


MARCH 1979 • \$1

HAOASSTH

magazine

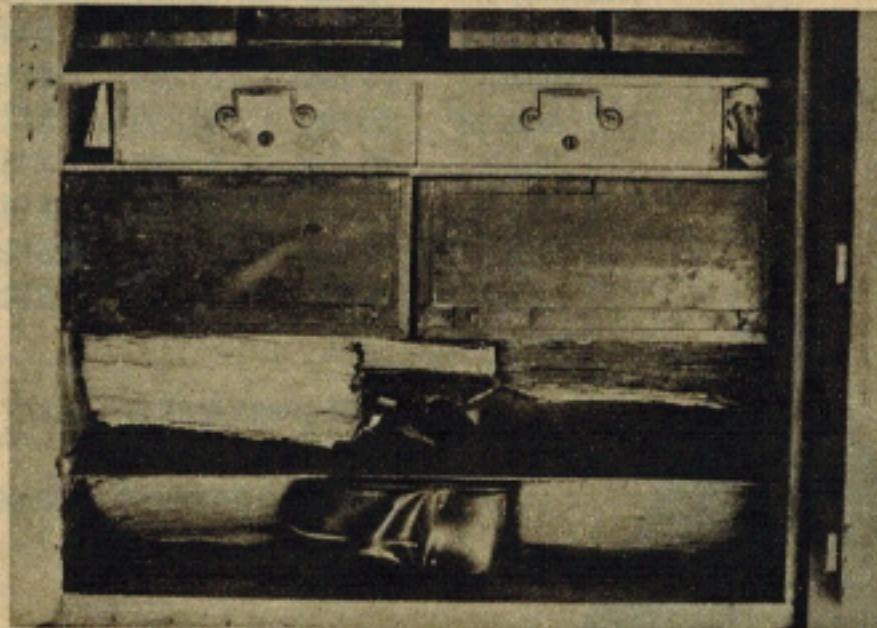


The Karaite Jews of Cairo

The Karaite



KARAITE TREASURES: Farag Menashe (above), secretary and *shohet* of the Karaite community, displays an ancient Torah Scroll encased in copper and another (left) housed in wood. Precious illuminated codices are stored in a safe in the synagogue (below), while other Torahs (bottom), are kept in the Ark.



WHEN I first came to Cairo in order to study Arabic in the difficult period following the 1967 war, I was not sure what would await me as a Jew. I anticipated all kinds of questions about my absence from Saturday classes at the university, but the first question, put to me by one of my instructors, the aristocratic Mrs. Ragia Fahmy, was one I had never expected. She accepted my religious obligations without demur but inquired with friendly interest, "Are you a Karaite or Rabbanite?"

Not only had I never before had to identify myself as a Rabbanite Jew, but I was very surprised that she, a Moslem, knew about Karaites—the little-known Jewish sect dating from the eighth century C.E. which had rejected the binding nature of the Oral Law—and that she was familiar with the term Rabbanite, commonly used only by scholars to refer to the mainstream of Judaism.

It was difficult for me to couch my answer in contemporary terms when she asked me to explain the difference between myself and the Karaite physician who had been both her family doctor and friend. Mrs. Fahmy's questions brought home to me, as perhaps nothing else could have, how much a part of Egyptian life the Karaites had been. After all, Cairo had been host to their community for well over a thousand years.

During their first centuries in Egypt, the Karaites became prominent in commerce, banking, government service and medicine. As the centuries advanced, the doctrinal lines between Karaites and Rabbanites hardened, and the economic fortunes of both groups followed the general downswing in a country that was hostage to a succession of foreign rulers.

The present century, however, saw a new dynamism in the community, as many Karaites eagerly took advantage of modern educational opportunities. Karaite Jews made their mark on modern Egypt: Murad Farag Bey, lawyer, scholar, and the country's most prolific

Jewish author; Dr. Elie Lichaa, a leading ophthalmologist; Daoud Hosni, famed composer; and Barukh Lieta Barukh, jeweler to Cairo's carriage trade.

