To the South-East of Rome: Relations between the Syriac and Coptic Churches

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Summary: This article brings to light the wide spectrum of cooperation over time and space between the Churches of Syro-Mesopotamia and Egypt, which both reject the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. Among the ancient Apostolic Churches only these two conserved an unbroken, transparent and full ecclesiastical unity, nurturing the complementary heritages not just at the level of Church hierarchy. They are true sister Churches, also literally: in Semitic languages the word "church" is feminine.

The article describes several common elements in liturgy, the circumstances of patriarchs from one Church reigning over the other, ordination of each other's priests, monasteries built on each other's territory, where up to hundreds of monks of both denominations served, including famous theologians, writers, translators and scholars. An important place, even today, belongs to the still working monastery of Dayr as-Suryān in Egypt. Its extensive library with unique manuscripts in Syriac was moved, mostly to the Vatican, in the 18th century. Other important aspects are mutual help with education and church access, as well as Syriac borrowings present in the Coptic liturgy and everyday speech.

Introduction

Apart from the main components of Christianity, i.e. the Latin West and the Greek East, there exists as well the Christian Orient, which is made up of the local Churches of the Middle East and their branches in India. In its original cultural environment the Middle Eastern Christianity, though fragmented ever since the 3rd Ecumenical Council, was thriving throughout all of the first millennium, keeping its leading role as global centre of the Christian faith. This is where the Apostles started their journeys to all the nations and this is where the (chronologically) first three of Christianity's five capitals were located: Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria, later joined by Rome and Constantinople (City of Constantine), nicknamed "the second Rome."

The division between Western (Roman-Byzantine) and Eastern Christianity has been further widened and deepened by additional mutual misunderstandings during the 4th Ecumenical Council. The overwhelming majority of the native Middle Eastern population under Antiochian and

Alexandrian jurisdiction, consisting of Copts, Nubians, Abyssinians, Syriacs/Assyrians, Armenians and Arabs, joined by St Thomas's Christians of India, defended themselves in solidarity against the Greek-Roman cultural model imposed by Byzantium, preferring to walk their own way, to speak their own language and develop in their own culture and tradition.

The analysis of historical records shows that among the mentioned capitals of Christianity only Antioch and Alexandria managed to keep and maintain to this day normal, uninterrupted relations. Nowadays the two cities are represented by the Syriac Orthodox Church (SOC) and the Coptic Orthodox Church (COC), respectively.[1] From the first centuries of Christianity onwards they have been exchanging spiritual, organizational and liturgical experiences, fully accepting the sanctity and equality of each other, supporting each other in difficult times. The inter-Christian connection based on those principles and free from proselytism deserves attention, especially given that both churches have gathered and unified people of different backgrounds[2].

Liturgy

Kāmil, Al-Bakrī and Rušdī underline:

> The Copts have no liturgical book that would not contain a song translated from the Syriac language, that could be attributed to St Ephrem or other famous clergymen who lived in the 4th to 8th centuries.[3]

As we know, the first Church was established in Jerusalem, while the next—in form of an organized hierarchy headed by St Peter—in Antioch. The dominant language in both cities at the time was Aramaic. It is in this area that the corpus of the Anaphora was established between the 1st and the 3rd century, probably based on the late 1st/early 2nd century *Didache* (Teachings of the Twelve Apostles), and the *Anaphora by Apostles Addai and Mari*. On the other hand, the Greek-language *Apostolic Tradition*, attributed to Hypolite of Rome (ca. 215) was better known in the Middle East than in Rome

[1] Both Churches did not accept the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon and were pejoratively called "Jacobites", after Jacob Baradaeus (6th century).

[2] The names "Syrian Church of Antioch" and "Coptic Church of Alexandria" should be understood in exactly the same way as "Latin Church of Rome". Without going into too much detail on the expansion of both Churches in Asia (SOC) and South-East Africa (COC) in the first centuries of Christianity, it has to be noticed that currently both have thriving dioceses in Western Europe, Australia and both Americas. On November 9th, 2019, the SOC Patriarch ordained 11 priests in Guatemala, including 6 Guatemalans, 3 Colombians and 2 Mexicans. The service in San Raymundo was attended by ca. 6000 people.

[3] Kāmil et al. 1987, p. 98.

itself, being widely used in its Syriac and Coptic translations. H. Paprocki marks that both the Anaphora by Basil the Great († 379) and Gregory of Nazianzus († 390), used by the COC, and the Byzantine liturgy are of Antiochian origin.[4] He also states that the second oldest preserved Anaphora, after Hypolite, originated in the Alexandrian sphere of influence, attributed to St Mark the Evangelist, missionary to the Copts.

