

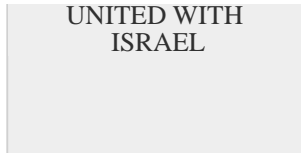


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## Egyptian Gov't Seizes Jewish Land Documents



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Egyptian authorities claim to have detained around 1.7 million papers proving the land and asset ownership of Egyptian Jews in Cairo, the Times of Israel reported.



The documents were supposed to be shipped to Jordan and from there, transferred to Israel. Preliminary investigations claim that these files were supposed to be used as part of an Israeli lawsuit involving Jewish lost property in Egypt following the 1952 Revolution. Some of the documents date as far back as 1863 and currently are being held by Egypt's general prosecution.

These documents were reportedly stolen from the Institut D'Egypte on December 16, 2011 during the public riots that erupted following the overthrow of former President Hosni Mubarak. Al Ahram asserted that a senior member of former President Mubarak's National Democratic Party was involved in the efforts to smuggle the documents out of Egypt in the service of a French Jewish woman and a Lebanese Jewish man named Robert Khalil Sarsaq, both of whom the Egyptians believe to be linked to the Mossad.

The Israeli government however denies that it was involved in smuggling these documents

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out of Egypt. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, "We have this great pool here of testimonies of the survivors who are still alive. All of this information about blocking the documents has no basis, because we have all the information here with us. With all due respect to whether these documents exist or not, we have enough historical information and testimonies right there," the Jerusalem Post reported. Ayalon has been actively involved in raising public awareness about the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries via his facebook campaign page "I am a refugee."



Egyptian Alexandria Jewish choir at Samuel Menashe Synagogue, Wikipedia

Jews first settled in Egypt during the reign of the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, 1375-1358 BCE, and by 1937, around 63,500 Jews were living in Egypt. According to Egyptian born JIMENA founder Joseph Abdel Wahed, "Mizrahi Jews are among the oldest indigenous people in the Middle East. We are like the American Indian, natives of our country. Our communities in Baghdad and

Cairo predate the Arab conquest by as much as 2,000 years and our contribution to Arab societies is immense. Judaism was born there. Our sacred Torah and great rabbis and philosophers, Maimonides and Philo, took root there." Nevertheless, despite the existence of deep Jewish roots in Egypt, Egypt's Nationality Code of 1926 deprived Jews of Egyptian citizenship.

In 1937, with the rise of Egyptian nationalism and anti-Jewish sentiment, 10 Egyptian Jews were murdered, over 300 Egyptian Jews were injured, and a synagogue, Jewish old age home, and Jewish hospital were destroyed amidst anti-Jewish riots. Between June and November 1948, bombs set off in Cairo's Jewish Quarter resulted in the slaughter of 70 Jews and the maiming of nearly 200 Jews, which was accompanied by the arrest and property confiscation of 2,000 Egyptian Jews.

Following Israel's Independence, the Arab masses responded harshly towards their Jewish subjects. Joseph Abdel Wahed asserted that across the Arab world, "Hundreds were killed, maimed, women were raped and Jewish property looted and burned. In Cairo and other Arab capitals, crowds chanted 'Al yahud Kelab el Arab/The Jews are the dogs of the Arabs' and 'Ebdah el Yahud/Slaughter the Jews.' It was like hell in Dante's Inferno." However, after the dust of the 1948 war had settled, the situation did not improve. In 1956, the Egyptian government used the Sinai Campaign as a pretext to expel and confiscate the property of 25,000 Jews, while an additional 1,000 Jews were held in detention camps. In November 1956, an Egyptian government document declared, "All Jews are Zionists and enemies of the state," and promised that they would soon be expelled.

As Egyptian Jewish refugee Lili Hazan Brode writes of this period on Danny Ayalon's facebook campaign page, "In 1956, my mother removed my chain with the Jewish star and told me to be very careful about every word I said in public or my father would end up in jail like many of our friends and relatives. I knew many people whose



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Lili Hazan Brode as a child in Egypt, taken from the 'I Am A Refugee' Facebook page

young 18 and 19 year old boys were jailed or hung because the Egyptians believed every young and old Jew was a Zionist. In my Jewish school, which was attached to the Eliyahou Hanavi synagogue, I experienced direct anti-Semitic lectures about the Jews who stole Israel and humiliating discussions about the Jewish people. I was often asked to repeat these awful slurs against my Jewish people and I would start to cry or explain that I didn't understand the lecture which resulted in more punishments."

By 1957, there were only 15,000 Jews left in Egypt and following the Six Days War, there was a renewed wave of persecutions that caused the Jewish community to dwindle to 2,500 souls. After Jews were given permission to leave in the 1970's, almost no Jews remained in Egypt. Today, the once vibrant Egyptian Jewish community is on the verge of extinction, as less than 100 Jews are presently living in Egypt and most of them are very old.

Joseph Abdel Wahed declared, "Our homes, businesses, synagogues, schools, hospitals, home for the aged and other community property are gathering dust in Cairo, Alexandria, Baghdad, Aleppo, Tunis, Aden and Tripoli. This region in effect is now judenrein. In the words of Bernard Lewis, the renowned British Middle East expert, we have become 'a shadow of history.'" The confiscation of documents that proclaim to testify to what the Egyptian Jewish community lost demonstrates the Egyptian government's efforts to hide from public view the fate of this "shadow of history."

Reported by Rachel Avraham

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