

# COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

*Volume 22, Number 3 . . . . . Fall 2001*

- *Christian Designs on Marble Stone*
  - *Holy Family in Egypt*
  - *Portrait of a Historian*



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# ***CHRISTIAN DESIGNS CARVED ON A SMALL MARBLE STONE***

*James J. Hester  
Boulos Ayad Ayad  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Colorado*

## ***Introduction***

Dr. James Hester, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, suggested joint deciphering of designs on a marble stone that currently belongs to Mr. Marvin Wolf an attorney who inherited it. According to Mr. Wolf, the origin of the stone is unknown. The stone's measurement is 2.25 inches long, 1.75 inches wide, and 0.5 inches thick. The designs on the stone offers 16 pictures depicting (portraying) the life of Jesus Christ with the spread of Christianity. Starting with his birth, the appearance of the star to the wise men, their gifts to Jesus, the disciples of Jesus, his miracles, his crucifixion and his five wounds, the persecution of the Christians, the saints, triumph of Christianity, the seven sacraments, and the establishment of the church.

## ***Design No. 1:***

A star shining with rays represents the star seen by the wise men from the East. The New Testament states the following in explanation of the star: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him'..."(Mathew = (Mt) 2:1-2). "And lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was." (Mt 2:9).

## ***Design No. 2:***

This block includes the symbols for the gold, frankincense and myrrh, the gifts offered to Jesus by the wise men. The book of Matthew writes about these gifts the following: The wise men from the East "when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceeding with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him, then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." (Mt 2:10-11).

***Design No. 3:***

Each of the six large circles contains smaller circle with the 12 circles representing the 12 disciples of Christ. The artist did so to avoid drawing 12 separate circles due to the limited space. Concerning the 12 disciples, the New Testament cites: "And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity." (Mt 10:1).

***Design No. 4:***

This design resembles the disk of the sun with six attachments that look like wings. The New Testament recounts many miracles of healing performed by Jesus; thus the prophet Malachi mentions, "But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings." (Mt 4:2).

***Design No. 5:***

With the shape of a cross, this design refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. The Bible says about this: "Pilate said to them, then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? They all said, let him be crucified." (Mt, 27:22)... "And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him." (Mt 27:31)... "And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots." (Mt 27:35).

***Design No. 6:***

The five circles in this design are linked together by four lines in an X arrangement. The number five refers to the five wounds suffered by Jesus immediately before and during his crucifixion. According to the New Testament are: "stripped him, a crown of thorns they put on his head, they took the reed and struck him on the head, led him away to crucify him, pierced his side with a spear." "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And *they stripped him and* put a scarlet robe upon him, and *plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head*, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And *they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head*. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, *and led him away to crucify him*." (Mt 27:27-31)... "They offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall." (Mt 27:34)... "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers *pierced his side with a spear*, and at once there came out blood and water." (John 19:33-34).

***Design No. 7:***

An interpretation of this design might be linked to the book of Acts which records the persecution of the disciples and many early Christians. Thus, the believers went to different places. Because of such a situation, the artist drew each part of the cross not attached to each other but separated or scattered. The New Testament says concerning this: "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch." (Acts 11:19).

***Design No. 8:***

Here one sees a cross inside two circles, and a short lines link the two circles. Probably the two circles with short lines represent the shining earth or a halo around the cross. All the drawing in its entirety symbolizes the spread of Christianity through out the world. This would follow the instructions of Jesus: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16).

***Design No. 9:***

Contains 12 S's, on their sides. The letter S probably is the initial for saint in Latin, Italian, French, Spanish and English. S's are equal to the same number of the disciples of Jesus

***Design No. 10:***

Above the twelve letters of S's, there are 12 vertical lines, each one is a symbol representing the 12 disciples of Jesus.

***Design No. 11:***

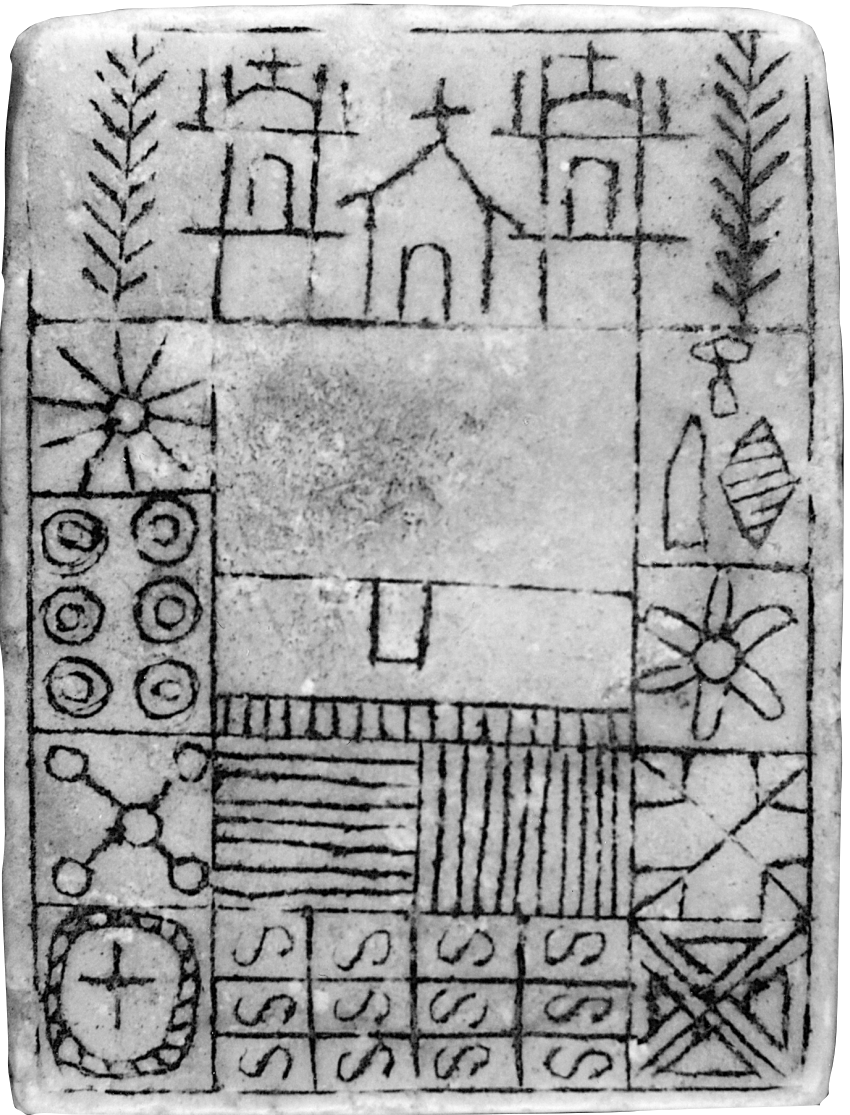
Close to the 12 vertical lines, there are seven horizontal lines representing the seven sacraments of the traditional churches. These sacraments are: "Baptism, Chrismation (Confirmation), Holy Eucharist, Penance, Holy Orders, Marriage and Unction of the sick." (See Mural Kamil, *Coptic Egypt*, printed by Le Scribe Egyptien, Cairo, 1968, p. 29).

***Design No. 12:***

Above these lines, there are two horizontal lines, and between them there are 19 vertical lines, 12 refer to the disciples of Jesus, and the other seven lines are symbols for the seven sacraments.

***Design No. 13:***

Above the 19 lines is a small court, at its end and in its middle, an oblong shape which is resembling an entrance to another large court.



***Design No. 14:***

At the end of the large court, there is a church with its entrance. The roof of the church is not flat but has a sloping two sides, taking the shape of the Basilican churches. Above the roof is a simple cross. On the two sides of the church exist two minarets (bell towers) are higher than the level of the church with semi-dome and a cross atop each dome.

***Design 15:***

The large court usually is found in front of the traditional churches. After the services, people gather together in it.

***Design No. 16:***

On either side of the church and the two minarets branches of plant or the symbols of two trees represents a garden. Usually there were gardens on the two sides and behind the traditional churches, especially in the churches were built in the countryside.

***Conclusion:***

The importance of such designs is that they tell us about the motivation in religious art or religious private art which has spread among the Christians. The one who drew such designs believed in Christianity or at least was familiar with the Christian faith as well as the traditional churches, Catholic or Orthodox. Probably the artist was not a native of the Middle East because he did not use the Hebrew, Greek, or Arabic initials for saints, but instead he employed the Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, or English initial letter S for each disciple of Jesus. According to this, the designs of the stone, possibly were related to the period which was just before, during or after the European Renaissance.