The works by Fathers of ancient Churches were distributed rapidly in spite of persecutions and were often translated into other languages during the life of their authors. In the Middle East the most common language versions were Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, Geez and Arabic. In his monumental work the SOC Patriarch Iġnāṭiyyos Afrem I Barṣaum quotes a detailed list of several dozen texts on liturgy, which were translated from Syriac into Greek, Coptic and Armenian or from Greek and Coptic into Syriac, introducing a timeframe divided into periods "from the beginning until the year 400," "between the years 400 and 451," "after the year 451." He points which texts (or parts thereof) by a Father of one Church, and when, were introduced to the liturgy of another Church.[5]

Among the Syriac songs introduced into the Coptic liturgy is the song by St James of Sarug († 521), which is sung during the ritual of ܦܘܪܣܐ, i.e. breaking of Eucharistic bread, authored by Dionosiyyos Bār Ṣalībī († 1171). The preface begins with the words: ܗܲܘ ܟܲܕ ܫܪܝܪ ܐܝܬ (It is indeed worthy), and the post-Sanctus prayer starts with: ܫܪܝܪ ܐܝܬ ܟܲܕ ܩܕܝܫ ܐܢܬ (Thou art indeed holy). The Egyptian author named it "the Syriac song". Furthermore, the Coptic liturgy by Cyril the Great († 444) was appended in the 7th century with the four prayers adapted from the liturgy by Yuḥanna, a Syriac bishop of Busra.[6]

The Church of Antioch in turn adapted to its own liturgy the Coptic songs, attributed by tradition to St Mark the Evangelist and Pola the Lesser († after 408), the disciple of Anba Anthony († 356), as well as a hymn by Anba Serapion († ca. 370) and texts by Popes Athanasios I († 373), Timothy I († 385) and Dioskoros I († 454). Furthermore, to this day the SOC uses the liturgy for ordaining monks which was adopted in 1533 from the Copts and Ethiopians (in manuscripts earlier than 16th century called "the Liturgy of St Anthony"), as well as the rules for spiritual hardening of monks written

[4] Paprocki 1988, pp. 21–22, 49. This view is supported by I. Sākā, who says that the Antiochian liturgy was the most common in the Christian world until the late 5th century. See: Sākā 1986, vol. 5, p. 212 and Allūsī 1905, pp. 677–687.

[5] Barṣaum 1976, pp. 164–186. The original Arabic version, published in Homs, Syria, in 1943 was translated into Syriac, French, English and German.

[6] Starowieyski 1987, pp. 39, 47; Armala 1925, pp. 25–30; Barṣaum 1976, pp. 62–63. During the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the revelation of Mary in the Az-Zaytūna church in Cairo (2.4.1968) the Coptic bishop recited a hymn to Virgin Mary by St Jacob of Sarug in an Arabic translation.

by Iwannis, prior of the Ṭūr Sīnā monastery. Many elements of the Coptic liturgy were included in the works by Syriac commentators: Jacob of Edessa († 708), Eli'ōzor (Lazarus) of Baghdad († 830), John, bishop of Mardin († 1165), Bār 'Ebrāyā († 1286), who pointed out the similarities and differences. Jacob of Edessa wrote that the Fathers of the Alexandrian Church in the intercession mention the Church Fathers before the main body of the Holy Mass, while the priest greets the congregation with the words "Lord be with you all." John, bishop of Dārā († 860?), mentions that a Coptic priest puts eight sheets of canvas on the altar: he covers the tray and the chalice with two, while the remaining six are used by the congregation to dry their mouths after the Communion.[7] In his work titled *Hūdōyē* BĀR 'EBRĀYĀ included some rules effective in the Coptic Church, especially the rights and duties of popes and bishops.[8]

In both Churches the important parts of the service, the ordination of priests and greeting of important figures of the Church (and other Churches) are similar. Further similarities include seven prayer times per day, strict fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays (except for the period between Easter and Pentecost), commemorative services three days, forty days and a year after the death of a member of the community, as well as the liturgy called *qandīlō*[9], probably only encountered in these two Churches.

Finally, the Coptic sacramental bread has an identical form, shape, way of preparation and breaking as the Syriac one. Round bites of fermented dough are stamped with a wooden stamp engraved with twelve crosses symbolizing the twelve apostles. The dough is pricked in five places with a nail (Syriac) or a stick (Copts), which represents the Christ's wounds on the Cross.[10] Fresh sacramental bread is prepared before every service where confession and communion are expected, in the amount corresponding to the number of attendees; the bread cannot be left over until the next day.

The significant and meaningful dimension of the relationship between the two Churches is confirmed by the fact that during the Holy Mass the

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7 DUVAL 1992, pp. 336, 354–355.

8 BĀR 'EBRĀYĀ 1986, pp. 45–46.

9 قَنْدِيلٌ (Greek κανδήλα; Jewish-Palestinian Aramaic קנדילא *kandîla'*) (candle, lamp, light). This is a solemn ceremony of absolution, arranged by the family members of an elderly (not necessarily ill) person on their own initiative or by request from the person in question.

