PREFACE

On September 29, 1970, President Gamal Abdel Nasser died of a heart attack. World leaders were stunned, while men, women, and children from Morocco to Iraq careened through the streets, weeping and tearing off their clothes. In Egypt, all theaters, athletic events, and places of amusement were closed for a forty-day period of mourning. Radio and television carried funeral chants and readings from the Koran. From throughout the countryside thousands of Egyptians streamed into Cairo. They came by all methods of conveyance—trains, buses, cars, donkeys, or on foot. The almost hysterical outpouring of grief at the state funeral dramatized the depth to which the loss of this charismatic leader has shaken the Arab world. Few men have achieved the love, prestige, and adulation that Nasser experienced from the Arab masses. Yet, in reality, Nasser's life was a tragic story.

Forced to choose between domestic needs and international challenges, Nasser's attention too often drifted beyond the borders of Egypt. His visions of renewed Arab greatness, his dreams of Arab unity, and his concerns for Arab justice and development often distorted his perception of his own country—Egypt. And while nobody who had personally conversed with Nasser doubted his sincerity in wishing a better life for the peasants of the Nile Valley, many have noted the tendency of Nasser to allocate resources more on the basis of dreams and less on the realities of Egypt's own domestic problems. This book seeks a careful analysis of Nasser's belated attempts to modernize the rural areas of Egypt. Granted permission to move freely through Egypt's twenty-five provinces prior to the post-1967 travel restrictions, I gained the unique opportunity of personally observing Nasser's dramatic attempts to

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bring progress and development to his people. This study attempts to portray graphically the political, economic, and social factors that made Nasser's dream for his people unattainable in his lifetime. The bitter reality of Egypt's slow progress toward modernity and prosperity is not due to Nasser's lack of leadership or determination, but rather to the frustrating awareness that the gap between the industrialized nations and the newly emerging states is widening—not diminishing—and that no leader, whether enlightened and dedicated or ruthless and demanding, can quickly eradicate the centuries-old social and cultural imperatives that block progress, hinder development, and destroy the hopes of those who would seek a better life for their people.

Most of the research for this study was concluded prior to the death of President Nasser and thus focuses on Nasser's rural reforms as an ongoing set of policies. Although Nasser's untimely death now makes this study history, it must be recognized that Nasser's impact on Egypt has been profound, that his ideals and aspirations will live long beyond his death, and that events in Egypt far in the future will be colored and shaped by the two decades of Nasser's rule.

Few will deny that Nasser was one of the truly great Arab leaders of this century. I have accepted the challenge to analyze Nasser's policies in rural Egypt both as a friend and as a scholar. As a friend, I have been deeply moved by Nasser's great hope to establish dignity and prosperity for the Egyptian people. I left Egypt gladdened by the friendship, the hospitality, and the warmth extended to me by Egyptians in all walks of life and in all parts of the Nile Valley. As a scholar, I must critically evaluate what I have observed—not for the purpose of belittling or destroying, but for the purpose of clarifying and delineating both the achievements and the mistakes of Nasser's programs. Thus, hopefully, the achievements will be recognized and the mistakes will be rectified.

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