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# **ANCIENT AND MODERN LEGENDS CONCERNING THE HOLY FAMILY IN EGYPT**

*Youhanna Nessim Youssef*

## **INTRODUCTION**

On the occasion of the Second millennium, the Flight into Egypt has been studied recently by several scholars.<sup>2</sup> In this article, we will discuss two legends related to the Holy Family in Egypt, the first one is modern and the second is ancient.

### **1- SAKHA**

Sakha is a well known city in Lower Egypt from Christian times.<sup>3</sup> In this article we will try to retrace a Christian legend about this city starting from the most recent publications to the ancient ones.

- Bishop Samuel,<sup>4</sup> speaking about Sakha mentioned that footprints of Jesus appeared upon a stone in the church of Sakha.

- The Egyptian ministry of Tourism, commemorating the new millennium, have published a book with many photos about the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt which contains a photograph of the marble stone with the

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1 This paper is a part of the project on Severus of Antioch, under the supervision of Professor Pauline Allen, director of the Centre for Early Christian Studies, The Australian Catholic University. I am indebted to Professor Allen for her kind support. Mrs K. Hay was kind enough to correct my English text and suggested several ameliorations.

2 Such as Gawdat Gabra, "über die Flucht der heiligen Familie nach koptischen Traditionen" *BSAC* 38, 1999, p 29-50, Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "Notes on the Traditions concerning the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt" *CCR* 20, 1999, p48-55. Wadi Abûl Lif, "Les homélies concernant la Fuite en Egypte entre le texte imprimé et les manuscrits" *Le Monde Copte*, (In press).

3 S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, [Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas der Vorderen Orients Reihe B - Geisteswissenschaften 41] (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert 1984) Vol 5, pp. 2231-2237. E. Amélineau, *La géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque Copte*, (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller 1973) p. 410. H. Gauthier, *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes Hiéroglyphiques*, (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller 1975), Vol 4, pp. 154- 155.



foot print: This book indicates that the footprint on the stone of Sakha belongs to Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

- Murad Kamil identifies the origin of this stone containing the foot print as Sakha. "Bikhâ Isûs might be the town of Sakha"<sup>6</sup>

- Otto Meinardus followed the identification of Murad Kamil.<sup>7</sup> Recently, however he has rejected this identification: "I have been unable to locate this place, which is mentioned by the Ethiopic and Coptic Synaxaria. It has been suggested that Basus may be the contraction of the name Bikha Isous, but it is not most unlikely that Bikhâ Isûs should be identified with the village Basus, which lies between Cairo and Qalyub."<sup>8</sup> In the same book speaking about Sakha: "It has been suggested that "Bikha Isous", which was visited by the Holy Family on their Flight to Egypt, might be Sakha."<sup>9</sup>

- The same story is narrated in the Synaxarion of the 24 Bashons<sup>10</sup> without mentioning the name of the city "Minyat Tana".

- The History of the Patriarchs mentioned Minyat Tana without mentioning this legend.<sup>11</sup>

- Crum in his Coptic dictionary referred, under ;a, to the Synaxarium Alexandrinum, "Jesus when in Egypt set His heel on a rock & place name was pi;a IHS "The Heel of Jesus"<sup>12</sup> But Crum did not identify this site as Sakha. Timm also was unable to identify this site.<sup>13</sup>

4 Bishop Samuel, Badie Habib, *Ancient Coptic Churches & Monasteries in Delta, Sinai, and Cairo*, Cairo 1996, p. 103-104.

5 Text prepared and revised by a Cathedral Committee headed by H.H. Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark (1999), and introduced by Dr. Mamdouh El-Beltagui, Minister of Tourism, *The Holy Family in Egypt*, Cairo 1999, p. 22-23.

6 Murad Kamil, *Coptic Egypt*, Cairo 1968, p.12.

7 O. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern*, \_ed., Cairo 1977, p. 621-622. Id. *The Holy Family in Egypt*, \_ed., Cairo 1986, p. 34.

8 O. Meinardus, *Two Thousands Years of Coptic Christianity*, Cairo 1999, p.20.

9 Ibid., p. 174.

10 I. Forget, *Synaxarium Alexandrinum II*, CSCO 67, Louvain 1912, p136.

11 A.S. Atiya, Y. abd al-Masih and O.H.E. Burmester, *The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church Known as the History of the Holy Church*, Vol II, part 3, Le Caire 1959, Fol 79r, p.227 (text), p361 (translation)

12 W.E. Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, Oxford 1939, p. 629b-630a.

13 Timm, op.cit., Vol I, p. 390-391.

14 Samuel al Suriani, *Tarih al-Kana'is wal-'addyra*, Cairo 1984. 4 Volumes. (Hereafter Makarim). For specific studies cf. Samuel al-Suiani, "Icônes et iconographie d'après le manuscrit d'Abu el-Makarim, publié en arabe au Caire 1984" *Le Monde Copte* 18, 1990, p. 78. (For codicology and Composition) U. Zanetti, "Abu L-Makarim et Abu Salih" *BSAC* 34, 1995, p. 85-133. (For the Authorship and Influence) J.Den Heijer, "The Composition of the History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt -Some preliminary remarks " *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies Washington 12-15 August 1992*, ed D.Johnson, Vol 2 Part 1, Roma 1993, p. 209-219. (Loan Coptic words) Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "A propos d'un terme ambigü chez Aboul-Makarim" *Göttinger Miszellen* 145, 1995, p 101-103. (Social study of the Delta) M. Martin, "Le Delta chrétien à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> s" *OCP* 63, 1997, p. 181-199. Id., "Alexandrie chrétienne à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après ABÜ l-Makârim" *Alexandrie médiévale* éd. Décobert, Empereurs, Etudes Alexandrines 3, IFAO, Le Caire, 1998, p. 45-49, "Chrétiens et musulmans à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle" *Valeur et distance*, 2000, p. 83-

The edition of the Book attributed to Abû al-Makarim,<sup>14</sup> helps to fill the gaps in our knowledge about Christianity in Egypt in the XII century.

Bishop Samuel states that his reference is taken from Abû al-Makarim, but in fact, Abû al-Makarim mentions this story while speaking about Minyat-Tâna<sup>15</sup> and not Sakha.<sup>16</sup>

Fol. 34-34b

“Sakhâ and the meaning of its name is rain

there is a Church dedicated to the Pure Lady. In (that church) there is a cave where Severus, the Patriarch of Antioch, took shelter when he was banished. He died in it and his pure body was carried to the monastery of Zugag (of Glasses) in Alexandria. In the cave of the church of Sakhâ there is the altar on which he used to pray the liturgy.”

Bishop Samuel observed

“Nothing of the ancient churches remains except that stone marked by Jesus’ foot,<sup>17</sup> and a magnificent capital discovered on digging the foundations for a house beyond the church.”

Makarim attributed this story to the Church of Minyat Tâna

Fol. 44b-45b

“In Minyat Tanah of al-Gharbia there was a church named after the pure Lady...That spot was the farthest site at which Our Lord Christ arrived in Egypt with His Mother, the pure Virgin, accompanied by the righteous elder Joseph, the carpenter. It is said that there was a socle, but the fathers hid it when the Arabs came and invaded the country. Upon that socle was the foot print of the Lord, when the Virgin caused Him to stand on it, that His tiptoes dipped a little and their prints appeared upon the stone. The people came from the far regions and the near country and put oil on that print and took it to their land to be granted its blessings. But the fathers feared that Muslims might come and take the socle; and perhaps they could trespass upon the *dair*; therefore they hid it and nobody has known its place till today.

That *dair* is called Bikha Isûs, that is to say Jesus’ heel, till now.

The Legend of Bikha Isûs appeared for the first time in the homily of Zacharia bishop of Sakha<sup>18</sup> (Seventh or Eighth centuries) which does not

92. Youhanna Nessim Youssef, “Multiconfessional churches in Egypt during the XII Century” *Bulletin of Saint Shenouda the Archmandrite Coptic Society*, 5, 1998-1999, pp. 45-54.

15 S. Timm, op. cit, Vol 4, p. 1667-1668. Amélineau, op.cit., p. 259-260.

16 Cf. *Makarim*, fol.45 a, b. Youhanna Nessim Youssef, “Notes on the traditions concerning the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt” *Coptic Church Review* 20/2, 1999, p. 48-55.