THE Karaites lived for centuries in their own section of the Harat al Yahud, Cairo's medieval Jewish quarter, whose narrow and crowded lanes lie between the bustling markets of the Mousky and the fabled bazaars of the Khan el Khalili. Although the wealthier had begun to move out by the end of the 1800's, some remained until only a few years ago.

The *hara* (quarter) of the Karaites consisted of one long, winding street, together with seven or eight short alleyways that branched off from time to time. Here were found the synagogues, the office of the *hakham el akbar* (as the group calls their chief rabbi), the Hebrew schools, the butcher shops, the bakeries, the foodstalls, and the coffeehouses that served this tight-knit—and tightly packed—society. Only a short walk away was the bazaar of the goldsmiths, the *Sagha*, where the majority of the men engaged in the manufacture and sale of jewelry and gold, handing down their skills from father to son, into the present century.

IN Cairo today, Farag Murad Yehuda Menashe, a well-built man in his late twenties and the father of the city's two youngest Jewish children, is the secretary and *shohet* of the Karaite community. He administers their properties and cemetery from his office next to the Musa Dar'i Synagogue (an imposing domed structure built in 1926 in Abassie, a newer part of the city), whose exterior design is strongly reminiscent of the great Rabbanite Shaar Hashamayim Synagogue in downtown Cairo.

It is unlikely that the Rabbanite Jews of Cairo have ever stepped into Farag's synagogue (which contains some of the most remarkable Jewish manuscript treasures in the world), although Farag has occasionally visited theirs. He celebrates one day of Rosh Hashana, and the Rabbanites, two; his Yom Kippur this year occurred one day later than theirs; on Sukkot, he roofs over the *sukka* in the synagogue courtyard with the Four

Species mentioned in the Bible, but he has never held and blessed a *lulav* and *etrog*.

The dates of Farag's Passover sometimes will not coincide with theirs, and he will read a Haggada based on Biblical texts, free of all Talmudic references. He will have no seder plate, no four questions, and no four cups of wine. His Shavuot will always fall on a Sunday, and instead of observing the Ninth of Av, he will fast on the seventh and tenth. He has never heard the shofar blown, never put on *tefillin*, never affixed a *mezuzah* to the doorpost of his home, and never lit a *hanukkiya*. (Indeed, Hanukka is totally absent from his calendar.)

For Farag, who is proud to identify himself as a Karaite Jew, is following in the tradition of his late father, a goldsmith and member of his community's council, and of his father's fathers. Today he is one of the 40 Karaites who remain in Cairo, which until mid-century was home to the largest single enclave of this group in the world. In 1948, approximately 7,000 of the city's 42,000 Jews were Karaites.

EVERY Saturday morning at six o'clock, Farag will enter the synagogue to join the handful of other congregants for their four-hour Sabbath service. He has come with his two brothers, Musa, an engineering student at Cairo University, and Baraket, who is studying at a technical school. They greet another early arrival, Dr. Eli Marzuk, who has recently completed his course in dentistry at the university.

A few minutes later, the four are joined by Eli Massuda, the dedicated and active president of the

IF YOU GO . . .

TWA flies to Cairo daily. You can continue on to Israel via Athens on TWA. The Karaite synagogue in Cairo is at 25 Sebil el Khazindar in the Abassie district. Sabbath services begin at 6 in the morning and last until a bit after 10. Visitors are welcome. Remember to take your shoes off at the door. The Jewish community synagogue is on Adli Street in the main business district.

RABBI BORUCH K. HELMAN, who was born in Canada and now lives in Boston, studied at the American University in Cairo in 1968-69.

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Jews of Cairo

By BORUCH K. HELMAN

THE BEN ASHER CODEX, an illuminated codex of the Prophets inscribed by Moses ben Asher of Tiberius in 895 C.E., is the oldest dated Biblical manuscript and the gem of the Karaite collection. Decorative micrography of Biblical verses form an architectural design suggesting the Holy Sanctuary.

community, a retired senior government legal advisor, and by Barukh Lieto Harun, a textile merchant in the Mousky, who serves as *hazzan*. Yusef el Kudsi, owner of a plastics factory near the old Karaite synagogue in the Harat el Yahud, will arrive soon, as will several other older men, all goldsmiths, and five or six elderly women, some of whom live in newly constructed quarters behind the synagogue.