10 In the 11th century, during the reign of the 66th Pope of Alexandria, Christodolos (1047–1077), misunderstandings surfaced regarding the sacramental bread. The Coptic Church forbade Syriacs staying in Egypt from using salt and oil when preparing it, but after the intervention of the Patriarch of Antioch, Yūḥānon bār Šūšān (1063–1073), who explained this tradition as stemming from Old Testament symbols, the ban was lifted (BARṢAUM 1976, p. 368; NAṢRĪ 1905, vol. 1, pp. 473, 477).

Copts invoke the name of the Antiochian Patriarch St Sāwīros († 538)[11] immediately after St Mark the Evangelist. They mention St Ephrem (†373), St Mārūṯa († 420) and Bār Ṣauma († 496). On the other hand, the old calendars of the Church of Antioch had holidays commemorating the Coptic Fathers. Moreover, the unity of both Churches is attested by almost identical liturgical robes worn by clergymen of all ranks. A new priest gives an oath of discipline and respect towards the Patriarchs of both Churches.

Exchange of hierarchs: Coptic patriarchs on the throne of Antioch

1. Pola (Faulos, Paul) II, named Ḥabašōyō (550–575, the 34th Patriarch), was of Alexandrian origin, had studied in Antiochian schools and monasteries, where he mastered Greek and Syriac and was ordained as a monk, then bishop and finally Patriarch. The main role in his ordination was played by Jacob Baradaeus with the participation of Theodosius, Patriarch of Alexandria. There was a time in his life when he wanted to return to Egypt, but faced with resistance by the Syro-Mesopotamian population he gave up on the idea, only to leave unexpectedly for Constantinople and join the Chalcedonians.[12] The resulting vacancy in the Patriarchate remained, by tradition, until his death in Constantinople in 581.

2. Theodore (649–667, the 39th Patriarch) is only known to have been born in Sketis[13] and to have led a hermit's life many years before joining the Syriac monastery of Qennešrin[14], where he was elected Patriarch and where he was

[11] The Copts have a feast of St Severus four times a year: twice in the month of Tut (December), once in the month of Babe (February) to commemorate his arrival in Egypt, and once in the month of Hatur (March).

[12] Butcher (1901, vol. 2, pp. 93–95) states that the reasons why Pola accepted the decisions of the Chalcedon Council, though unclear, were strongly criticised by the Church of Alexandria; though he repented, Baradaeus was unable to change the position of the Pope of Alexandria, whom he visited specifically to that end. The reign of Pola is negatively assessed by Mār Miḫōyel Rābō (1996, vol. 2, pp. 240, 248).

[13] Sketis (Coptic Šīhet—distorted into Arabic al-Isqīṭ) covers an area of 60 × 10 km, lies halfway between Alexandria and Cairo and is rich in lakes and minerals, including natron, hence the name Wādī an-Naṭrūn (more details on its ancient names can be found in Brune 2009, pp. 12–13).

[14] The Qennešrin monastery (قنّسرين—"Eagle's Nest") was built in 530 on the Western bank of Euphratus, near the modern city of Ǧarābulus in northern Syria, under the invocation of St Thomas the Apostle (in some sources it is named Mār Aftuniā, after the name of its founder St Yūḥānon Urhōyō bār Aftuniā). During its golden age (9th century) it numbered 370 monks; from its ranks came seven patriarchs, fifteen bishops and many

eventually buried.[15] It was him who in the year 654 ordained Gabriel (prior of one of the oldest monasteries in Ṭūr ʻAbdīn) a bishop. The circumstances of the event suggest that it was the Patriarch who made the journey from his residence in Qennešrin to the Mār Gabriel monastery, which allows us to speculate that there were still some Coptic monks remaining in that monastery at the time.[16]

Apart from the abovementioned popes the sources mention that the position of bishop and prior of Mār Gabriel was occupied by a Nubian, whose name is known in two forms, Tatanos or Atanos († 1058).[17] He was ordained in 1030, and 25 years later became bishop of the entire Ṭūr ʻAbdīn. It can therefore be concluded that Coptic priests were present in Mesopotamia at least until the end of the 11th century.[18]

Syro-Mesopotamian popes on the throne of Alexandria

1. Damianos (569–605, the 35th Pope) was one of many Syriac monks who at a young age already served first in the Coptic monastery of Anbā Yḥannis, and later at Dayr az-Zuǧāǧ. He was ordained a bishop by the Coptic Pope Peter IV, who chose him as his secretary and guard of his seal. Pope Damianos made many ministrative journeys to Syria, most often to the city of Edessa, where his brother was governor for a short time. The chronicles underline his virtues:

> he was an alumnus of the holy fathers, a man of word and deed, persisting in prayer and fasting, a zealous defender of the faith, blessed with divine graces, brave and firm in debates, to which he invited the followers of Chalcedonian school.[19]

2. Anbā Simon I (692–700, the 42nd Pope).[20] The Coptic chronicles inform that his parents came to Alexandria from the East[21] specifically to place their

scholars, including St Jacob of Edessa. It was destroyed in the 13th century (BARṢAUM 1937). It was there that bishop Severus Seboct († 667) worked; his scholarly activity is described by PIGULEWSKA (1989, pp. 28, 125, 166, 205–206, 224, 263). Severus is said to have adapted the Indian numerals, called "Arabic" in Europe.