17 In his study about the French in Egypt, Nabih Kamel Dawood mentioned that in 1842 the Wali of Egypt after serious investigations permitted the Copts to rebuild the Church of Sakha which was destroyed by the French troops in 1798-1801AD. For the Arabic text of the decree cf. Nabih Kamel Dawood, “Al-Ḥamlat al-Firincyah ‘ala Mîsir (1798-1807) fî Ḍû’ Kitâbat al-Aqbât al-Mu’asirîn lahâ” (The French campaign in Egypt (1798-1801 AD) according to the Coptic contemporary writings) *Coptological Week* 7, Cairo 1997, p129-147

contain any allusion to Miniât Tânah.

It is important to mention also that in Sakha, Severus, the great Patriarch of Antioch died in 538 AD.<sup>19</sup> According to the Homily on Severus of Antioch by George Bishop of the Arabs, we find:

“They carried his blessed body according to their wish, and they had him enter and set him in the midst of the bathhouse so that he might be warmed. They stretched him out, who by his toils was all dried up, and they extended him and put him upon a slab in the bathhouse. Although the pious man was not healed at all by it, he left on the stone a great power from his limbs. A fount of life issued forth from him (and) flowed *onto the marble*, so that everyone who comes will receive from it all remedies.”<sup>20</sup>

The biography of Severus of Antioch by John of Beith Aphthonia which was essentially written in Greek and later translated to Syriac and Coptic,<sup>21</sup> narrates:

“Après l’avoir fait entrer dans le bain avec son vêtement, ils l’étendirent à terre sur une dalle de MARBRE... lorsqu’ils l’eurent enlevé de cette pierre, il y laissa une vertu ineffaçable: jusqu’aujourd’hui, quiconque est atteint d’un refroidissement, de la fièvre, ou de toute autre maladie corporelle, est délivré de la maladie qu’il accable, rien qu’en touchant cette pierre.”<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

It is now easy to trace the development of the legend of the printed heel on the marble.

\* In the Sixth century, in the biographies of Severus of Antioch, we find that before dying in Sakha, he left his toesprints on a marble stone.

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and especially p146-147.

18 Gawdat Gabra, “Über die Flucht der Heiligen Familie nach Koptischen Traditionen” *BSAC* 38, 1999, p. 29-50. See also Wadi abul Lif, “Les homélies concernant la Fuite en Egypte entre le texte imprimé et les manuscrits” *Le Monde Copte* (in press).

19 Attested several times in the *History of the Patriarchs* cf. B.Evetts, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria, Patrologia Orientalis* I/4, Paris 1947, p. 457-458 [193-194], Seybold, *Severus Ben El-Moqaffa’ Historia Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum* I, I, *CSCO* 52 *Arabici* 8, Peeters Louvain 1962, p 90-91. Evetts, *HPCC, PO X/5*, p. 434 [548], Seybold, *op.cit.*, p 251.

20 K. McVey, *George, bishop of the Arabs, A Homily on Blessed Mar Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, CSCO* 530, lines 845-

21 Only two fragments survived from this life cf. W.E. Crum & H. G. Evelyn White, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art -Egyptian*

\* In the Seventh/Eighth centuries, Zacharia Bishop of Sakha, wrote a homily about the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. (He did not mention the city as Sakha but the village called Bikha Isûs = the heel of Jesus).

\* The city of Sakha is also known for the cult of Agathon the Stylite.<sup>23</sup>

\* By the End of the twelfth century, Abû al-Makarim identified the village of Bikha Isûs as Miniât Tânah; while Sakha is always related to Severus of Antioch. The footprints of Jesus on the stone was hidden long time ago.

\* By the end of the Eighteenth century and beginning of the Nineteen, the church of Sakha was destroyed and rebuilt forty years later.

\* By the mid Twentieth century, a Coptic Scholar (Dr Murad Kamil), identified Bikha Isûs as Sakha. He was followed by several authors regardless of their religion or nationality, as we have a Bishop (H.G Bishop Samuel), a German Scholar (Otto Meinardus) and even a Muslim such as the Egyptian Minister of Tourism (Dr. Mamdouh al-Beltagui)!!!

\* In 1987, while doing restorations in the Church of Sakha, the stone containing the footprint was discovered again. It was identified as the footprint of Jesus.

## 2-MEMPHIS

In a previous study L. Kakosy has identified the three *Thetas* as sun disk.<sup>24</sup> One of our sources *the Piacenza Pilgrim* informs us that in his *Travels from Piacenza*, that it can be dated between the years 560-570AD, where Memphis is mentioned: "At Memphis was the temple, (now a church) which had a door that was shut in the Lords's face when he visited it with the Blessed Mary, and until this day it cannot be opened."<sup>25</sup>

This closed door may be identified as a false door of a tomb.<sup>26</sup> The Church seen by this pilgrim is one of the churches of the Monastery of Saint Jeremiah in Saqqara before the destruction. Quibell had noticed "two of the three other churches were built, in part, with material derived from earlier

*Expedition*), Part II, New York 1926 (Reprint 1973), N° 81 p. 25 (text), p. 172 (translation). W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of John Rylands Library Manchester*, Manchester 1909, N°99, p.51.

22 M.-A. Kugener, *Vie de Sévère par Jean, Supérieur du monastère de Beith-Aphthonia*, PO II, Paris 1907, p. 259-260.

23 G. Viaud, *Les Pèlerinages Coptes en Egypte*, BEC 15 , Le Caire 1979, p28-29.

24 L. Kakosy, "A Christian interpretation of the Sun-Disk," *Studies in Egyptian Religion dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee*, Brill- Leiden 1982, p72-75.

25 J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims -before the Crusades*, Warminster, England 1977, p. 88.

26 Mahmoud El-Khadragy, "Two Old Kingdom False Doors from Saqqara " *Göttinger*

ones, then doorways and passages were blocked, walls were doubled in thickness.”<sup>27</sup> It is well known that the Copts re-used material from ancient sites especially in Saqqara,<sup>28</sup> and there are many influences of Ancient Egyptian Art that can be detected in Coptic Art.<sup>29</sup>

This “Christian” interpretation of a Pharaonic monument is not unique.

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*Miszellen* 174, 2000, p. 37-48.

27 J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqarra (1908-9, 1909-10)*, Le Caire 1912, p. I

28 B. Porter and R. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic texts, Relief, and Painting*, Oxford 1931, Vol III, p. 178-179.

29 Cf. A. Badawy, *L'Art Copte - Les influences Egyptiennes*, Le Caire 1949, 16-19.

30 A. J. Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto, Subsidia Hagiographica 34*, Bruxelles 1961, Ch. XVIII:16. Id., *Les Moines d'Orient IV/1*, Paris 1964, p. 105.

## **COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW**

### ***Important Change in the Editorial Staff***

The readers will observe that starting this issue a new editor is added to the editorial staff of Coptic Church Review (see front page and backcover). Maged Mikhail is a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at the University of California Los Angeles. His fields of study are Late Antiquity, Medieval Middle East, Modern Middle East, and Coptic Language and Literature. His most recent publication appeared in *Byzantion* (2000). He is presently working on his Ph.D. dissertation, which focuses on the cultural and institutional changes that occurred in Egypt as a result of the Arab Conquest.

Mr. Mikhail is not new to readers of the Journal. His translation of the whole *Life* of St. John the Little from Bohairic Coptic appeared in 1997 in a special issue (CCR, vol. 18, number 1&2). This has been the first time the *Life* was ever translated to any living language. He also wrote the first article in the special issue on St. Cyril of Alexandria (vol. 19, # 1&2) that appeared in 1998. In addition, he has been of much editorial help to me during the last several years.

I will still remain as Editor in Chief. However all new articles and reviews are to be submitted to the new editor at his address or e-mail. Do not send them to the P. O. Box at Lebanon, PA, that will be closed in a few months.

Rodolph Yanney

## ***SAINTS OF MT. IZLA: EGYPTIAN FORMS OF MONASTICISM AND THEIR INFLUENCES ON SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY***

*Fr. Dale A. Johnson (Bar Yohanon)\**

Mt. Izla is not really a mountain at all. It is a 48 mile long ridge running west to east with a high hilly plateau on its northern flank and a low, flat Syrian plain on its south side. Today it is located along the Turkish/Syrian border. During Roman/Persian times it was like a spiny finger that poked its way into the Persian frontier. Two towns anchored each end of the ridge. On the West End was Dara, a Roman fortification, and on the East End was Serwan (Sisaranon) where the Castle of Turabdin was situated. For 1500 years this ridge was populated by monks. Tiny agricultural villages sat at the base of the ridge below many of the monasteries in reverential support.

What Mt. Athos is to the Byzantine world, Mt. Izla is to the Mesopotamian Christian world. Today all the monasteries but one sit in ruins on the holy ridge. Two monks and a nun fiercely hold onto the memories and traditions of the Syriac Orthodox world of monasticism. The monastery of Mor Melke occupies a low ridge below the high peaks of Mt. Izla on the northern side.

