarah) The **Qattàra Depression** is uninhabited and the eastern part is 35 mi. (56 km.) south of El Alamein. It is about 7,500 sq.mi. (19,500 sq.km.); 170 mi. (275 km.) long by 70m. (110 km.) wide; and is 436 ft. (133 m.) below sea level. **Water** is in the form of salt lakes and marshes created by precipitation, annual rainfall 2 in. (50 mm.). Montgomery stopped Rommel's final advance here in July, 1942, at the Battle of El Alamein.

Egypt



and **Al-Kharijah** is the capital. In the 1970s experiments in new crop varieties were undertaken. (B) Oases included within the Al Wadi al Jadid (Al-Gadeed) ('New Valley') area.



Foot Notes: (A) See map in the last issue, no. 353, on page 5, showing the **Al Wadi al Jadid** ('New Valley') Governorate. Until 1958 the area was known as the 'Southern Desert' (as-Sahra` al-Janubiyah). 'The New Valley Project' was started by the Government in the 1960s with the idea of developing the oases' potential



the university authorities opposition to them and Sadat's attempt to diminish their influence in 1979; and the gradual secularisation of the country combined with the loss of Islam's influence. ⁽⁶⁾

Since the 1970s the 'Movements' have gained a following across all areas of Egyptian society and have influenced the military and Government at regular intervals. Some of these 'Movements' are peaceful, following a rigorous religious life, while others preach violence in order to establish a pure 'Islamic State' incorporating the **Shari'a** law. These 'Movements' have other common elements such as: they reject Marxism, 'Zionism' (especially Israel), and Western Capitalism; and they are against the orthodox. The majority of them wish to move away from Egypt's secular society and some have even developed almost a parallel order to that of present day Egypt.

By the 1980s Muslim student organisations dominated campus life and greatly influenced university administration. Their membership numbers several hundred thousand, but those involved in underground activities and violence are only a few. There have been several Government crackdowns on the 'Movements' over the years and the extreme groups are constantly watched.

Another example of Islam's revival is the growth of Sufism from the 1970s. Sufism has been present in Egypt for many years and has developed much of its mystical side in the birthplace of Christian monasticism. It is not an 'extreme organisation' but throughout its history has been a movement of renewal within Islam. Sufism is found in many forms, and different countries, and has been an inspiration to those who have become involved in other 'Movements'. In Egypt Sufism has developed a great following among young professional

men. ⁽⁷⁾ The Sufi Confraternities are very active and number about 120, with around six million members.

CHRISTIANITY

As we have seen the Coptic Church is accustomed to ill treatment from early Roman times, during its split from Rome, and through the various Islamic dynasties. Part of this was the selling of Copts into slavery, which removed most of the Christian population from the Nile Delta. Even today, Christians suffer discrimination in many ways, such as their exclusion from important positions in the Army, the Government and the Civil Service. A simple example of this is seen in the 'Hamayouni Edict' (1856) under which churches are not allowed to be built or repaired without the approval of the Head of State. This law was relaxed on the 28th. December, 1999, but still permission is needed from the Governor of the Province.

The present day 'persecution' on the Copts began in the early 1970s with the resurgence of 'Islamic Fundamentalism' in Egypt. Many churches have been destroyed and 'Islamic Groups' often denounce Copts in pamphlets. There were clashes between Copts and Muslims in Upper Egypt (1977 and 1978) and religious riots in Cairo (1981).

In rural areas it is often difficult to say if deaths are the result of 'family feuds/disputes' or the actions of 'Fundamentalists'. Most 'Fundamentalist' activity is in Upper Egypt - such as in the Miniah, Assiut, Sohag and Qena Regions - where the majority of Christians live. 'Extremist' groups have carried out terrorist attacks since 1992. They are usually against State institutions or tourists (Luxor, November, 1997, when 57 people were killed), but some have been against local Christians. Examples of the latter are: an attack in Abu Qorqas, Minya, in 1997 when twelve Christians were killed; in 1999 thirty people were killed at al-Kosh'h; and clashes

at the beginning of 2000 in the Sohag Province when about twenty people were killed.