[15] Those patriarchs are not attributed any literary works by the sources.

[16] The monastery founded by Mār Šmuel and Mār Šemʻun in 397 is still open, after a difficult past. It has adopted the name Mār Gabriel in the 7th century (BARṢAUM 1964, pp. 87, 271).

[17] This could be a distorted name of the patron saint, which is traditionally taken by Syriac and Coptic bishops; in this case Athanasios.

[18] BARṢAUM 1964, pp. 47, 83, 85, 232, 267, 269.

[19] MUQAFFAʻ no date, vol. 1, pp. 77–79; also ǦAMĀL ED-DĪN 2006, vol. 1, p. 77.

[20] NAḪLĀ (1943, p. 15) states that the first description of his reign has been chronicled by his contemporary, Archdeacon Abū Ǧurǧā.

[21] The name "East" described the areas east of the Roman Empire, where the Magi came from, i. e. Assyria and Persia.

son, "sacred to God," in the Dayr az-Zuǧāǧ monastery, which was a pilgrimage destination and a place where vows were made. It was there that the remains of the Antiochian Patriarch Severus were buried. Simon's election as Pope was made in the presence and with the approval of the Arab governor of Egypt, 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān.[22] During his life two episodes took place:

1. four men, who attempted to poison him several times, were ordered by the governor of Egypt to be burned alive. Having found out about this, the Pope knelt before the governor and begged him to spare their lives;
2. during his reign a group of clergymen from India, unable to reach the war-ravaged Syria, came to him and asked to have their bishops ordained, but before leaving Egypt they were arrested as spies.[23]

Before his death the Pope asked to be buried in Dayr az-Zuǧāǧ, where his father Yūḥānōn, deceased three years before, had served as well. The strong bond between son and father is noted: the son conducted his father's funeral service, kept vigil at his grave for 40 days and personally prepared his own grave next to his father's.

3. Aprem[24] (Ephrem) bār Zar'a (975–979, the 62nd Pope), according to the Coptic chronicles, came from a known family of Syriac merchants and philanthropists settled in Egypt. His election took place in unusual circumnstances. After Pope Anbā Mīnā's death the Coptic hierarchs and intellectuals were unable to choose a successor for several days. During the Christmas service at the church of St Serge and Bacchus a man entered the temple with a white beard covering his chest. It was Ephrem, a famous and respected philanthropist. Seeing him, people began to say: "The Holy Spirit sent you to lead the Church."[25] The people were joined by the clergy. When Ephrem said he was not worthy and attempted to leave the church, he was

[22] Such procedure was compulsory under Muslim reign. A new patriarch had to be accepted by the Caliph or his representative. The circumstances of the election of the pope, worshipped by the Copts as a saint and a reformer, and his reign are described in detail by Yūḥannā (no date, pp. 297–301) and Butcher (1901, vol. 2, pp. 166–171).

[23] His reign is described by S. Ibn Al-Muqaffa' (no date, vol. 1, pp. 110–119). A summary has been published by the Antiochian patriarch Iġnāṭiyyos Zakkā I 'Iwāṣ (*Al-Maǧalla al-Baṭiriarkiyya* 26 [1988] 74–75, pp. 167–171).

[24] Due to the lack of a "p" sound in Arabic some authors mistakenly interpret the spelling Aprem (in Syriac "p" and "f" are marked with the same letter) as a shortened version of Abraham. This pope occupies the sixth place on the list of the ten most renowned Coptic popes.

[25] After the election of a patriarch or bishop the present hierarchs repeat three times the Greek word ἄξιος *(áxios)*, meaning 'worthy.'

stopped and tied up. The ordination took place at the Aš-Šam‘ palace in the southern part of Old Cairo, called Babylon, around 300 metres from the banks of the Nile. Afterwards, the newly elected pope gave away his possessions to the poor and those in need.