The ridge is referred to by Assurasirpal II, the Assyrian King, in 879 B.C. as Mt. Kashyari. Even then it was rich in resources bearing vineyards, cattle and sheep and furnaces which could produce bronze. Armies could provision themselves from the abundant supplies of food and materials found along the skirts of this mother of many military campaigns. Romans, Persians, Greeks, Turks, and Kurds occupied the mountain ridge of Izla. The history of the Castle of Turabdin illustrates this multicultural occupation of Mt. Izla.

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The Castle of Turabdin was probably built by King Constantius around the year 348-350 A.D. as part of a vast network of fortification for the protection of Amida. It was destroyed by the Persians in 613 A.D. and rebuilt by Abraham and Lazarus in 683 A.D. Four hundred masons refortified the site and it became a frequented refuge of the local inhabitants. In 750 A.D. the Greeks destroyed the castle once again. Even though it was burned and torn down, it was slowly rebuilt. In 971 A.D. it was rebuilt by the governor of Haytum and renamed the castle Qelo d-Haytum. The Seljuk raid of 1100 A.D. forced many residents and monks to flee to it for refuge. Eventually in the 15th century it was occupied by Kurdish tribes who exacted tribute from the local villages.

Mt Izla was also the encampment of armies of saints who spread out over the entire Middle East and most likely beyond in the first four hundred years after Christ. They were militantly evangelistic going into dangerous places and testing the power of God. Almost all of this activity either stops or converts to distorted and exotic forms of spiritual exhibitionism after the 5th century. What we see in this period, especially among these saints of northern Mesopotamia, is a form of spirituality we have not seen since. These men and women pioneered vast areas of pagan lands. First they would spend several years in prayer, usually in community and under the guidance of a teacher. Then they would venture out usually in pairs (Aho and Michael, Yoreth and Koriokos, etc.). Next they would perform miracles. People would be healed, the dead would be raised, demonic spirits would be cast out. This created a platform for them to be heard by their pagan audiences who were not especially convinced by the healing miracles. It is when the pagans had their lives personally touched, such as the healing of the only child of the Persian commander, that people converted and were baptized. Finally, the saints would then settle in the community and teach the people how to live before God.

### ***Disciples of St. Augin***

All history is propaganda. This does not mean that history is not true.

The telling of history involves filtering events through the structure of bias and presumptions. As long as one recognizes these structures woven into the very fabric of the story then history has much to contribute. In the West, we suffer from the illusion of objectivity and the idea that we can tell the story of a history free of subjective elements. This concept has led to great scientific achievements in all fields. But we must admit that the idea of objectivity is a myth. All history is an interpretation and no interpretation escapes the subjective concepts of the interpreter. When we encounter the hagiography of the St. Augin Cycle through the interpretive structure of people in the West we are told that the story of St. Augin is legendary.<sup>1</sup> To those world manuscripts of the language of Jesus.

1. S.P Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, XIV p. 97. "...Mar Augin, the legendary



of us in the Syriac East we cringe at this thought. We believe that St. Augin existed. Who is correct? The answer is both are correct starting from the presumptions of each side. In the West if you take the narrow definition of disciple, that is, people who lived and were taught by a master, as in the case of Jesus and his disciples, then the list of disciples under St. Augin looks quite legendary. This casts a poor light of St. Augin. But it is a light dimmed by western assumptions, which may not be true. If you assume a broader definition of disciple, that is, people who follow in the tradition of a saint, then the list of disciples of St. Augin appears quite authentic.

There are 72 male disciples of St. Augin listed and two female disciples who are his sisters. When we look closely at the list we notice that some of the disciples lived long after the death of St. Augin who died in 363 A.D. Some of the members of the list are Abbots of the monastery of St. Augin.<sup>2</sup> It is more like an alumni list. If one tries to fit all these disciples into the supposed time frame of the life of St. Augin it does not work. But under a broader view the list is a magnificent story of a powerful and stunning monastic tradition that arose in the regions of Mt. Izla and Turabdin. Another assumption in the western view is that the Syriac Christian world was so enamored of the Egyptian monastics that historical texts of an indigenous monasticism were wiped clean of any reference to indigenous monasticism. At one point Dr. Sebastian Brock of Oxford University suggests that no mention of St. Augin is found in the literature before the 9th century. This suggests that St. Augin was a mere invention of later Syriac monks who were prepared to forget their genuinely native heritage under the immense prestige that Egyptian monasticism gained.<sup>3</sup>

This latter point is a huge assumption and presumes a duplicitous and unethical act toward the monks of the Syriac east. It presumes that many Syriac writers colluded to hide the indigenous monastic history in order to invent a supposed superior Egyptian monasticism in the form of an imaginary St. Augin. But in fact upon close inspection of the list, many of the monks are not from Egypt. While St. Augin and a core group probably were from Egypt, there are many people on the list from many regions such as Persia, Reshaino (northern Syria.), and Palestine. If the Syriac monks were so enamored of Egyptians and redacted their own monastic history, why did they then not

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founder of Syrian monasticism. In a letter to me in the Spring of 2000 Brock corrects his earliest dating from the 9th to 7th century but still does not retract the legendary claim.

2. see J-M Fiey, *Nisibe metropole syrienne orientale et ses suffragants, des origines a nos jours*, History of Mt Izla Superiors of Mor Augin: Augin 327-363 AD, Andreas 363-444 AD, Yoanon of Hira 444-485 AD, Daniel 485-505 AD, Yohanon Araboyo 505-540 AD, Estephanon the Persian 540-590 AD, Isho the Palestinian 590-592 AD, Abraham the Egyptian 592 - 612 AD Abraham of Jerusalem 612-643 AD, Sallara 643-664 AD
3. S.P. Brock, *ibid.*, p. 3, *Early Syrian Monasticism*.
4. Compare the story of Abraham of Qidun who was a contemporary of St. Augin and St. Ephrem. Abraham was under the authority of his bishop and was instructed to go to Qidun



convert all the disciples on the list to Egyptian origin?

St. Augin existed and was a real saint if we take the broader definitions of the East. If we try to impose narrower definitions, such as those in the West, then the history falters. I believe St. Augin lived and founded a great monastic tradition. It was blended with indigenous forms of monasticism which was highly individualistic and autosyncratic.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Forms of Egyptian Monasticism***

The influence of Egyptian monasticism on upper Mesopotamian monasticism in the 4th century consisted of more than one religious form. There were at least two, if not three monastics systems. One form was urban mainly created by Athanasius in collaboration with priests of Alexandria. The other was expressed in the desert forms forged by Anthony and Pachomius. Gregory of Nazianzus in a eulogy at the funeral of Athanasius mentions at least two of these forms. He said that Athanasius reconciled those who had completely renounced the world and lived alone in solitude and those who obeyed the law of charity and lived in community (*koinonia*), combining the solitary life with the world. Athanasius reconciled the eremitic life and the community life. (Gr. Nz. Or. 21.19). This same Gregory even mentions those monks aligned with Athanasius who went into exile to 'places of meditation.' It may be a reference, among other places, to Upper Mesopotamia, namely, Mt. Izla.

### ***Urban Monasticism***

Theodore of Alexandria describes his experience with urban monasticism under Athanasius. He first entered the church as a lector. Athanasius made him a lector and he lived in the church shut off from all contact with women except his mother and sister for 12 years. Later he joined a Pachomian community in the desert. There he had a conversation with Pachomius sometime before 346 AD. Theodore is critical of what Pachomius calls Alexandrian anchorites. We learn that these anchorites were attached to the church and clergy. They were a source of financial support for his diocese. Many of the women were wealthy Greeks. This enraged Julian the Emperor, probably because it cut off sources of income for his government.

### ***Suburb Monasticism***

This is the type of monasticism spawned by Pachomius (d. 346 A.D.) who organized a system of monasteries that existed on the outskirts of villages and cities. They were semi-desert monasteries taking the economic benefit of living close to towns and yet remote enough to maintain an eremitic sense of aloneness with God. The monasteries became quite successful as economic enterprises making baskets, shoes, candles, and marketing agricultural crops to the local villages. They sometimes would participate in the ecclesiastical life of a nearby villages assisting the clergy or Bishop. The

monasteries were autonomous of the religious leadership which sometimes produced mild tension. It is reported that Bishop Athanasius wanted to ordain Pachomius to bring him under ecclesiastical control. Pachomius recognized the motive and avoided meeting with the urban leader. It was not until the Council of 451 that monks were brought under control of the ecclesiastical structure.