In the anteroom, they all remove their shoes. Each man takes his *kippa* and *tallit*, worn folded like a scarf, a blue thread glistening in each of its fringes. Upon entering the synagogue proper, each one kneels and prostrates himself in one flowing movement, before taking his place on the richly carpeted floor. They sit in a kneeling position, resting on their heels, their backs ramrod straight, in carefully ordered rows. (The women are to one side, perhaps because the ladies' gallery that runs around three of the walls would seem too lonely for their tiny number.)

Everyone is facing the curtained Ark and the immediately adjacent large, raised *bima*, where the *hazzan*, his *tallit* fully open, will begin the responsive reading that is the characteristic form of their prayers. Their *siddur* consists almost entirely of Biblical passages and *piyyutim* composed by Karaites. Many of the prayers most familiar to the Rabbanite visitor—the *Shemoneh Esrei*, the *Kaddish*, the *Aleinu*—are missing, and he will be surprised to note the strong penitential flavor of the liturgy, an embodiment of the Karaites' long mourning for Zion and their yearning for redemption.

WHEN the *Shema* is read, the worshipers rise and extend their arms with palms outward, the men holding the *tzitzit* before them. Later in the service, prior to the reading of the weekly portion, the Torah Scroll is opened and held up before the congregation, which again prostrates itself. Shortly after the *haftara*, the service concludes with the *hazzan's* words, "*Shalom aleikhem. May your prayer be accepted.*"

What will have most struck the visitor to this service? Perhaps its discipline, its sense of order, certainly the bowing or the unfamiliar
(Please turn the page)



ilarity of the prayers themselves. He may wonder at its surface resemblance to services in a mosque, but in fact the Karaite service retains older forms of Jewish worship, since both prostration and raising of the hands were practiced until the destruction of the Second Temple. In the Karaite tradition, the service and mode of behavior, the great concern for the ritual cleanliness of the worshiper, echo the sanctity of the Temple ritual.

TO Farag, as for the others, the morning must be full of memories: to his right, once sat his brother, now in Israel; to his left, was his uncle, now living in Baltimore. Partly dissipating the synagogue's quiet and emptiness is the tiny congregation's sense of being the guardian of an extraordinary assemblage of 20 priceless Bible codices, some of them gloriously illuminated, stored in a large safe in the building.

The pride of the collection is the Codex of the Prophets, completed by Moshe ben Asher in Tiberias in 895 C.E., the oldest dated Biblical manuscript extant. Plundered by the Crusaders from the synagogue of the Karaites in Jerusalem in 1099, it was redeemed a few years later and entrusted to the Cairo community.

When Columbia University orientalist Richard Gottheil was privileged to see the Karaite codex collection in 1905, he wrote: "They were the most magnificent specimens of the Hebrew penman's hand that I have ever set eyes on. One stands before some of these venerable monuments with feelings not unlike awe; immense masses of parchment, the pages ranging from twenty to fifty centimeters (7.9 to 19.7 inches) in height. Think of the love, the veneration, the sacredness that are here embodied."

But he went on with considerably less enthusiasm to describe the tightly fitting box into which the Ben Asher codex was stuffed and the condition of the other codices, as well as that of the Arabic documents, which are of the utmost historical value. The privileged modern visitor shares his awe, and also his concern for their preservation under more favorable conditions.