Over the years the Coptic Church has opposed the Government's wish to introduce various Islamic laws such as the amputation of hands and capital punishment. Under **Shari'a** law conversion from Islam

to another religion is punishable by death - although this is not practised. There have also been cases when women were forced to convert to Islam. The Coptic Pope, Shenouda III, has continually protested to the Government about these and the terrorist incidents. This resulted in Sadat banishing him to internal exile in September, 1981. The then Government appointed five Bishops to administer the church and tried to have a new Pope elected, but the clergy would not agree. Mubarak eventually released Pope Shenouda III in 1985.

Not all is negative between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. There are examples of Muslim-Christian dialogue such as the 'Al-ikhaa ad-dini' Association at the Greek Catholic parish of St. Mary of Peace in Cairo. On an international level the Vatican and **Al-Azhar** have a 'Commission for Dialogue' which has met twice a year since 1998. We also often

forget that Catholic, Copts and Muslims have co-operated, and even fought side by side for the Arab and Palestinian causes.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERN

Many organisations regularly express concern about the human rights situation in Egypt. ⁽⁸⁾ This concern does not only apply to atrocities committed by 'Islamists', but also to Government activities. The Security Forces, including the local Police, are alleged to have been involved in 'extrajudicial killings'; deaths in custody; torture (in Cairo and Alexandria); and have had people 'disappeared' (though many of the 'disappeared' have later been found to be in prisons where they are not allowed to be visited by relatives). ^(9 & 10) Often the accusations of both torture and death in custody are not investigated and it is rare for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. ___ continued on page 12

⁽⁸⁾ Organisations such as: Amnesty International, Committee to Protect Journalists, Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, Human Rights Centre for the Assistance of Prisoners, Human Rights Watch, International Federation of Human Rights, Land Centre for Human Rights, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, U.S. Department of State, World Organization Against Torture. ⁽⁹⁾ U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, the U.S. Department of State, February 25, 2000. (USCR 1999)

⁽¹⁰⁾ 'There are several security services in the Ministry of Interior, two of which are involved primarily in combating terrorism: The State Security Investigations Sector (SSIS), which conducts investigations and interrogates detainees; and the Central Security Force (CSF), which enforces curfews and bans on public demonstrations, and conducts paramilitary operations against terrorists. ... 'Human rights groups believe that the SSIS continues to employ torture. ... in SSIS offices ... and at [CSF] camps.' (USCR 1999) *Picture above: A traditional Siwa building*



⁽⁶⁾ The 'Jamaat al Islamiyah' (Islamic Associations) rapidly grew on campuses in Egypt and gained power in Student Unions. During Sadat's time they were tolerated to counter-balance left wing elements in the Student Unions. ⁽⁷⁾ See 'Islam Through the Years - Part One', issue no. 340, on Sufism.



COUNTRY FACTS ON THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT (JUMHURIYAT MISR AL-ARABIYAH)

THE LAND

COUNTRY AREA: 386,659 sq.mi. (1,001,450 sq.km.), 384,343 sq.mi. (995,450 sq.km.) land and 2,316 sq.mi. (6,000 sq.km.) of water.

LAND USE: 95% desert except for the Nile valley and delta. 2% is arable and 12,532 sq.mi. (32,460 sq.km.) is irrigated ^(a)

COUNTRY BORDERS: total of 1,038 mi. (2,689 km.) with the Gaza Strip, Israel, Libya, and the Sudan.

ELEVATION EXTREMES: the Qattâra Depression -436 ft (-133 m.) below sea level is the lowest point and Mount Catherine 8,668 ft. (2,642 m.) the highest.