### ***Desert Monasticism***

This is the classic form of monasticism especially associated with St. Anthony. Hermits would go deep into the desert wilderness and wander among the hills and plains praying the Psalms. Each monk would work out his own salvation and thus this form was highly idiosyncratic. Some hermits worked by making mats. Others did not. Frequently they suffered hallucinations due to physical deprivations. Because the human being is a social animal, it did not take long before disciples gathered around hermits forming temporary cenobitic communities. From time to time Anthony was drawn out of the desert to assist in countering the challenges of heresy in the city. Even his attempts to be alone were not always successful. Disciples found him out and sat at his feet. There was contact between Anthony and Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, which was friendly and admirable. At the end of his life, Anthony gave his cloak to the Bishop. In response to this act of thoughtfulness, Athanasius wrote the biography of the desert saint, *The Life of St. Anthony*.

### **Why did the Monks of Egypt Flee to Mesopotamia during the 4th century?**

There are three causes:

1. Theological purges
2. Increasing taxation leading to economic and social collapse
3. Military enforcement of political and theological policy

### ***Theological Purges***

Athanasius became the Bishop of Alexandria in 330 AD. He was a theological warrior against heretics such as Arius and Eustathius. This caused a response from Constantinople which was under the influence of Arians and Meletians who had been anathematized by Athanasius. Even before the

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and convert it. Qidun was a small village outside of Edessa. But we have almost no references to Bishops in the Augin cycle and certainly they do not tell the monks what to do.

5. Brock, S., *Notes on Some Monasteries on Mt. Izla*, Abr-Nahrain XIX, Leiden, 1980/1 912 The life of John the Egyptian is copied at Mor Augin by monk Moshe (Mingana 496)1271: restoration of Mor Augin by Mar Abdisho1501: A manuscript is copied at Mor Augin (Berlin syr 59)1620; A manuscript is copied at Mor Augin (Berlin syr. 31)1739: Maryam of Mor Augin commissioned the writing of the manuscript of the life of Mor Augin. Copied by the priest Shemoun of Alqosh (Mingana syr 166)1808: Order of St. Anthony and St. Augin founded as part of a monastic revival by Gabriel Danbo1842: Monastery changed hands

rise to power by the confrontive bishop of Alexandria there were efforts to bring Egyptian Christians into conformity. Experimentation among monastics and clergy began to build to a climax after 313 AD and the Edict of Milan. Constantine tried to bring the Church under his control. He offered protection to the Church and in return wanted the Church leadership to deliver him stability and loyalty.

Eventually even the desert was no protection. While political and economic assaults on the populace drove people out of the cities the monks were not immune from theological attacks. Monks left Egypt as part of the Arian theological controversies that divided and plagued the monks in at least three waves of purges through the 4th century. The first purge seems to have begun around the year 320 AD when St. Augin and his band of disciples headed north and east to Nisibis and Mt. Izla.<sup>5</sup>

The second purge occurred immediately after Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria around the year 330. The legitimacy to his election was challenged by the Meletians, Constantinople was under the influence of Arian bishops who in turn turned their hatred against Athanasius of Alexandria. The complaining Meletines aligned themselves with the Arians to try to oust the bishop of Alexandria. To attack his power base, enforcers of the Arian backlash confiscated property, imposed fines and imprisonment, and physically beat up those under the bishop. This included urban monks, priests, and even ascetics living near the villages and towns, the suburban monks. This was the second theological purge which occurred in the early 330's.

Mesopotamia became a place of refuge beyond the reach of Alexandrian inquisitors. Also it was the source of many heretical leaders. In a kind of counter attack, the monks of Egypt may have gone to upper Mesopotamia to convert and correct the heretical foundations. Yet when many of these monks got to Nisibis at the foot of Mt. Izla, they found people such as Jacob of Nisibis and St. Ephrem who were quite untainted by heresy. The Egyptian missionaries for the most part turned their attentions to the Mithrian and Zoroastrian pagans of the eastern and northern regions.

Emperor Constantius II, who followed the Arian heresy, was purging the monastic communities in Egypt of orthodox monks who supported St. Athanasius. He used military powers to collect taxes, extort money from followers of Athanasius. We know that these events occurred around 357-362 AD during the Egyptian campaign to enforce the political and religious concerns of the empire. The third major purge was the time when Athanasius went into exile for the third time.

### ***Moral Decline***

The 4th century it was a period of unrest in the eastern Roman provinces where taxation was driving people out of the cities. It was a period

of social collapse. Moral corruption was exposing its ugly head even among the clergy and urban monks. Clergy and monks were living with virgins who were serving them. It was a mutually compatible arrangement. Women received financial support in return the men got domestic assistance. Both were able to dedicate themselves to lives of prayer and service. But there was suspicion that chastity was not being practiced among the men and women dedicated to such vows. The scandals and suspicions forced Athanasius to forbid such associations although some were pure relationships. These conditions fueled the monastic movement into the deserts outside of Alexandria and other metropolitan centers. As we observe in the story of St. Habib, it appears that, because of financial scandals in his diocese of Athens, he resigned his office as bishop and joined St. Augin in the Egyptian desert before they left for Mt. Izla.

### ***Military Enforcement***

It maybe that some urban monks fled to upper Mesopotamia during the third purge, even to Mt. Izla, as suggested in the story of St. Jacob of Salah.<sup>6</sup> What is interesting to note it that the military general and Emperor Julian followed on the wake of these monks northward to Nisibis when Julian was killed allegedly by one of his own men outside the gates of Nisibis at the foot of Mt. Izla. It is said that St. Ephrem was a witness to the corpse of the Eastern Roman Emperor at the gates of the city.

Some of the young people were fleeing the cities to avoid military conscription as well. Those who did not avoid conscription delayed their monastic call and many monastics were soldiers before they entered the desert. Such was the case with Pachomius. It was while he was a soldier that he was exposed to Christians in Thebes. After his departure from the military he resided in an abandoned village and eventually developed a vast network of monasteries. His military training may account for the way he organized his monastic communities along Greco-Roman military lines. St. Aho, a disciple of St. Augin, was another former soldier who later became a monk although he was forced into service by the Persians in the region of Nisibis on his way to become monk.

Five of the seven saints of Mt. Izla in the following pages are in the list of St. Augin disciples. Only one actually was part of the original band who traveled from Egypt to Mt. Izla and worked with his master. The others, even his nephew Malke, arrived from Egypt after he died and followed the monastic tradition of St. Augin. Thus they are listed as disciples of the famed monk of Izla. The two others, Abraham of Mt. Rom and Jacob of Salah, are non- Egyptians who represent forms of monasticism that arose in the region

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from Nestorian to West Syrian ownership. Perhaps initiated by Mafrian Basilios Abulhad.1973: Monastery restored again and one monk and two nuns live there.Also see

of upper Mesopotamia.

***LIST OF DISCIPLES OF ST. AUGIN***

1. Mor Toma
1. Mor Goryo
2. Mor Batolo
3. Mor Gewargis
4. Mor Kadlo
5. Mor Dodo
6. MorTobo
7. Mor Yoanis
8. Mor Elisho, Companion of St. Malke
9. Mor Srafyon
10. Mor Gregorius
11. Mor Yaho
12. Mor Yab
13. Mor Shemoun Istone
14. Fr. Shemoun Hezoyo, cared for the body of John the Arab at his death
15. Mor Awlog, lived during time of St. Awgin, resided near Beth Arbaye south of Nisibis. Lived with a pet lion.
17. Mor Johoshofat Sohdo
18. Mor Melenos Sohdo
19. Mor Awlo
20. Mor Joseph Bosnoyo
21. Mor Bosnoyo
22. Mor Daniel, 4th Abbot of the monastery of St. Awgin, late 5th century.
23. Mor Gabrono
24. Mor Issac
25. Mor Shaze
26. Mor Bar Shemesh
27. Mor Habib, born in Egypt, a former bishop of Athens and missionary to the Kardu mountain region of northern Iraq. Died at end of 4th century or early 5th century at a reported 125 years of age.
28. Mor Gawlo, healed and converted by Mor Habib
29. Mor Moshe
30. Mor Hadabshabo Yameno
31. Mor Silwana
32. Mor Titus
33. Mor Anderya
34. Mor Awbel bar Baoth
35. Mor Benyamin, may be Benjamin Dogan who brought the bones of St. Awgin and 10 elders to the monastery of Zaphron, see story of St.

Hananyo.

