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Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat. by Raymond William Baker

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Book Reviews

MURRAY CLARK HAVENS, EDITOR

Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat. By RAYMOND WILLIAM BAKER. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978. Pp. xii, 290. \$16.00.)

The publisher's blurb says that this is "the only authoritative history of Egypt's [modern] revolutionary experience"; a quote on the jacket suggests that it ". . . is far superior to anything previously written." The fact that the text of the book is less than 250 pages would suggest some sketchiness in spots; indeed, it looks like the typical dissertation pared down to fit into a modest publishing subvention for the Press. The many complexities of the past 30 years in Egypt cannot be sorted out when only hinted at in what comes to a cursory sketch of people, politics, and power. The book does not live up to its advertising.

Now for the good news. Baker is an extremely knowledgeable student of modern Egyptian affairs. He has put together within the confines of this brief volume a number of provocative perceptions, suggestions, and hints of what one might find in the dark corners of Egyptian politics. In some cases he has done more than hint, carrying us on what seems like a felucca trip up the Nile of politics, pointing out some promising silt, or some forgotten species or aquarian difficulty. There is no major point in the book that I would challenge. Although Baker has not yet written the definitive book, I would guess that he could, given encouragement by a sympathetic publisher. And even the volume he has written is a good and valuable work, one that I want to keep around for a long time.

The Middle East used to be so "simple"; today it is so complex. There is no doubt that Nasser was the catalyst of many of those

changes that led to this complexity. Much of the "revolution" in the Middle East (not just the Arab world) would have occurred eventually, although the time and spatial dimensions would certainly have been different, had there been no Nasser. But in fact there was that character from Pirandello, striding Mediterranean, African, Asian, and even world stages; in a way, although it is easy to press the idea too far, the events of January 1979 in Iran can be traced back over another generation to the events of July 1952 in Egypt.

But the revolution in Egypt is not quite identical to the "revolution" in the Middle East. After all, it is "uncertain," as Baker states. And it has been colored and affected by that other catalyst, Israel, and since 1967 by Israeli retention of the Sinai. Nasser's successor, Sadat, is a consummate political gambler; his place in Egyptian history is well assured. But he is not a revolutionary, at least in the normal sense of the term. Much of the Middle East sits on a powder keg of religious enthusiasm and dissension; Egypt is not an exception. The revolutionary energies so long dormant in Egypt may yet explode in violence and bloodshed.

All this is intended as a positive review of Baker's book. I hope that it has a wide sale; the price puts it within the reach of most *full* professors; others will have to await the paperback. I congratulate Baker on the fine contribution that he has made to the study of modern Egyptian politics.

CARL LEIDEN, *University of Texas at Austin*

In a Moment of Enthusiasm: Political Power and the Second Stratum in Egypt. By LEONARD BINDER. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978. Pp. xxii, 437. \$22.50.)

Leonard Binder has provided us what I believe to be the first detailed analysis of a contemporary phenomenon common to many LDCs: the political and economic assertion of a rural middle class. It is certainly a commonplace of much of the literature on Egypt that this class, perhaps by default, is at once the underpinning of the regime installed in 1952 and the primary beneficiary of State policy since then. Binder seeks to test this conclusion empirically in an elaborate, painstaking exercise in marshalling circumstantial evidence and in plausible inference.