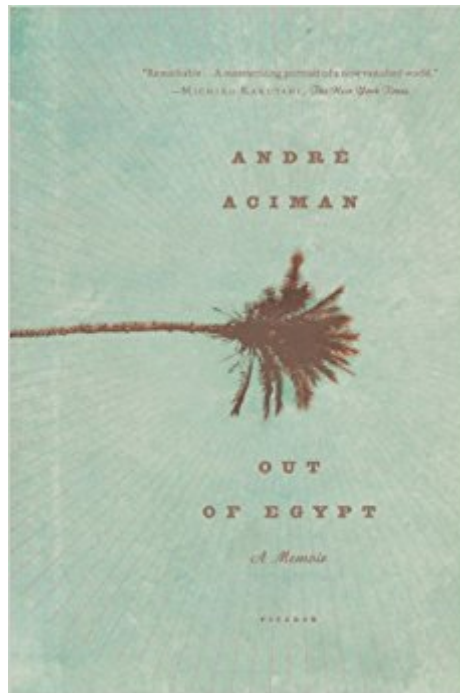




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Out Of Egypt: A Memoir



Synopsis

This richly colored memoir chronicles the exploits of a flamboyant Jewish family, from its bold arrival in cosmopolitan Alexandria to its defeated exodus three generations later. In elegant and witty prose, André Aciman introduces us to the marvelous eccentrics who shaped his life--Uncle Vili, the strutting daredevil, soldier, salesman, and spy; the two grandmothers, the Princess and the Saint, who gossip in six languages; Aunt Flora, the German refugee who warns that Jews lose everything "at least twice in their lives." And through it all, we come to know a boy who, even as he longs for a wider world, does not want to be led, forever, out of Egypt.

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Customer Reviews

When Aciman, born and raised in Alexandria, Egypt, was asked his nationality as a boy, he automatically replied, "French." His confusion was understandable; his family were Sephardic Jews who had wandered from Italy to Turkey, then settled in Egypt. His father owned a woolen mill and his parents were very rich, as were the rest of the exotic clan who lived with them or gathered regularly for elegant, memorable teas, fetes and fierce but transient squabbling. Like Russian nobility of old, they disdained the common language. Few of them learned Arabic but preferred French, English, Ladino or Italian. They concealed their Jewishness when Nasser was in power, a time of high Arab nationalism, intense anti-Semitism and then war. Eventually they fled to Paris, leaving behind much of their wealth but little of their culture, which Aciman--his mother's darling, his teachers' despair, his father's worry, a child spy in a house of eccentric, cultivated adults--here recalls with a magical sensibility streaked with antic humor. A marvelous memento of a place, time

and people that have all disappeared. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Aciman presents a rich and captivating portrait of a Jewish family from cosmopolitan Alexandria, Egypt. From their arrival there at the turn of the century until their departure three generations later, the members of Aciman's clan experienced adventures and harrowing disappointments. Their stories are in many ways similar to those of other Jewish families in vanishing communities throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Most impressive among the siblings is Uncle Villy, who led a colorful life as a British spy, Italian fascist, and soldier. Aunt Flora, a refugee from Germany, maintains a rather pessimistic philosophy about life. With this memoir, the author in part redeems the social life, customs, and history of a community that barely exists today amid an inhospitable milieu, due to political turmoil in close and remote lands. This is not simply another nostalgic account but a well-written and touching depiction of life in a community that has almost ceased to be. Highly recommended for most collections. Ali Houissa, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a true story about one, rather large, Jewish family living in Egypt thru WWII, thru the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, and up until Nasser's defeat in the Sinai Campaign of about 1957. The book details the various characters in the family, their social lives, and how they blended with the general, Arab population of Egypt for decades. The book is a very good history, from the particular perspective of this, perhaps typical, Jewish family. It details how their lives changed because of the Israel-Egypt wars of the 40s and 50s. It gives a very clear and vivid picture of what it was to live under such, at times, very stressful conditions while not actually being involved in the wars. I would recommend the book to others who may have wondered about the lives and times of Jews living in Arab countries at war with Israel, both before and after it became a legitimate State of Israel. The book is somewhat similar to- *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*, which also covers about the same time frame in Egypt of a different, Jewish family in Cairo, who then emigrated to America when they too could no longer live, safely in Egypt in the 40s and 50s.