In spite of his short reign Ephrem was known for his care about construction of new churches, as well as reorganisation and standardisation of the Church administration. He was a successful defender of Christianity during disputes with the Egyptian Fatimid Caliph Al-‘Azīz Billāh (Abū Manṣūr, 975–996), which took place in the presence of Sāwīros ibn al-Muqaffa‘[26], a Coptic bishop of Ašmūniyyīn[27], well-versed in Arabic. The harmony of his reign is attested by the fact that he decided to join the week-long fast of Heraclius[28], observed by the Copts, who, moved by such attitude, began to observe their Pope's three-day-long fast of Nineveh[29]. Moreover, the 40-day Advent was extended by three days for the intention of defending the Church against the ultimatum by the aforementioned Caliph, who suddenly became hostile towards Christians.[30]

4. Marqos (Mark) III (1166–1189, the 73rd Pope)[31], probably originated from the same family as the above described Ephrem, even though they were separated by eleven popes and 187 years. He was known for his devotion and solid theological knowledge. During his reign Salahaddin invaded Egypt, which resulted in hardships and humiliating regulations against Copts. Those in-

[26] The first Copt writing in Arabic and the first Coptic-Arabic translator. His *History of the Patriarchs* has been translated into many languages and continues to be reprinted by the Coptic Church.

[27] The town of Ašmūniyyīn, called Hermopolis in the Ptolemaic times, is nowadays a village in the Asiuṭ district (Ǧamāl ed-Dīn 2006, p. 9, footnote 1).

[28] After Egypt was liberated from a short-lived Persian rule (629), Emperor Heraclius (626–641) made attempts to unify all Christians. Another tradition relates this period of fasting to Heraclius preventing Jews from attacking Christians and destroying their temples during the Persian invasion on the Levant. A Western Church author describing those circumstances expresses her surprise at a new fast being added to other, "exhausting" fasts of the Coptic Church (Butcher 1901, vol. 2, pp. 116–120).

[29] Alluding to the mission of Jonah among the dwellers of Nineveh. The Copts call it the Fast of Jonah and keep it to this day.

[30] During his reign many miracles took place, repeated to this day by the Copts and described by Yūḥannā (no date, pp. 375–378), Miṣrī (2003, pp. 20–29) and Muqaffa‘ (no date, vol. 2, pp. 76–83). De Tarrazi (1947, p. 530) calls this pope a scholar, but does not mention his origin; he also gives different dates of reign (976–980) and names the cause of death as poisoning.

[31] Yūḥannā (no date, pp. 408–409) devotes only seven lines to him, not giving any details. Muqaffa‘ (no date, vol. 3, pp. 46–47, 78, 97) calls him "a holy man", but short mentions are lost between detailed descriptions of wars between the Crusaders and various Muslim rulers, most importantly Salahaddin.

cluded removal of crosses from church towers and domes, ban on church bells and any kind of processions (especially on Palm Sunday), as well as bans on horse riding, obligation to paint church walls black from the outside and silence church singing so that it could not be heard by passers-by, and finally the order to dress differently from Muslims.[32] A common intervention of both Patriatchs of Alexandria and Antioch (Mār Miḫōyel Rābō, † 1199) managed to moderate the hostile attitude of the fanatic Salahaddin and persuade him to lift the orders. This, however, did not last long: the next radical shift by the Muslim rulers against Christians was probably dictated this time by their will to manifest their victory over the Crusaders at Ḥaṭṭīnie in 1187.

During Marqos's reign Egypt was torn by arguments about the interpretation of confession and absolution. The Coptic preacher Marqos ibn Qanbar was saying that absolution is in itself a sin, as the absolved one wants to liberate himself from living through the Passion of Christ. In order to get a second opinion on this the Pope delegated three bishops to Patriarch Mār Miḫōyel Rābō, who was in Jerusalem at the time. The Patriarch supported the Pope's position and the dispute was deemed resolved.[33]

Ordaining of priests and conducting services

In the history of contacts between the two communities priests were often ordained by bishops of each other's Church. An active participation in each other's jubilees, celebrations and other important events was also regular.

One of the first, groundbreaking ordinations was probably that of a Syriac monk, Jacob Baradaeus, who was made bishop by the Coptic Patriarch Theodosius I (536–567), interned in Constantinople. The event took place

[32] Iskandar (2012, vol. 1, p. 68) writes that the ban on church bells in Egypt lasted from the 11th until the early 19th century. The humiliating restrictions Christians were subjected to were put into place in various ways and times all over the Middle East (Abdalla 2018b, pp. 9–23).