CLIMATE: desert with hot, dry summers, moderate winters. The average annual rainfall is 1.2 in. (30 mm.) in Cairo and 7.9 in. (200 mm.) on the Mediterranean coast. The average daily maximum temperatures are 96.8°f (36°C), lowest 46.4°f (8°C).

THE PEOPLE

POPULATION: 66,050,004 (61,400,000 World Bank ^(b)). 99% of Egyptians live on 4% of the land. Africa's second most populous country, after Nigeria, with an urban population of 45% ^(b).

CAPITAL: Cairo (est. inhabitants 6,850,000 and greater Cairo 20 million).

AGE STRUCTURE: 0-14 years: 36%. 15-64 years: 60%. 65 years and over: 4%. ^(b)

BIRTH RATE: 27.31 births/1,000 population ^(b)

DEATH RATE: 8.41 deaths/1,000 population ^(b)

INFANT MORTALITY RATE: 69.23 deaths/1,000 live births ^(b)

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH: 62.07, years male 60.09 years, female 64.14 years ^(b)

LITERACY RATE: 51.4% (male 63.6%, female: 38.8%) ^(c)

LANGUAGES: Arabic (official), English and French also understood.

RELIGIONS: Muslim (mostly Sunni) 94% (official estimate, other 88%), Christian (Coptic majority) 6% (official estimate, other 11%), traditional religions 1%.

THE MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS

ETHNIC GROUPS: Eastern Hamitic stock (Berbers, Bedouins, and Egyptians) 99%, Greek, Nubian, Armenian, other European (mainly Italian and French) 1%.

ARMENIANS: 12,000 in Alexandria and Cairo, has declined since the '1952 Revolution'. ^(d)

GREEKS: 350,000 mainly in Alexandria and Cairo. ^(d)

GROUPS OF BERBER ORIGIN: 6,000 in the Western Desert, the largest at Siwa Oasis, though they are a distinct group with their own language, which is not related to Arabic, and culture.

NUBIANS: 160,000 ^(e) the majority live in the cities of Lower Egypt and in villages along the Nile in Upper Egypt, from Aswan into the Sudan. There were three linguistically separate groups of Nubians living in the Nubian Valley before the Aswan High Dam was built and they were forcibly resettled. They were the Kenuzi (north), the Beduin-descended Arabs (central), and the Fadija-speaking (south).

BEDOUINS: between 500,000 and 1 million ^(e) and are the largest ethnic minority in Egypt and speak an Arabic dialect. They are nomadic and are found in Western and Eastern Deserts and the Sinai Peninsula. The Bedouins have never been fully assimilated into Egyptian society but since the nineteenth century some have settled down to an agricultural way of life. At present they make up about 1% of the population - in the 1890s they were as many as 10%.

CHRISTIANITY FACT AND FIGURES

1) **THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES:** Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox and Apostolic Armenians.

COPT ORTHODOX CHURCH: According to official Government statistics they number 3.3m (1986), but Baptismal registers say 10m., therefore the figure is probably around 6m. There are about a million living outside the country. 93% of Egyptian Christians are Copts. 30 dioceses.

Shenouda III has been the Pope since the 11th. November, 1971. Shenouda III, Nzir Gayed, was born in 1923 and studied at Cairo University. He went to the Serian Monastery in 1954 and was ordained Bishop there in 1962. He is the 117th. successor of St. Mark. Since the 11th. century the Patriarchate of Alexandria has had its See in Cairo. There are three main **Liturgies** in the Coptic Church, they are: the Liturgy of St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea; the Liturgy of St. Gregory of Nazianzus; and The Liturgy of St. Cyril I (24th. Pope). The Coptic Church is a founder member of the World Council of Churches (1948). It is a member of the All

African Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches.

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH: Mostly of Greek origin they numbered 150,000 in 1930. Due to political changes they have become less - 80,000 in 1953 and 30,000 in 1970, to a few thousand now. Their head is the Patriarch of Alexandria.