36. Mor Shabai
37. Mor Yohanon Ephmoyo
38. Mor Yohanon Nahloyo
39. Mor Yohanon Delomoyo, John Dailman, a 7th century saint settled a dispute between Syriac and Persian speaking monks by building separate monasteries. (see Harvard MS. syr. 38, fol 185)
40. Mor Yohanon Tayoyo (John the Arab) from Kashkar region, also known as John of Hirta. Arrived at monastery of Mor Awgin during the tenure of Mor Andreas, the second abbot of the monastery of St. Awgin. Awgin (sometime after 363 A.D.) Builder of a monastery in his name in 390 A.D. and died about 433 A.D.( if we compute 42 years as Abbot of his monastery)
41. Mor Gewargis of Tobeen
42. Mor Stephanos, probably Sephanos the Persian and 6th Abbot of the monastery of St. Awgin.
43. Mor Melke, nephew of St. Augin and builder of monastery in the village Arka where were saved a child from Astrasis, head of the demons. He put a stone collar on Astrasis and drove him out of the village.
44. Mor Isaiah, 7th Abbot of the monastery of St. Augin
45. Mor Yoreth (b. 503 A.D.) followed in footsteps of St. Augin
46. Mor Penhos
47. Mor Aho, (b. 420 -d.525)
- ~~48. Mor Yohanon Z\_oro~~

Brock, S, Parole de l'Orient XX. Kaslik, 1995

6. See Johnson D.A., Syriac Perspectives, Winter, 1992, pp. 13-36, Quarterly of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Diocese of North America
7. Three manuscripts were used for this translation. The base text was a MS of Mor Gabriel from the library of the Bishop copied by him in 1963. A second text from the library of the nuns at Mor Gabriel was used copied in recent times. A third MS was a private manuscript copied by monk Gabriel in 1999 from a MS at Mor Malke Monastery in Turabdin. The latter has not been consulted yet and is of an undetermined date. Two Fenquithos were con-

***PORTRAIT OF A HISTORIAN  
IRIS HABIB EL-MASRI (1910-1994)  
AUTHOR OF THE STORY OF THE COPTIC CHURCH***

*Compiled and written by Dora Habib El-Masri.*

From her early youth, the dynamic power of the Coptic Church attracted her, she started studying earnestly and with reverence everything that pertained to it, the language, the Liturgy, the rituals, prayers and hymns. She loved it whole-heartedly and decided to dedicate her life in pursuit of studying its history. She chose to be a nun, not in a convent, but in the world at large. She felt that she had a mission to fulfill. There was an inward voice calling her and an invisible hand guiding her. Her mind was tuned to the frequency of God's divine love and to the Grace of Jesus Christ. The messages fully reached her heart and were the power that kept her working faithfully all her life. Her eyes were set on the goal she wanted to achieve and that was to write the history of the magnificent Coptic Church to make it known to the world.

Iris had fortitude of character, the power of perseverance and the sincere efforts to gain a vast knowledge about her beloved Coptic Church. She spent all her life in research so as to write the true story of Christianity in Egypt. She held the pen in her hand and started writing and she never, ever put it down or looked backwards, but went steadily forwards, with an indomitable spirit, to write that great history. Iris was adamant in her zeal and perseverance. She had a good command of the language and expressed herself in clear, lucid words, that were a joy to the reader. All these qualities combined together made her history books a pure source of knowledge.

Iris Habib El Masri is the only woman historian in Egypt. She is also the only person who wrote the complete history of the Church which started with the advent of St. Mark to Alexandria in the year sixty-one AD, until the year nineteen hundred seventy one, the time of Pope Kyrillos VI the hundred and sixteenth pope on the See of Alexandria. She wrote nineteen hundred years of history, in nine volumes, entitled "*The Story of the Coptic Church*".

In the memoirs of Iris, I found the following note about her experience in reading the Holy Bible: "I am holding steadfastly to the true Coptic Orthodox faith, which is based firmly on the continuity of both the Old and the New Testaments. I have been brought up and nourished by reading all the books of the Holy Bible. I read them gradually, consecutively, and continuously and thought deeply of their contents. In the many books which I have written and which God Almighty has given me the power to accomplish, I have relied faithfully on verses from the Bible. To me the Holy Bible beginning with the book of Genesis and ending with the book of Revelation was the pure source from which I drank and the highest reference for me in my books. Every time I read it, the teachings I found in it became clearer. The Holy Spirit with its perpetual intercession aided me and with its power illuminated my mind. This enhanced my understanding of the meaning of the words which I read and I always discovered new things for my spiritual needs."

*(End of memoirs)*

Iris read the Holy Bible with the eyes of her mind. She fully understood the Grace and Truth of the new life which Jesus Christ bestowed freely on those who believed in Him. Jesus Christ often reprimanded His listeners and wanted them to understand His words. He admonished those who have ears but do not hear and have eyes but do not see. Jesus did not ration the gifts of the Spirit but granted them bountifully to all those who accepted them with faith. When Jesus spoke to the two disciples of Emmaus, He was surprised to find them slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke about Him. He interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures of the Old Testament, then their eyes were opened. Later St. Paul writes in the Epistle to the Romans: "Be ye transformed by the renewal of your minds, for you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption whereby we say Abba Father."

Iris was renewed in the spirit of her mind and she put on the new self. Her heart was enlightened and she followed Jesus Christ in the regeneration. She continuously gave thanks for this new life. She expressed her thanks truthfully and honestly in every book she wrote whether it was a history book or otherwise. For example in the forward of her sixth volume she wrote, I give thanks with humility and gratitude to the bountiful gifts with which God Almighty has overflowed on me. However many thanks I give, they will never be enough. How can I the weak limited creature, give enough thanks to the Unlimited Creator. In this same volume, she introduces her book as follows: To all those who LOVE the Church which we have inherited from our ancestors. To all those who care that our Coptic Church remains with its own integrity, I introduce to them this volume of The Story of the Coptic Church praying to God, Father of the Church to enlighten our vision so that we will go on, steadily and gratefully to hand over our valuable treasure whole and beautiful to our children just as we have received it from our ancestors.



The first four volumes of *The Story of the Coptic Church* were supervised by the saintly Rev. Fr. Bishop Kamel, Pastor of the Church of St. George in Sporting Alexandria. He always encouraged her to complete her task and to write this story to the end. It was Father Bishop who sent the drafts of these volumes, one by one to the printer and it was he who received them to be sold and distributed by the Church of St. George, to the benefit of the Church, as it was the wish of Iris.

Clergy and laymen alike esteemed her as a person and praised her as a historian. Three consecutive Popes of the See of Alexandria gave her important assignments: H. H. Pope Youssab II assigned her in 1954 to be his private secretary for the correspondence with The World Council of Churches.

H. H. Pope Kyrillos VI appointed her in 1966 Counsellor to Coptic Girls. The following is his letter of appointment:

October 20, 1966.

Baba 10,1683

The Blessed Daughter Iris Habib El Masri,

Blessings be upon you and on your behalf devout invocations. Being cognizant of your consuming zeal, your mature judgement, your loyalty and devotion to the Church and its members, of your unflagging concern for the welfare and the flourishing moral, social and cultural future of the young girls of the Coptic Orthodox faith and of your dedication to the inculcating of the **ORTHODOX TEACHINGS AND TRADITIONS** of the Church in these young girls so that they may become worthy examples and virtuous models to all others in our beloved country, and all will see their good deeds and glorify God thereby. We have seen fit to decree your appointment as Counsellor to Coptic Girls, holding meetings with them in the assembly halls adjoining the two churches of the great saints Mark the Evangelist and George the Martyr in Heliopolis as well as those other adjoining Coptic churches. You are to be responsible for fixing the time and place of the meetings and for giving regular weekly lectures, notices of which are to be inserted in the newspapers, instructing the girls spiritually, morally and socially that they may grow more attached and more loyal to the Coptic Church and to their beloved motherland. We have no doubt that you will prove yourself worthy of the great task with which we have charged you, certain that you will inform us periodically of your diverse activities and will thus assure us of your whole-hearted strivings in this blessed field. May God Almighty help, guide and bless your endeavors for the good of the Church and its blessed girls.

May His Grace overshadow you and His Arm protect you. To Him be praise and thanksgiving forever.

Pope Kyrillos VI  
Patriarch of the Coptic Church.

In 1972 H H Pope Shenouda III appointed Iris a member on the committee to rewrite the new synaxarium. Also in the same year, His Holiness wrote to her the following testimony:

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate  
Papal Residence

The Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate testifies that Miss Iris Habib Elmasri is a deaconess in the Coptic Church serving in the ecclesiastical field for thirty years. She has served with all diligence and efficiency in child education and in delivering religious lectures to University students, both young men and young women. She has also taught Church history in the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies. Her books on the Coptic Church are valuable and comprehensive. She deserves to be congratulated and appreciated for them and we wish them a wide circulation.