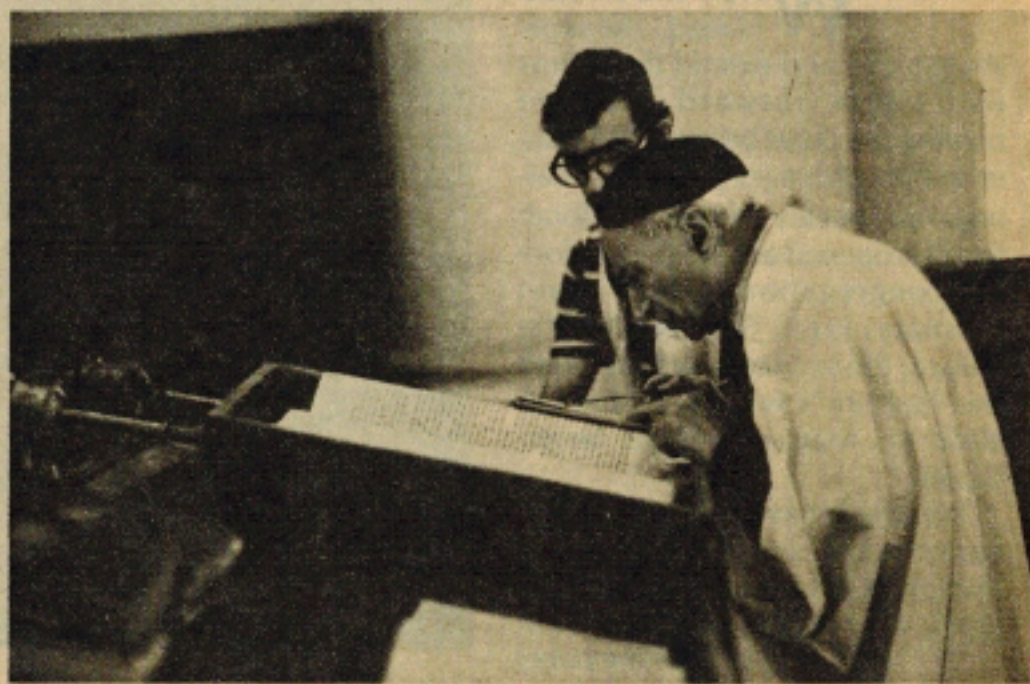
An antiquity of a very different order is the Karaite cemetery at Basatin, southeast of Old Cairo. Thanks to the walls that enclose some of its sections, it is in better repair than the vast and tragically devastated Rabbanite cemetery that borders it. The community leaders have tried to fend off vandals and land developers but have had only partial success.

Their geographical compactness and intricate nexus of family relationships, the rich scholarship of their early centuries, the "collective memory" of their long



SABBATH MORNING SERVICES begin early at Cairo's imposing Musa Dar'i Synagogue (6 A.M.) and differ from Rabbanite practice in a number of ways. Upon entering, worshipers remove their shoes and then pray kneeling, facing Jerusalem, in ordered rows on a richly carpeted floor. If one is called up for an *aliya*, he first kneels, with forehead touching the ground, before the Ark (above).

When the *Shema* is recited, arms are outstretched to display the *tallit* and then the *tzitzit* are held horizontally in front of the eyes to fulfill the verse, "And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord" (*Num. 15:39*). The arms are outstretched too when reciting "Lift up your hands in holiness, and bless ye the Lord" (*Ps. 134:2*). At the end of the service, the weekly Torah portion is read by *hazzan* and acting *hakham* Barukh Lieto Harun (below).



The Karaite Jew retains his identity in the face of radical challenge and change.

Egyptian heritage, life in a country where the individual's status was largely determined by his religious denomination and where he was subject to his own religious courts—all these factors help us to understand how this small band of "different" Jews survived in Cairo for so many generations, and how today, the Karaite Jew still retains his identity in the face of radical challenge and change.

But none of the reasons we have suggested would have been enough to ensure survival without the sustenance of faith.

When Karaite Jews first came to Egypt some time during the ninth century, they were representatives of a sect which had its genesis in the social and religious ferment of the eighth century Jewish world of Persia and Iraq and which underwent a process of consolidation and refinement over the next few centuries. Its followers rapidly spread westward to Palestine and through the Jewish settlements in Syria, Egypt, and Byzantium, even penetrating for a time as far west as Spain and Morocco and even to Wargla, deep in the Algerian Sahara.