ARMENIAN CHURCH: number about 10,000 (Gregorian and Catholics).

2) **THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES:** 7 rites: Maronites, Chaldeans, Greek (Melkite) Catholics, Catholic Copts, Armenian Catholics, Syrian and Latin Catholics.

COPT CATHOLIC CHURCH: It is a small Eastern Catholic Church of the Alexandrian rite with about 200,000 people today. It has seven dioceses and a Patriarchal diocese. The Patriarchate was officially founded in 1895 but there have been Apostolic Vicars, and the Church has been in communion with Rome since 1741 when Athanasius, a Coptic Bishop, became a Catholic. They were looking after the Copts who had

become Catholics. Since 1986 it has been led by Patriarch Stephanos II Ghattas.

LATIN CHURCH: The Latin (Roman) Catholic Church is looked after by the Vicar Apostolic at Alexandria. There are very few Catholics in Egypt and they are represented by the different congregations (Comboni Fathers and Sisters, Franciscans, Jesuits, Salesians, Brothers of Christian Schools) who are involved in pastoral, educational and social work. The Comboni run 'Dar Comboni Arabic Study Centre', Cairo. The Franciscans founded the Copt-Catholic Church. Their role is unique as they follow the Coptic (14 parishes) and Latin (11 parishes) rites.

GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH: In 1940 they numbered 35,000, today about 9,000. They are of Syrian-Lebanese or Palestinian origin and come under the jurisdiction of a Vicar General of the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch Maximos V Hakim.

MARONITE CHURCH: It was re-established in 1986. The believers are descendants of Lebanese who migrated to Egypt in the 19th. century.

Foot Notes: (a) 1993 est.; (b) 1998 est.; (c) 1995 est.; (d) 1989; (e) 1990 est..

Picture above: An intent young donkey cart driver at Siwa



The Security Forces regularly conduct mass arrests and detain people without charge under the 'Emergency Law' of 1981, which still remains in force. ⁽¹¹⁾ Once arrested the outcome can be uncertain. Prison conditions are poor and prisoners do not receive appropriate health care. ⁽¹²⁾ There are a high number of political detainees, though many have been released over the last few years. ⁽¹³⁾

For some years now Egypt has asked different countries to return 'Islamic Extremists' to them. It is reported that alleged members of 'Jihad (Holy War) Group' have been extradited to Egypt from Albania, Azerbaijan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. In this connection it is believed that the United States and Egyptian intelligence and security agencies have been working together to combat 'Islamists' - especially those who have connections with Ossama bin Laden. ^(14 & 15) Some of the suspects have been tried in Military Courts where the verdicts can only be quashed or re-

ferred back to the courts by the President. Both local and international human rights organisations have questioned the use of such courts for the trial of civilians.

The 'Muslim Brothers' is still banned in Egypt but, according to Amnesty International, it is 'an organization that neither advocates nor condones violence', this can certainly be said about the mainstream non-violent majority within the 'Brotherhood'. ^(16 & 17) Despite this, alleged members of the 'Brotherhood' have been treated in the same way as 'Jihad'. In mid-2000 the Government targeted them in a crackdown. Reports say that this was timed for before elections to the board of Egypt's Bar Association on the 1st. July, in which the 'Brotherhood' plays a prominent role, and the General Election due to be held in November. Both the 'Brotherhood' and the 'Islamic Group of Egypt' have asked for dialogue with the Government, but it appears that such opportunities were rejected. ^(17, 18, 19 & 20)

⁽¹¹⁾ 'The Emergency Law allows authorities to detain an individual without charge. After 30 days, a detainee has the right to demand a court hearing to challenge the legality of the detention order and may resubmit his motion for a hearing at 1-month intervals thereafter. There is no maximum limit to the length of detention ... Human rights groups reported that hundreds, and according to one report, thousands, of persons detained under the Emergency Law have been incarcerated for several years without charge.' (USCR 1999)