[33] Mār Miḫōyel Rābō (1996, vol. 3, pp. 342–343) presented his opinion on the argument. It is also described by Naṣrī (1905, vol. 1, p. 545). In April 1959, at the time of the Egyptian-Syrian union (1958–1961) under the Egyptian president Gamal Abdulnaser, Egypt was visited by the Patriarch of the SOC Iġnaṭiyyos Yaʿqūb III. This took place after the death of the Pope of Alexandria Yosap II (13.11.1956) and before the election of the new Pope Kirillos VI (10.5.1959). The Patriarch's visit was strictly of a ministrative nature, but it was speculated the guest would take over the patriarchate in Alexandria to assure "a full unity of the two countries." See the Coptic magazines: *Mār Ǧirǧis* 11,2 (1959) (a whole edition was devoted to the visit), *Al-Maḥabba* 46,8 (1980), pp. 173–184. The idea of a unification of the two Churches was not new: on July 8th, 1211, the Patriarch of Antioch John XI (1208–1220) sent an envoy to the Coptic Pope John VI (1189–1216) to this end (Naṣrī 1905, vol. 1, p. 559).

in the year 543 or 544, thanks to the Arab king of the Ġassānids, Al-Ḥāriṯ ibn Ǧabla, who was himself a member of the SOC and who intervened with Empress Theodora in a critical time marked with persecutions and deportations of bishops, specifically Antiochian ones, who did not comply with the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon.[34] Preserved works by Coptic and Syriac/Assyrian authors allow not only to present the state of the relationship between Antioch and Alexandria in almost every century, but also to recreate the image of the political situation in the region.

In mid-19th century Egypt was visited by Īša'yā (Isaiah), a monk from the Saffron Monastery (near Mardin, Turkey), born in Ṣadad (62 km southward of Homs, Syria), who subsequently spent 12 years serving at the Anbā Antonios monastery and as priest in St Mark's Cathedral in Al-Azbakiyya, Cairo. In 1880 the Pope of Alexandria, Cyril V (1874–1927) ordained him a bishop, naming him after patron St Isidoros and entrusting him with the duties of Patriarchal Chancellor of Alexandria.

After his ordination Īša'yā returned to Ṣadad for a short period and took his eight-year-old nephew Nā'ūm to Egypt. After graduating from Coptic schools, at the age of eighteen Nā'ūm became a monk in the Baramus monastery, assuming the name Ephrem (Ephraim in Coptic) as-Suryānī, and began teaching French and English in St Mark's Seminary in Alexandria. On October 17, 1897, he was ordinated a bishop and became Chancellor of the seminary, as well as prior of Baramus. He devoted the rest of his life exclusively to studying and writing. He authored nine books (some of them in two volumes) and a dozen brochures for the youth. He founded two monthlies: *Al-Ḥaqq* (1894) and *Zion* (1898), remaining their editor until his death, while he was also an active member of the Coptic Historical Commission. He passed away on January 19, 1942, and was buried in a monastery in Old Cairo. In recognition of his legacy he was named the scholar and father of modern Coptic history. He spoke the Coptic language.[35]

On March 14, 1955, the last Antiochian bishop in Egypt, Qorillos (Cyril), passed away. The situation at the time did not allow Antiochian hierarchs to travel to Egypt; at the request of the Pope of Alexandria, Yosap II (1946–1956), the funeral ceremony was conducted by four Coptic bishops.[36]

[34] According to the local tradition Empress Theodora, Justinian I's wife (529–569), was said to be a daughter of an Syriac priest of Mabug and was not liked at the Byzantine imperial court due to her support for pre-Chalcedonian Christians. She is attributed all sorts of help given to the persecuted.

[35] His most important work is *Baramūsī*, 1892. It is a critical work of more than 800 pages, written in a European style.

[36] The bishop's brother, Buṭrus Anṭūn, also served in Egypt, as the only Antiochian priest at the time for the Syro-Mesopotamian community. He died five years before his brother.

A significant fact is that the ordination of Pope of Alexandria Šenuda III (November 14, 1971) was attended by the Antiochian Patriarch Iġnaṭiyyos Yaʿqūb III († 1980). Both Patriarchs met again on May 15, 1973, during the ceremony marking 1600 years since the passing away of the Coptic St Athanasios, and they concelebrated a mass in the new St Mark's Cathedral in al-ʿAbbāsiyya, Cairo.[37] Another meeting took place on May 4, 1997, on the occasion of the Council of Middle Eastern Churches meeting in Damascus, during which Pope Šenuda III († 2012) and Antiochian Patriarch Zakkā I Iwās († 2014) together ordained the Egyptian Y.Z. Sedrak a priest for Copts living in Syria and Lebanon. The ceremony took place in St Ephrem's church in the new SOC patriarchal residence in Maʿarrat Ṣaydnāyā, near Damascus. The new priest received a blessing of both patriarchs.[38]

Another grand event was the opening on June 22, 2018, of the Antiochian Cathedral of St Severus in Lebanon, coinciding with the 1500 years' jubilee of St Severus's journey to Egypt.[39] The remains of the saint, brought to Lebanon by the Coptic pope, were buried in the crypts of the cathedral. The ceremony was attended by patriarchs of all Middle Eastern Churches, as well as by the President of Lebanon, and the service was concelebrated by patriarchs of all three pre-Chalcedonian Churches: Syriac, Coptic and Armenian, who afterwards signed a joint declaration.[40]

Monasteries and churches commemorating Coptic fathers in Mesopotamia

The history of Mesopotamian Christianity emphasizes that the first spontaneous grassroot meeting between the Coptic and Syriac/Assyrian communities was due to monasticism, which had been initiated in Egypt by St Anthony the Hermit († 356) and St Pachomius the Great († 346), although the idea of monastic life must have been known in Mesopotamia much earlier.