The Jerusalem Karaites were strong enough for a few centuries to vie with the Rabbanites there for mastery, but the community was brought to an abrupt end by the First Crusade in 1099. Leadership of the sect then passed to Cairo and Byzantium, with the latter gradually gaining primacy. From there, it expanded into the Crimea (ca. 1200) and later into Lithuania and Poland (ca. 1400). The Golden Age of Karaism, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, saw it at its greatest strength in influence and creativity. Despite later periods of intense cultural activity, it never afterwards posed a serious threat to Rabbanite Judaism.

What were the beliefs of this Jewish sect, which is the only one of the ancient Jewish sects to survive until the present day? The Karaites trace their ideas to the days of the First Temple, and many authorities note their links to other schismatic tendencies in Jewish thought. The early leaders, including the eighth century Anan ben David, honored by the Karaites as their founder, denied the divine origin of Oral Law and the post-Biblical tradition formulated in the Talmud.

The new sect insisted upon a return to the study of the Scriptures as the basis for Jewish practice; and its members took the name Karaim, Bible readers, while they labeled their opponents Rabbanim, followers of the rabbis of the Talmud. Aside from the crucial negation of

the Oral Law, Karaism departed very little from the doctrines of normative Judaism, accepting the divine origin of the Scriptures and messianic redemption.

Karaite practices, some of which we have noted earlier, differed much more, especially with regard to dietary laws (where it added to the laws of ritual slaughter but did not accept the Rabbanite rules of meat and milk separation), Sabbath observance (where it prohibited any use of fire, even if kindled before nightfall), calendation (where it insisted on direct sighting of the new moon and rejected mathematical calculation), and the critical area of matrimonial law (where it greatly expanded the prohibited degrees of kinship, devised its own marriage and divorce procedures, and determined the religious status of the child according to the reli-

gion of the father). Conflict with the Rabbanites often resulted from these as well as other divergencies in practice, most of which derived from the basic premise of the sect.

Although Karaism was never a monolithic movement, and in fact was beset by much internal controversy, by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries its men of learning had evolved a body of tradition and code of law, with scholars in Constantinople gradually modifying certain of the original usages. They formulated a less stringent definition of prohibited marriages, permitted the kindling of fire before the Sabbath to serve as a source of light (thereby lifting the curtain of darkness that had covered their quarters on Friday nights), and accepted a compromise on mathematically setting the calendar. During this period and subsequent cen-

turies, the Egyptian community generally followed the more conservative school of Karaite thought, often adopting reforms only after a lag of several hundred years.

In Cairo, "mixed marriages" between Karaite and Rabbanite, at first accepted in even the highest social circles, became increasingly frowned upon by both groups, especially after the arrival of Maimonides in Cairo in 1165. While the Rabbanite authorities began to require that the Karaite partner in marriage embrace normative Judaism, the Karaite position evolved into one of almost total rejection of intersectarian marriage.

THE exact relationship of Karaism to mainstream Judaism has often been raised. It is not merely a theoretical question, but one

which has generated new debate in modern Israel, where the majority of Cairo's Karaites relocated after the rise of the Jewish State. In striking contrast to the Karaites of nineteenth century Russia, who sought to win greater civil liberties from the Czarist Government by disassociating themselves from Jewry, the Karaites of the Near East always regarded themselves as part of the Jewish people and were invariably so considered by both their Rabbanite counterparts and by the Moslem authorities who held sway over the two denominations. Despite periods of friction and outbursts of antagonism, the two groups managed to coexist harmoniously enough in Cairo itself. There the Karaites shared the fate of Egypt's Jewry in times of tolerance and in times of persecution. *(Please turn the page)*

THE KARAITES IN ISRAEL

By LEAH ABRAMOWITZ



THE KARAITES of Israel, most of whom came from Cairo, dedicate two new Torah Scrolls in their centuries old Jerusalem synagogue.

IN Jerusalem's Old City, we're used to ceremonies and religious processions, but this was an especially festive affair. On Hol Ha-moed Sukkot we watched a huge, ecstatic crowd of three hundred Karaite men and women conduct two beautifully decorated, round Sephardi Torah Scrolls into their newly-renovated synagogue right opposite our bedroom window.