Miss Iris is from a well known Coptic family closely linked to the Church and sharing in its diverse activities.

Signed Pope Shenouda of Alexandria and the See of Saint Mark  
Sealed with the Papal Seal.  
Dated 6.25.1972.

In 1974 Iris went to London with her brother Sami El Masri who was appointed director of the Egyptian State Bureau for Tourism in London. She wanted to have access to the famous Library of the British Museum and other university libraries. H.G. Bishop Gregorios, bishop of Higher Theological Studies and Coptic Culture and Scientific Research, who was at that time the Rector of the Institute of Coptic Studies at Anba Rweiss wrote for Iris the following certificate.

To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that Professor Iris Habib El Masri has been since 1954 professor of Coptic Church History in our Institute of Coptic Studies. Professor Iris is the author of The Story of the Church of Egypt and she is authoritative on the subject. She is highly estimated for her erudition and vast knowledge in history. She is of good Christian character and high sense of duty.

I recommend Miss Iris El Masri as a good representative of our Coptic Orthodox Church.

Signed and sealed.  
Dated September 26, 1974.

H.G. Bishop Moussa, Bishop of Youth, in a recorded interview with Iris in 1987, started by saying: "Today we are guests of our able professor Iris. Many people have read with admiration her magnificent historical volumes written about the Coptic Church, beginning from the first century until our present time. We are happy that we have seen her and that we have heard her." After this introduction, H.G. asks Iris to relate to him how she started her great love for the Coptic Church. Iris then talks with fervor and delight about her great love of the Coptic Church.

Now I record the words of the venerable Father Matta Elmeskeen, the great scholar and theologian. In the introduction of Iris's fifth volume "*The Story of the Coptic Church*": he writes: I reviewed your book word by word and in all truth I found it written with zeal and accuracy, combined with the sense of nationalism and deep loyalty to your faith. This book is considered a living part of our Egyptian heritage, the like of which we rarely find. It has great influence on the national spirit. I thank God that the series of your valuable history books are written with such a magnificent portrayal of our history which is a long story written with blood and tears. But our history remained vibrant and strong all through the centuries. It is a story that awakens the mind to the great glories of our spiritual and national existence.'

Again in the introduction to the eighth volume Father Matta el Meskeen writes: "In this volume we have a vision of the author herself. We see in her the qualities of the persevering historian who is always searching the books. This volume is a great addition to her unique historical books. It relates the story of Church and Country in their struggle against foreign occupation. Iris records in this volume the lives of some contemporaries: saints, laymen, scientists and artists and also some ordinary people who live in obscurity but have a high spiritual life. History is life and their lives were mentioned as part of the Church. In this volume the author was elevated above this world to get inspired from the highest heavens."

Now I mention the loving and sincere words of the Reverend Father Mikhail Saad Pastor of the Church of St. Mary and St. Joseph in Smouha Alexandria. He was a gifted preacher with the ability of the teacher who explained vividly and ardently the words of the Holy Bible to the congregation. He had power and tenacity through his trust in the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and was able to build the grand House of Grace in the vicinity of the church. Fr.Mikhail Saad wrote more than once about Iris. I choose from the article which he wrote on the occasion of the fortieth day of her departure from this world. He wrote a tender message of loyalty to the memory of Iris. He invoked blessings and peace to her soul in the eternal abode in the Kingdom of Heaven. Then he describes her great achievements of knowledge that made known to the world the treasures of our fathers. He quotes the words of our Lord when He said: Every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his store room both the new and the old. 'Math. 13:52'

Then he describes Iris as the person who renounced the vanity of this world and lived the life of a wise virgin whose lamp glittered with holy oil and who was

always ready to meet the bridegroom. She held fast to faith, hope, and charity and always strove eagerly for the greatest of gifts which is LOVE that remains forever.

It is not only the clergy who esteemed Iris, but also laymen praised her and valued her historical books. In the second volume Iris wrote about the entry of the Arabs into Egypt. She sent a copy to Professor Mohamed Mahmoud El-Sayad who was at that time the Vice President of Ein Shams University. After reading her book, he sent her a letter on the top of which was written:

In Recognition of Goodwill.

To the respected professor Iris Habib El-Masri,  
Best salutations, I received with thanks your valuable book "*The Story of the Coptic Church*", I read it and found that it contained the accuracy of the historian who knows the details of the subject about which he is writing. I hope that God will guide you to complete this unique story in your clear and excellent style. This is a big service to our country because the Coptic Church is a part of our national history which is dear to all of us. Egypt is proud that it was always a defender of religions. The people lived together along the centuries as bretheren. They loved God and Country. All religions call for virtue and goodness. Egypt never deviated from sanctifying these qualities.

I congratulate you for your great efforts and thank you for presenting to me your book.

With my best wishes.

Signed and dated March 1, 1968

Iris also received a letter from Dr.Hassan Ragab, director of the Institute of Papyrus Research.

To the respected historian Iris Habib ElMasri,  
Best salutations. I received with thanks your encyclopedical books about "*The Story of the Coptic Church*", which you have graciously donated to the library of my institute. I read and admired them for many reasons, foremost of which the orderly and accurate way in writing their contents and the information about the history of Christianity in Egypt. This history is a part of our national heritage which all Egyptians endear with pride. Secondly I register my admiration for your indomitable spirit of research with such great strength and continuous perseverance. You read many references in different languages in order to give the true and vast knowledge to the reader. You spent many years of your life to achieve this goal. I ask God Almighty to prolong your life for the noble efforts you are doing which are for the service of both religion and country.

Your books have filled a big gap in the library of my institute. May God grant you his blessings.

Signed and dated October 1, 1984.

Iris received hundreds of letters from many thinkers and writers. From educated people and from simple people. They all expressed, everyone in his own style, the love and admiration for her.

### ***Scholarship in Philadelphia***

Iris was granted a scholarship by the International Federation of University Women, to make research studies for one year in the United States. She asked of the committee of the Federation to choose for her a university that has the best professor in Coptology. Professor Cyrus Gordon was widely known at that time in 1952\1953 as the best coptologist in the United States. He was at Dropsie Univeraity in Philadelphia. She studied under his tutorship and had access to many manuscripts. There was a Coptic manuscript which was bought by an American who donated it to the university and no one had read it before. Dr. Gordon told Iris that it was waiting for a Copt to come and unfold it and study its contents.

After her return from the United States, she received a letter from Dr. Gordon in which he wrote: "You were lucky to be born a Copt, but it is exclusively to your credit that you have built so creatively on your heritage. To inherit is not enough, we also have to build on our inheritance constructively."

Iris also received a letter from the president of Dropsie university in which he wrote: I am happy that we were able to afford the opportunities of study and research to you and we are gratified that you made such excellent progress under the guidance of Professor Gordon. You were not only an outstanding student at the College, but you also made a very deep impression upon the larger community in Philadelphia by interpreting your country and its aspirations to important segments of the American population.

Signed Abraham Neuman

Dated June 12 1953.

During her stay at the U.S.A. that year, Iris gave 58 lectures about the Coptic Church and about Egypt from the broadcasting and television stations and in the Women's International League and in the branches of the Federation of University Women.

Iris's first English edition of the *Story of the Coptic Church* was published in 1975 by the Middle East Council of Churches. When this edition became out of print, a second edition was published in 1982 by the Monastery of Abba Bishoi in California. Father Pachom Abba Bishoi, priest and monk, wrote in the introduction: "The author voluntarily did more than her best to fulfill this great work. We consider sister Iris ElMasri the only historian in the Coptic Church at the present time."

The second edition also became out of print and a third edition was published in 1987. It was published by St. Fam Coptic Association in California and supervised by H. G. Bishop Antonios Markos, bishop of African Affairs. In the preface he wrote:

Your heart will be touched by this faithful report of the Coptic Church. The author has spent years in research of ancient records in libraries of many nations to give us the book you now hold in your hand. It is in two volumes. Due to the high demand on *The Story of the Copts*, by individual Christians, Christian Institutions, libraries and the interested elite all over the world, the first two editions of such a book in English language were sold out. There is a great need for the third edition in English language which presents the true story of the Church of Christ in Egypt which has persisted for almost 2000 years. We feel it must be told to the world.

Everybody who read such a book has been so much touched with the faithful Christians of Egypt, God's Children, who have suffered for Christ and remained true through centuries. We trust your heart will be greatly blessed as you read this amazing book.