A wise Englishman (A.J.A. Symons) wrote that "Nothing is more destructive of contentment than nostalgia of the past." Not so in this book. Mr. Aciman re-creates his childhood in the glory days of the cosmopolitan culture of the international community that inhabited Alexandria, Egypt before Gen. Gamal Abdel Nasser led a coup that overthrew and ousted King Farouk and kicked all the

Greeks, Armenians, Jews, English, French, Italians and Germans out of the country. With immense charm, cleverness and subtlety Aciman reveals the mature import of what he only observed as a child, by fast-forwarding to his decades-later comprehension as an adult. The book has particular relevance today in view of the broad-scale civil strife and killing going on in Egypt now, prompting one to wonder just what Nasser accomplished in getting rid of the foreigners from his country who had contributed so richly to its culture for centuries.

There has been a spate of diaspora memoirs in recent decades, in addition to the ever-expanding circle of Holocaust literature, but in my opinion this book stands alone. The writing is so lyrical, the tone both plaintive and celebratory, that the book is hard to put down. I could not recommend it more highly.

Aciman's book reads like a dream. Every word exudes love and with it a sad sense of loss and nostalgia. Unlike any other such biography I have read, it does not have "Poor Us" as a main theme, rather a description of how the actions of the few on both sides, had shattered a beautiful world, which existed, with no regards to the difference between the individuals involved. It is a classic account of loss of a home due to changes taking place around us, which are bigger than us and outside of our control, regardless of what we try to do; just a new tide that can't be stopped. The book is such a tender account, which touched me deeply and which I recommend to anyone who wants to learn about this aspect of Egyptian history and this phase of Alexandria's story.

Interesting story and era. I had trouble keeping characters straight and also when things were happening.

Have always enjoyed learning about different cultures. Interest comes from growing up in a neighborhood which, while small, had families from many different cultures living in a rather small geographical area. That many not only served very different food than we ate in my childhood home, they also spoke differently, attended churches different from the one I grew up attending and still do attend, I however learned much from all of those to whom I was exposed. What a shame our that many of our children, (including my own and their own), no longer have the benefit of this kind of education.

Andre Aciman's *Out of Egypt* is an amazing book, I found it very hard to put down. At a time of

increased hostility in the middle east it is heartwarming to read of a time when Jews lived in peace with their Muslim and Christian neighbors in Alexandria. Not a whiff of anti Jewish sentiments was reported by Aciman until after the Suez War. Aciman and his family left Egypt in the sixties. Aciman, like many "Egyptian" Jews preferred to hold European nationalities and in some cases some were French or Italian without ever setting foot in these countries. Europeans had their own courts in Egypt and did not fall under Egyptian Laws. For Aciman, born and raised in Egypt and in many ways no different than many affluent Alexandrians life became unbearable after the waves of Nationalization in the early 60's. Aciman writes of an Alexandria that no longer exists not just for Egyptian Jews. The population explosion in Egypt has transformed Alexandria beyond recognition; hence Aciman's beautiful writing of Alexandria, its beaches and its tram will bring floods of memories for anyone who's known Alexandria. Affluent Egyptian Jews who left Egypt in the fifties and sixties are not immediately thought of as refugees and there is little discussion on their issues of identity and affiliation in Egypt and elsewhere. Aciman through his acute sensitivity to the people and events around him and his wonderful story telling skills has produced beautifully written and very touching book that subtly challenges many assumptions on all sides. Readers will see the very same Alexandria in Leila Ahmed's Border Passage and in parts of Ahdaf Soueif's In the Eye of the Sun. Enjoy

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