The Karaite synagogue, probably the oldest Jewish house of prayer in Jerusalem, dates back to the tenth or eleventh century, according to the historians. A Karaite legend, however, credits its establishment to Anan ben David, the founder of the sect. There are ancient inscriptions on the walls which refer back many generations to early benefactors.

It was not the synagogue's age, however, that impressed my kids, but its location deep down in the bowels of the earth, more than 22 feet below the level of the courtyard where we watched the Torah dedication ceremony.

Did the early Karaites build their synagogue underground to fulfill the verse: "From the depths, I called out to You" (*Psalms 130:1*); or was it a necessary accommodation to religious persecution and oppression? No one knows for sure.

Today, to reach the synagogue one descends 23 narrow steps which lead to a decorative trough. Worshipers must remove their shoes before entering the synagogue proper and wash their feet here. The central hall itself is unfurnished except for rich, colorful wall-to-wall rugs which cover the floor. Even benches and chairs are

LEAH ABRAMOWITZ, a medical social worker from St. Louis, has lived in Jerusalem's Old City since July 1973. She wrote "We Moved to the Old City" in our January 1975 issue.

missing, giving the place a mosque-like atmosphere.

I learned much about Karaism from our new Karaite neighbors, the Moshe Dabach family, who have just moved in and live over the nine-century-old synagogue. Moshe Dabach and his wife, Shoshana, were born, raised and married in Egypt, where, for centuries, a large community of Karaites flourished. When the Sinai Campaign broke out in 1956, they were expelled and, like most Jewish and Karaite families, then came to Israel.

They settled in the development town of Ofakim, where Moshe became a teacher and his wife raised their five children. When renovation on the ancient and historic synagogue neared completion, Moshe was asked by a board of nine *hazzanim* (elders) who make up the National Council of Karaite Jews (offices in Ramle), to administer its rejuvenation and act as its superintendent.

MOSHE sees as one of his prime tasks explaining his sect's tenets and history, in order to achieve better mutual understanding. Most Israelis have never met a Karaite, although there are over 10,000 now residing in such places as Ramle, Bat Yam, Holon, Ashdod, Akko, Ofakim, Beersheba and several homogeneous moshavim (agricultural settlements).

Old prejudices die slowly, however, and the generations of vicious polemics and fights between the two groups are not easily forgotten. There were times when the Rabbinic tradition was in danger of being overcome by a Karaite majority and such leaders as Saadia Gaon fought tooth and nail to counter the Karaite influence.

There was further strife in 1755 when the Karaites convened a meeting with the leaders of the

Jewish community in their Jerusalem synagogue to discuss common difficulties with the Turkish authorities. On descending the narrow staircase, the Chief Rabbi suddenly fainted and fell. In a subsequent search to find an explanation for his fall, a Code of Law by the Rambam was discovered hidden under the steps by an anonymous Karaite with the intent of showing his contempt for the Oral Law.

THE Chief Rabbi placed a curse on the Karaite community for this act of blasphemy: they would never again enjoy a *minyan* (quorum) of ten local males in the Holy City. Tradition bears out that subsequently the community never was very large and some accident, illness or death always kept them from achieving the required muster.

Thus, not all the present residents of the Jewish Quarter were pleased to see the Karaite synagogue being renovated and opened for regular prayers. Even at the Torah dedication ceremony I noticed hot philosophical debates taking place between guests and local inhabitants. Some people in the neighborhood wondered why an ancient feud should be revived and the Karaite congregation rebuilt.

However, our local rabbi thought that we should encourage the present Karaites for, as he said, "better a believing Karaite than an *apikores* (heretic)." The Karaite Jews are equal citizens in all respects. The two older Dabach boys are currently serving in the Army.