⁽¹²⁾ 'In principle human rights monitors are allowed to visit prisoners in their capacity as legal counsel; however, in practice they often face considerable bureaucratic obstacles that prevent them from meeting with prisoners. The Government does not permit the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit prisons.' (USCR 1999)

⁽¹³⁾ 'In April the Ministry of Interior reported that it had released 1,200 political detainees described as 'repentant extremists.' This group included persons who had served their sentences but had remained in detention, and persons who had never been charged or tried. The release brought the total number of detainees released in the past 2 years to more than 6,000. Following the releases, revised prison population estimates indicate that there are 10,000 prisoners who are registered and serving sentences and approximately 12,000 political detainees.' (USCR 1999)

⁽¹⁴⁾ Human Rights Watch, World Report, 1999, 'Egypt: Human Rights Developments' (HRW 1999)

⁽¹⁵⁾ 'The London-based Islamic Observation Centre (IOC) pressure group said this week: "The Egyptian regime has allowed a team from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation to question Mohamed Rabie al-Zawahri in Cairo after ... being extradited by the UAE regime.'" (Reuters, Cairo, June 8, 2000)

⁽¹⁶⁾ Amnesty International Index: MDE 12/40/99 of 29th. October, 1999, 'Egypt: Concern over arrest and detention of possible prisoners of conscience'.

⁽¹⁷⁾ 'Harassment and arbitrary arrest of known or suspected members of the non-violent but unauthorized Muslim Brotherhood also continued, possibly to weaken the influential group's ability to field independent candidates in the parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2000. As hundreds of suspected militant Islamists were released from prison, Muslim Brothers, including doctors, engineers, and teachers, were arrested, detained, and questioned by prosecutors throughout the year, typically suspected of membership in an illegal organization, possession of illegal leaflets, and attempting to reactivate the group by recruiting new members. In January, interior minister Habib el-Adli ruled out any role for the Brotherhood in the political system: "They are a banned group. They have no legal status and, hence, there will be no meetings or dialogue.'" (HRW 1999)



The Government operates 'censorship' over the Media and activities of NGOs within the country. A Government license is required for the printing, and distribution of newspapers and this can be revoked by the Government's Higher Press Council. Foreign publications are subject to censorship by the Ministry of Information and journalists are often face court cases for articles that they write. All of this makes it difficult for the independent press to report on many issues. ⁽²¹⁾

A HOPEFUL FUTURE

Some concern was attached to the Pope's visit to Egypt (25-26 February, 2000) at the invita-

tion of President Mubarak. The worries were unfounded and the Pope covered the various delicate situations on the different levels of diplomacy: the Government (meeting the President); the Catholic (Latin) Church; the ecumenical (meeting the Coptic Pope [Shenouda III] other Christian Leaders); and the inter-religious (meeting the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University [Sheik Mohamed Sayed Tantawi]).

Perhaps the best way to sum up the Pope's visit is by quoting from the communiqué which Sheik Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi gave to 'Fides' concerning the Pope's visit and their talks together. In this statement the Sheik echoes the

⁽¹⁸⁾ 'On March 25, the clandestine Islamic Group issued a statement announcing that all of its cadres "inside and outside" the country would bring "armed operations" to a halt. In April, some 1,000 to 1,200 known or suspected Islamic Group members were reportedly released from prison, bringing to about 6,000 the number set free under Interior Minister Habib el-Adli, who assumed his post in November 1997.' (HRW 1999)

⁽¹⁹⁾ 'The same month, Mustafa Mashur, the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, said that his beleaguered group sought a 'dialogue with the various parties to firmly oppose violence and terrorism and end extremism.' He argued that the state's 'lifting of limits on freedom of expression and political action would be the best way to fight against the deviant thought' of the armed militants. Suspected Muslim Brotherhood activists continued to be detained for membership in an illegal organization and 'possessing leaflets opposed to the regime.' (HRW 1999)