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[37] Iġnāṭiyyos Yaʿqūb III 1977, vol. 2, pp. 53, 65.

[38] *Mağallat Al-Karāza* 25 (1997) 19–20, p. 6. During his visit to Damascus in 1866 the Coptic parish priest Filoṯāwos Ibrahim Baġdādī was asked by the Patriarch Iġnāṭiyyos Yaʿqūb III to conduct a Sunday mass in the Coptic rite (*Mağallat Al-Karāza* 1 [1965] 2–3, p. 80).

[39] On the circumstances of the Patriarch Severus's escape to Egypt see Abdalla 2018a, pp. 143–162.

[40] It was the twelfth meeting of pre-Chalcedonian Church hierarchs; the first one had taken place in 1997. However previously, in January 1965, at the initiative of the last Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Sellasie I (1941–1974) and with his active participation a conference of hierarchs of those Churches was organized in Addis Ababa (Iġnāṭiyyos Yaʿqūb III 1969, vol. 1, pp. 75–79; *Al-Mağalla al-Baṭiriarkiyya* 36 (1998) 174–175, pp. 296–299; *The Oriental Orthodox Churches …,* p. 132).

Tradition attributes the strengthening and enrichment of local asceticism to St Eugene of Clisma[41], a disciple of St Anthony and St Pachomius. Together with seventy hermits, St Eugene went to Mesopotamia, where they lived in grottoes, caves and rock-carved cells on the mountain of Izlō, near Nisibis, the city of St James († 338) and St Ephrem, spreading the Gospel among the local population.[42] Over the years they were joined by others, locals and Egyptians, but also by monks from Central and Southern Mesopotamia, as well as Eastern Persia. In one of the hymns sung to this day in the SOC on the day of Mār Gabriel, there is mention of eight hundred Copts who arrived in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn in the second wave.[43] A few years after St Eugene passed away on April 21st, 363, a picturesquely located monastery was erected on the slope of Mount Izlō and named after him.[44] A.S. ATIYA notes that monasticism, promoted in Eastern Asia by St Eugene, spread in the Syrian Church together with rules and discipline developed recently in Thebaid[45] by St Pachomius the Great.[46]

Other Ṭūr ʿAbdīn monasteries, erected usually in the same locations where Egyptian fathers lived together with local hermits, include:

1. the one built in the 6th century north of the village of Arkaḥ, named after Mār Malke i Mār Elīšaʿ, both nephews of St Eugene. In the 14th century it was an episcopal residence, destroyed by the Kurds and rebuilt several times (most recently in 1926), still open. The characteristic portrayal of Mār Malke on canvas is recognizable among the Tur ʿAbdinians: a saint holding Satan on a leash;[47]

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[41] Arabic al-Qulzum in the Middle Ages, nowadays Suez. The name Eugene is common among Syriacs in the native form Mārōge (shortened combination of "Mār", meaning 'Saint', and Augin, meaning Eugene).

[42] DE TARRAZI 1979, p. 42; YAʿQŪB 1953, vol. 1, p. 284. The plateau, of which Izlō is part, has been called Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, i.e. Mountain of (God-)Worshippers, due to the large number of monks, hermits and eremites. ŠĒR (1906, Vol. 2, pp. 11–33; 1913, Vol. 2, pp. 35, 39) gives a number of arguments challenging the historicity of the arrival of Coptic ascetes in Mesopotamia.

[43] Its author is Šemʿun Qūqōyō (i.e. Potter, †514), who lived in the village of Kišir not far from Antioch and wrote hymns and religious songs to the rhythm of the pottery wheel. Jacob of Edessa wrote: *Šemʿun's workshop and his pottery wheel are still known in the village of Kišir* (ca. 700–708) (BARṢAUM 1976, pp. 217–218).

[44] Built at the turn of the 5th century, plundered and destroyed by the Kurds several times (most recently in 1970), afterwards repopulated (ANSCHÜTZ 1985, pp. 137–138; BARṢAUM 1976, p. 508).

[45] Tebaida (named after the ancient Egyptian capital of Thebes, Greek Θηβαίς *Thebais*)—a region reaching southwards until Aswan.

[46] ATIYA 1978, pp. 160–161, 164–165, 250–251.

[47] ANSCHÜTZ 1985, pp. 136–137; ARMALA 1913, pp. 561–577; BARṢAUM 1976, p. 515.