Avraham Senani, the last man to hold Moshe's job as caretaker of the Karaite property (before the Jewish Quarter was captured and destroyed by Jordanian forces in 1948), went into captivity when the Quarter fell and was later killed during the War of Independence. □

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The year is 1948: Karaite Jews, now relatively prosperous and well-educated, were experiencing a virtual explosion of intellectual and communal activity. Throughout the Arab countries of the Middle East, the birth of the State of Israel came with the force of a tidal wave into the lives of local Jewish residents.

In Cairo, the wave of anti-Israel demonstrations that lashed the city made no distinction between the Rabbanite and Karaite. On June 20, 1948, a bomb thrown into the Karaite *hara* caused serious loss of life. In that same year the first exodus of Karaite Jews from Egypt began, as some one thousand of them made their way to Israel. This was an exodus motivated only in part by fear of force; it was also spurred by a deeply-felt desire to return to the Jewish homeland, whose rebuilding the Karaites have prayed for—as fervently as the Rabbanites—throughout the sect's existence.

In the early 1950's, the prospects for life-as-usual in Egypt did not seem hopeless to most of the Jews who remained there; but as the decade progressed, events became more and more ominous. One event had its beginnings some 20 years earlier in the Karaite *hara*.

Growing up in the 1930's, in the northern end of this quarter, was a young Moslem boy, tour of whose decisive adolescent years were spent in an apartment on Khamis el Ads Street, close to the post office which his father supervised and within earshot of the Karaite synagogue. His was probably the only Moslem family in the quarter, living in a building owned by Karaite Jews. The landlords, the Yaakub Farag Shamuel family, befriended the lonely young man, who, when he was not busy organizing student marches to protest British policies in Egypt, spent many hours in their apartment, as a guest at their table and a companion of their son.

Only a few blocks away, just outside the *hara* on Khoronfish Street, lived a younger boy, a Karaite Jew, a member of a prominent Karaite family, who attended a Jewish school and who was active in the Maccabi and Bnei Akiva Zionist youth groups. Perhaps the young Moslem and the Karaite sometimes brushed against each other in the constricted alleyways of the Jewish quarter, or even met in the Shamuel home, since the two Karaite families were close friends.

Twenty years later, their paths were to cross again. The young Karaite boy, who had by this time graduated from the Cairo University Medical School and was working as a surgeon at the Jewish hospital, had led the self-defense of the Jewish quarter during the 1948 demonstrations. In 1954, he was on trial for his life, accused of spying for Israel in what came to be known as the Trial of the Thirteen,

the centerpiece of the "Lavon Affair." The young Moslem, who had graduated from the Egyptian military academy and served as an officer in the 1948 war against Israel, was now the head of state. In his hands rested the young doctor's fate. So, early in 1955, Mr. and Mrs. Shamuel, sought an audience with their former tenant, Gamal Abdel Nasser, to plead with him for the life of Dr. Musa Marzuk.

Nasser, who had refused to grant an audience to Haim Nahum, the distinguished Chief Rabbi of Cairo, for a similar mission, received the Shamuels courteously; but he explained that it was difficult for him to commute the sentence in view of the storm of protest in the Arab world against his Government's execution of six members of the extremist Moslem Brotherhood several weeks earlier. On February 2, 1955, Dr. Marzuk was hanged, along with Samuel Azar, a Rabbanite Jew.

Just two years ago, Musa Marzuk's remains were brought to Israel, where his family now lives, and reinterred on Mt. Herzl with full state honors. Marzuk's life and death symbolize not only the identification of the Karaites with their Rabbanite brothers in Cairo, but also their identification with world Jewry.

THE Suez War of 1956—accompanied by arrests and deportations—precipitated the second and much larger wave of emigration, mostly to Israel. The final stage in the Karaite exodus followed the Six-Day War.

In Israel, the Karaites, almost all of Egyptian origin, now claim 20,000 adherents, although other estimates range as low as 10,000. The community, which once was extraordinarily compact, has been dispersed throughout Israel—at Ramle (the largest center), the moshavim of Matzliah and Rannen, Ashdod, Ofakim, and other places. Paradoxically, the return to Zion has raised new questions for the group. In Cairo, even the less observant had at least identified themselves as Karaites, but in Israel came a reexamination of their collective identity. In a nation of Rabbanite Jews, the members experience a new sense of isolation.