⁽²⁰⁾ 'In January, leaders of the Islamic Group held in Tora High Security prison reiterated their appeal, first made in July 1997, for a suspension of all attacks. In a handwritten statement, they challenged Islamic Group leaders abroad 'to issue a clear statement for an end to military activity.' (HRW 1999)

⁽²¹⁾ The Committee to Protect Journalists (USA). Picture above: Gebel al-Mawta (Hill of the Dead) - a hill honeycombed with tombs dating back to Ptolomaic and Roman times, 1km. from the centre of Siwa Town



possibility of dialogue between Christianity and Islam that bodes well for the future of Egypt and for all of us. He said:

‘ “We welcome with joy the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Egypt and **Al-Azhar**” and he adds: “God, the all powerful, created us in this life so we may know each other and open our hearts in harmony and agreement”. He quoted a passage of the Koran: “O humanity, we created you man and woman and made you into peoples and tribes that you may know one another...”

The Sheik also explained that dialogue is part of the duties of Islam and authentic **Shari’a** law (Islamic law) “for the good of humanity

and the propagation of virtues sustained by all religions ... Dialogue between religions allows us to listen to each other, to learn and compare ideas which commit us in love, truth and justice”.

“For Islam, all humanity came from the same parents” (Adam and Eve), the **Al-Azhar** Sheik said and continued “the Pope’s efforts for peace, love and moral values and virtues are precisely the goal of all the revealed religions.” “For our part, he says, we wish and work for the propagation of peace and security in the world.” “The leaders of world religions must work together so peace, security and love may reign among mankind.” ’ (22)

COUNTRY FACTS ON THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT (JUMHURIYAT MISR AL-ARABIYAH) THE ECONOMY

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT: US\$84.3 bn. (b)
- military expenses: 5.7% of GDP

GDP per capita: US\$1,290

GDP average growth rate 5.7% (b)

GDP by sector: agriculture - 16.7%,

industry - 33%, services - 50.3% (b)

INFLATION rate-consumer price index: 4.9% (f)

INFLATION: 5.6% (b) (in 1991 it was 19.7%)

GNP: US\$36.7 billion; US\$660 per capita. (a)

LABOUR FORCE: 17.4 million. (g) By occupation: agriculture 40% (an estimated 3.5 m. farmers cultivate small holdings in the Nile Valley and Delta), services, including government 38%, industry 22% (e)

Unemployment rate: 9.4% (f)

INDUSTRIES: textiles, food processing, tourism, paper, chemicals, fertilizers, petroleum products, construction, cement, metals. The industrial production growth rate is 8.5% (g)

AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS: cotton, rice, wheat, corn, beans, fruits, vegetables; cattle, water buffalo, sheep, goats. The annual fish catch is about 140,000 metric tons.

EXPORTS: a total value of US\$5.1 bn. (h) and US\$5.3 bn. (b) including: crude oil and petro-

leum products (50%), cotton yarn textiles and fabrics, raw cotton, corn, sorghum, potatoes, wheat, rice, oranges livestock, engineering and metallurgical goods (11%), chemicals. Exports go to Italy 19.8%, USA 9.7%, Greece 8.8%, UK 6.3%, Spain 4.8% & Germany 4.7%.

IMPORTS: total value of US\$15.5 bn. (h) and US\$16.5 bn. (b) including: machinery and equipment, foods, fertilizers, chemicals, wood and paper products, oils and lubricants, metal products, durable consumer goods, capital goods. Imports are from USA 20.4%, Italy 9.7%, Germany 9.2%, UK 4.1%, Spain 1.7%, Greece 0.6%. The main sources of foreign currency are remittances from workers abroad (est. 2.5 million), Suez Canal fees, tourism, and oil.

EXTERNAL DEBT: US\$30.5 bn. (h)

CURRENCY: 1 Egyptian pound (£E), 100 piasters.

