

The Greeks of Egypt

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A SECOND HOME: According to George Vallas, the head of the Greek Community in Cairo, the Greeks started settling in Egypt almost three centuries ago. At one point, they numbered 250,000, established in the cities and in the provinces. Today, the colony is down to approximately 2,000, but recently, several Greek businessmen, convinced that the privatisation programme is improving market potential, are planning a comeback.

Actively encouraged by Mohamed Ali, who relied on several members of the community to bring his dreams of industrialisation to fruition, larger and larger numbers of Greeks began to establish themselves in Egypt during the 19th century. Their implantation was so successful, indeed, that they soon became an integral part of the economic, social and political life of the country, leading Lord Cromer to remark that «the Greeks are so numerous that they deserve consideration by themselves» and also, more flippantly perhaps: «Wherever you turn over a stone in Egypt, you find a Greek.»

Mohamed Ali, however, was far from being the first ruler to seek Greek expertise: «In 1791, fearing an Ottoman invasion, Murad Bey organised a small war flotilla on the Nile, entrusting its command to a Greek convert, Nicolas Papas Oglou, known

as Hajj Niqola or Nicolas Ra'is. The crew was made up of Greeks, who were completely devoted to their leader: they did not hesitate to revolt against Murad himself when he attempted to discipline them after a scuffle with the Cairene population. Murad was forced to backpedal carefully, incurring the contempt of El-Gabarti, who accused him of favouring the Christians to the detriment of the Muslims, writes Henry Laurens in L'Expedition d'Egypte. ([περισσότερα...](#))