They receive financial support from the Government for their religious, educational, and communal programs and are served by an energetic national council. They have built new houses of worship, recently restored the synagogue of Anan Hanasi in the Old City of Jerusalem, and reprinted their prayerbooks and many classical Karaite works. The older generation and the leadership (all the chief *hakhamim*, including the incumbent, the 81-year-old David ben Moshe Yerushalmi, were active in Cairo) are dedicated to transmitting their carefully nur-

tured heritage to the younger generation, some of whom seem less than eager to accept the yoke of their tradition.

The late Chief Hakham Shlomo Nunu summed up the difficulties in a statement in their monthly magazine, *Dover Bnei Mikra*: "In Egypt, we were a foreign minority in relation to the whole population. This bound us together and united us around Judaism. In Israel, we are living in our own country, but we found here a secular culture that is strange to us. Unlimited freedom has changed our attitudes towards our values."

PERHAPS the most crucial problem facing the sect as a whole in Israel is that the standing of its religious court and its jurisdiction in matters of personal status remain in a kind of legal limbo. "We had our own court in Egypt until 1955 [when the Government abolished the communal courts]," explains one of

their leaders, "but in Israel we cannot get full recognition!"

The present confusing situation seems to find their clergy's right to perform marriages accepted, but the validity of their divorces denied. Following years of debate that included a report by a blue-ribbon Government commission, September 1978 found the frustrated Karaite national council demanding recognition as a religious community, a move that would facilitate the winning of legal status for their courts.

Political and rabbinical authorities have been reluctant to grant such a request in the past for fear that approval would institutionalize what they consider "a tragic rift in our people." For the Karaites, the issue at bottom is one of group survival.

Not all of Cairo's Karaites settled in Israel. Additional outposts of Egyptian Karaites exist today in the United States, France, Switzerland, Canada, Brazil, England,

and Australia. Thousands of Russian Karaites, their exact number unknown, still live in the Soviet Union, and about two hundred Karaites remain in Turkey.

In the United States, more than five hundred Karaites from Egypt have made their homes in San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Providence, Baltimore and Rochester. The Chicago Karaites were fortunate to be led by Jacques Mangoubi, president of the Cairo community until his departure from Egypt in 1966. An ebullient and outspoken man even in his seventies, he remained active in his religion's behalf until his death in 1976. A year earlier, he had incorporated the local group as the "Jewish Karaite Community of America."

This fall, Karaites held High Holy Day services in San Francisco, Chicago, and Baltimore, observing the dates of the standard Jewish calendar. The thoughts of the congregants, who were largely

middle-aged and older, must have turned to the times when their numbers filled to overflowing their own capacious synagogues.

THE Karaites in the United States are well-educated, among them an erudite doctor who was physician to the last king of Libya, a former high-ranking government lawyer, and a recently retired Cairo University physics professor. There are also a large number of practicing physicians and engineers, and they have imparted their values to their children. A great-grandson of a Chief Hakham of Cairo, who came to this country at the age of sixteen, is an alumnus of Phillips Andover Academy and of MIT, where he is now working for an advanced degree. Another young Karaite follows the no-less-honored trade of his father, a goldsmith and jeweler. In respect to their religious heritage, however, it seems clear that it will be very hard for them to

withstand the pressures to merge with the mainstream of Jewry.

Still, they speak with pride of their community's history, take part in one another's *simhas*, and with their innate courtesy and warmth welcome the researcher into their homes. "We are Karaite Jews, you are Talmudists," one dignified gentleman told me, "but I hope you realize that we are very old Jews. We are friends and should remain so."

They recall their lives in Egypt with an affection that is mixed with rueful recollections of the last years and days. Karaite Cairo lives in their memories.

Cairo is a city all but empty of its Karaites now. Even though the prospects of peace suggest the likelihood of a continuing communal presence, it is doubtful that Cairo will ever regain a substantial Karaite population. The future of the Egyptian Karaites now lies in Israel, where a new page in their history is being written. □