NATURAL RESOURCES: petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, phosphates, manganese, limestone, gypsum, talc, asbestos, lead, zinc.

THE GOVERNMENT

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT: Presidential Republic.

INDEPENDENCE: 28th. February, 1922.

NATIONAL HOLIDAY: The Anniversary of the Revolution, 23 July (1952).

CONSTITUTION: 11th. September, 1971.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH: Head of State President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak (since 14 October, 1981). The Cabinet is appointed by the President.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH: bicameral system consists of the People’s Assembly (Majlis al-Sha’b) (454 seats) and the Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura) which has a consultative role (264 seats).

JUDICIAL BRANCH: Supreme Constitutional Court. The legal system is based on English common law, Islamic law, and Napoleonic codes; judicial review by Supreme Court and

Council of State (oversees validity of administrative decisions); accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction, with reservations.

POLITICAL PARTIES: Democratic Peoples’ Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Dia’ al-din DAWUD, The Greens Party, Misr al-Fatah Party (Young Egypt Party), Nasserist Arab Democratic Party, National Democratic Party (NDP), National Progressive Unionist Grouping (NPUG), National Umma Party, New Wafd Party (NWP), Social Justice Party, Socialist Labour Party (SLP), Socialist Liberal Party.

Sources - ‘The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Egypt’ by Bill Manley; ‘Egypt: A Country Study’, Library of Congress; ‘A Brief Review of Modern Egyptian History’ by Dr. M. Trabia (University of Nevada Las Vegas, USA); ‘The Grolier Multimedia Encyclopaedia, 1999’; ‘Encyclopaedia Britannica’; ‘Egypt’, Lonely Planet, 1999; Lonely Planet Web Site; ‘Egypt’, The Rough Guide by Dan Richardson, 1997; ‘The Times Atlas of World History’; ‘The Catholic Encyclopaedia’; <http://www.anthro.mankato.msus.edu/prehistory/egypt/>; The Coptic Network - WWW; ‘The Coptic Encyclopaedia’, edited by Aziz Sourial Atiya; ‘Zenit’; ‘Fides International’; ‘World Churches Handbook’; ‘A History of Christianity’ by Owen Chadwick; ‘The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity’; CIA Factbook; ‘Country Reports on Human Rights Practices’, U.S. Department of State; ‘The New African YearBook’; ‘Africa Review’; ‘Makers of Modern Africa’ (3rd. edition, 1996); ‘Africa Today’ (3rd. edition, 1996), ‘Amnesty International’ reports; ‘Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalist Movements in the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey’ by Ahmad S. Moussalli; ‘National Geographic Atlas of the World’; ‘1999 Grolier Multimedia Encyclopaedia’; ‘North-East Africa’, Michelin (Map); ‘Dorling Kindersley World Atlas’; UN-Relief Web; ‘Dorling Kindersley World Reference Atlas’; ‘Country Fact Files’ on Egypt; World Bank reports; Human Rights Watch; APIC; Egyptian Tourist Authority pamphlets; Committee to Protect Journalists; UK. Hansard, 14th. June, 2000; ‘The Foreign & Commonwealth Office’; ‘The Oxford History of Islam’; ‘Islam Today’ by Akbar S. Ahmed; ‘Al-Ahram Weekly’; ‘The Cairo Times’; ‘The Egyptian Gazette’; ‘The Guardian’; ‘The Independent’; Reuters; ‘The Telegraph’; ‘The Times’. See also the White Father’ Web site: <http://thewhitefathers.org.uk>

Picture above: Old and new methods of transport in the Egypt



(22) ‘International Fides Service’, 25/02/2000.
Country Foot Notes: (a) 1993 est.; (b) 1998 est.; (c) 1995 est.; (d) 1989; (e) 1990 est.; (f) 1997 est.; (g) 1996 est.; (h) Financial Year 1996/97 est.