Signed Bishop Antonios Markos

In the Epilogue of the English book, *The Story of the Coptic Church*, Iris writes: "The present day Father of the Coptic Church is Abba Shenouda 111, the hundred and seventeenth Pope in the glorious succession of St. Mark. The Church is more alive and revitalized than ever. A veritable new re-awakening is evidenced by the amazing growth in the number of new churches continuously being built and always full to overflowing by the number of university educated young men and women who have entered the priesthood, the monasteries and the convents and by the immense growth of Sunday Schools. What is more vital is the immense growth of awareness among Copts to the wonders of their Church. Apart from expanding and developing within its own boundaries, the Coptic Church has extended in a surprising way far beyond those boundaries. It is now a member of the World Council of Churches, The Middle East Council of Churches and the All African Council of Churches. At the same time churches have been founded in the U.S.A and Canada also in England, Italy, France, Germany, Australia and Africa."

So, although the *Story of the Copts* as recorded in this book will end here, the *Story of the Copts* as a living active people and of their Mother Church that has played the main role in keeping them active and living is still a continuous story. It is both heartening and full of promise, and it reinforces the confidence held by their majority, that through the Grace of God they will continue to have a story worth telling until time is swallowed up into eternity.

I have delineated highlights of the life of the great historian Iris Habib El-Masri. I would like to add that Iris lived humbly and lovingly. She was an ascetic. She fasted all the fasts and she daily recited the prayers of the Agpeya which she knew by heart. Her room was like a shrine, the walls were decorated with pictures of saints and there was always a light in front of the picture of Saint Mary. The moment one entered that room one felt a peaceful atmosphere. In that peaceful atmosphere Iris worked through the quiet hours of the night until the early hours of dawn.

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### ***L'Incarnation de la Lumiere:Le renouveau iconographie copte a travers: L'Oeuvre d'Isaac Fanous***

*By Ashraf and Bernadette Sadek. Available from Le Monde Copte, 11, bis rue Champollion, 87000 Limoges, France (price: 400 French Francs). Pp. 448. 250 illustrations; 200 in colour. Map, Bibliography & appendices.*

L'Incarnation de la Lumiere by Ashraf and Bernadette Sadek is not only a compendium of Coptic Iconography but also the most important book of Coptic culture in print at the beginning of this millennium.

Coptic iconography from Late Antiquity is on display in Egypt, at the Louvre in Paris, in British collections and throughout the USA. Significant icons survive from most epochs of Coptic history, but this important book is the first to adequately recount the revolution in Coptic iconography instigated by His Holiness Pope Kyrillos the Sixth. He appointed Isaac Fanous to lead the renaissance in Coptic Iconography. This development has dominated the Coptic scene in new church buildings and monasteries, not only in Egypt but also around the Coptic Diaspora, throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of The Incarnation of Light. In the opening chapter of sixty-seven pages it recalls the roots on Egyptian Christian Art in pharaonic tradition, ancient techniques and historical symbolism. Over two hundred pages are devoted to the life and work of Isaac Fanous, the Master of Neo-Coptic Art who is certain to emerge as one of the most significant Christian artists of the twentieth century. This volume contains eighty beautifully illustrated and lucid essays, each supported by scriptural quotation and liturgical prayers, concerning some of the most important icons from Fanous.

When Kyrillos the Sixth appointed Fanous as the first professor of Coptic Iconography in Cairo, the patriarch was acting upon his instinct that Coptic demands for ecumenical recognition depended upon iconography as a badge of Orthodoxy. In the early 1950s, Fanous inherited a situation of a century's neglect of Christian Iconography in Egypt. Pope Kyrillos understood that this form of Christian art was intimately connected with Theology and Spirituality. In Isaac Fanous he had found an artist of profound theological and mystical insight. This is clear to every student of Coptic studies.

Ashraf and Bernadette Sadek, the editors of the encyclopedic journal, Le

Monde Copte are models of modern scholarship in Coptic studies and have made a significant contribution to our understanding of a major development in Christian Art in modern times. The reader should not be put-off if they have little French. The icons are sufficient and speak for themselves.

It has been noted that this volume is, for the reviewer, a most important work of Coptic culture, but this conclusion, though quite correct, is far too inconsequential. *L'Incarnation de la Lumiere* is a work that reaches to the heart of Orthodox Christian spirituality and devotion and should occupy the centre of the Coptic intellectual stage for decades to come.

John Watson

Dorset, UK

### ***Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament Vol. 1, Genesis 1-11.***

*Edited by Andrew Louth. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001. Pp. 256. \$ 39.99 (hardcover). ISBN: 0-8308-1471-X.*

This is the first volume in a new series of Bible commentaries that is a wonderful addition to the library of any church, or theological school. It is indispensable for biblical and patristic scholars as well as any Christian in his daily Bible study, for it makes accessible to readers of the 21st century the consensus of patristic interpretation, east and west. In it, the reader can follow the teaching in the classrooms of Clement of Alexandria and Didymus the Blind; the study and lecture hall of Origen; the cathedras of Chrysostom and Augustine; and the scriptorium of Jerome in his Bethlehem monastery. The fathers of the ancient church have interpreted the divine Scriptures in a way that integrates spirituality and erudition, liturgy and dogma, as well as all aspects of our faith.

Genesis 1-11 spans from the first century to the eighth, from East to West and from Greek and Latin speakers to Syriac. In addition to the Masoretic text of the OT, the supply of the English version of the Septuagintal Greek readings makes it easier to understand the Fathers' flow of thought. Some of the patristic material appears here in English translation for the first time, yet they speak with eloquence and intellectual acumen to the Church today. The six days of creation proved especially attractive among the fathers as a subject for commentary, with Basil the Great and Ambrose producing well-known Hexaemeron (commentaries on the six days of creation).

This volume is concluded with an appendix that contains the early Christian writers and the documents cited, a chronological list of persons and their writings, biographical sketches, bibliography, an alphabetical authors' index that includes their quoted writings, and a scripture index.

This book, together with the whole series, the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, will fill a long overdue need for students of patristics and theology as well as for of preaching, Christian devotion and ecumenical dialogue.



### ***Royal Waste of Time***

By Marva J. Dawn.). *Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company. Pp. 377, \$ 18.00 (paper), ISBN .0-8028-4586-X.*

The author, who has a Ph. D. in both Christian Ethics and Scriptures and is adjunct professor of spiritual theology at Regent College, Vancouver, uses all her talents in order to put God's worship in its true perspective. Though it may be considered by the modern society as a waste of time, yet it is a 'royal waste of time'. In different sections of the book, Dawn insists on the main aim of worship as to glorify God. In the first section of the book she examines the postmodern, media-saturated consumerism culture that makes worship difficult. In other sections she insists on having God as the center of worship, building Church community, the importance of God's word, and forming the character of the Church's children. The book also includes nine Scripture based sermons; the Word of God has to be the basis for true worship.

## **BOOK NOTICES**

### ***Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids, Michigan)***

***A Cry of Absence: Reflections for the Winter of the Heart.*** By Martin E. Marty. Pp. 185, \$12.00 (paper).

Reflections on the Psalms, written after the death of the author's wife. They lead the reader who passes in such an experience of absence and despair, into a fresh experience of God and a new hope.

***Inheriting Paradise: Meditations on Gardening.*** By Vigen Guroian. Pp.210, \$9.00 (paper).

***No Place for Truth: or Whatever happened to Evangelical Christianity.*** By David F. Wells. Pp.318, \$24. 99 (hardcover).

### ***Broadman & Holman Publishers (Nashville, TN)***

***Religious Freedom in the World.*** Edited by Paul Marshall. Pp 342, \$ 14.99 (paper).

A major survey of religious freedom released on October 2000 by Freedom House.

### ***Paulist Press (Mahwah, NJ)***

***Resurrection Love-Life.*** By Barbara Dent. Pp 189, \$9.95 (paper).

Following the contemplative tradition of the Spanish mystics, St. John of the Cross, and St. Theresa of Avila, the author reflects on several New Testament themes in the light of her union with the risen Lord.

# **INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS**

**Articles:** The Journal invites submission of articles on biblical, liturgical, patristic or spiritual topics.

We welcome scholarly and general articles on these or related subjects, as well as translations from the original languages.

**Special Sections:** Contributors to the sections of *Book Reviews* and *Currents in Coptic Church Studies* are advised to contact the editor before submitting their articles. Of the extensive new literature, we only choose for review books of lasting spiritual benefit for the reader.

**Manuscripts** are preferred to be typed double spaced (except for references and footnotes). If possible, send us an MS Word document on a computer disc or by e-mail. Authors should hear from us within one month of the receipt of their articles. Unpublished material is returned only if requested.

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