2. the one built in the early 5th century in the town of Ṣālaḥ, named after Mār Yaʿqub the Recluse. He became a martyr together with his eleven disciples during the reign of the Persian king Wahram V (420–438). The monastery is large, with a church built in 770, and served as a patriarchal residence in 1364–1816. It is still open;[48]
3. the Mār Eliʿōzor, Mār Asyā and Mār Pōlā monastery near the village of Ḥapsis, with an unknown construction date, currently in ruins;
4. the Mār Mūšē Ḥabašōyō monastery east of the village of Ḥāḥ;[49]
5. the "Egyptians' Dome" in the Mār Gabriel monastery.[50]

Moreover, a church named after the Syriac/Assyrian Mār Barṣaumā and the Copt Anbā Bīšōy used to existed west of the village of Miden.[51]

Syriac churches and monasteries in Egypt

The available sources often mention eight Syriac churches in Egypt. Probably the oldest one existed already in the 8th century, others were built in subsequent years. The analysis of preserved works, of which some are very detailed, would take up a lot of space. The patron saints of those churches were: St Ephrem, St John the Baptist, Mary, Mother of Jesus (2 churches), Mār Mārūṯā, Archangel Gabriel, Mār Qoryos and Mār Behnam. After the 17th century the numbers of Syriacs/Assyrians in Egypt decreased significantly and some of the buildings were handed over to the Copts, who replaced the former patron saints with Coptic ones.

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[48] Anschütz 1985, pp. 93–96; Armala 1913, pp. 662–675; Barṣaum 1976, p. 515.

[49] Anschütz 1985, pp. 90–91, 97–100. Another monastery named Mūsā al-Ḥabašī is located in Syria, north of an-Nabak, halfway between Homs and Damascus. St Mūsā is remembered on September 14th in the entire diocese of Homs and Hama; on the same day a holiday is celebrated in all churches under his invocation. "It was built at the beginning of the 6th century, by late 14th century was an episcopal residence, reconstructed in 1556, bore two patriarchs and twenty bishops, was taken away from us in 1832 due to political reasons, later emptied and became forgotten" (Barṣaum 1976, p. 515). The author, not willing to reopen old wounds, does not talk about the circumstances of the Uniate takeover of the monastery. Between 1982 and 2012 the monastery was resurrected by Italian Jesuit Paolo Dall'Oglio, who founded a community leading a Christian-Muslim dialogue (Woźniak 2011, pp. 189–201). Father Paolo's activity went beyond spiritual issues, and having supported the Syrian opposition he was expulsed. In late July 2012 he took a detour to ar-Raqqa to negotiate with the so-called Islamic State and was never heard of again.

[50] Anschütz 1985, pp. 128–136; Dolabānī 1991, p. 216. It is them who are the main topic of the aforementioned song by Šemʿun Qūqōyō.

[51] Barṣaum 1964, pp. 32, 216.

Among the monasteries, which were described in more or less detail also by Muslim authors, ARMALA in his unique work[52] mentions the following:

No.	Name of the monastery	Notes
1	Dayro d-Mār Romanos Rābō	This is where Jacob Baradaeus lived (6th century).
2	Dayro d-Mār Seweriyyos Rābō	Described as a huge building erected on the spot where St Severus died in 538.
3	Dayr az-Zuǧāǧ	This is where Anbā Simon I studied.
4	Dayro d-Mār Barṣaumā	Earlier known as Dayro d-Mār Qūra or Dayr Ša'lān.
5	Dayro d-Anṭūnōyē	A famous scientific centre and a mecca of scholars. Here in the early 7th century Bishop Tūmā Ḥarqlōyō translated the New Testament from Greek into Syro-Mesopotamian. Also here several works by Jacob of Edessa were written.
6	Dayr al-Ḫandaq	Destroyed in 1279.
7	Dayro d-Mār Teodor	—
8	Dayro d-Mār Mīḫōyel	Probably located on the same spot as the contemporary Coptic Monastery of Archangel Gabriel, on Mount Naqlūn near the city of Fayyūm.
9	Dayr al-Anbā Maqaryos	Built in the 8th century, one of three monasteries named after Anbā Maqaryos—the remaining two belonged to the Copts.
10	Dayr al-Anbā Pōlā	With a large library.
11	Dayr al-Anbā Anṭonios	—
12	Dayr al-Anbā Bīšōy	According to legends it was visited by St Ephrem.
13	Dayr al-Anbā Yūḥannā aṣ-Ṣaġīr	—
14	Dayr al-Iqlīm	—
15	Dayr Mariam al-'Aḏrā'	This is a different monastery from the one described separately below.
16	Dayr Mār Yūnān	—
17	Dayr al-Anbā Ṣāmūyēl	Also known as Dayr al-Qalamūn.
18	Dayr Mār Ǧirǧis	Handed over to the Copts in 1180.

[52] ARMALA 1925, pp. 35–41.

It can be assumed that apart from those eighteen monasteries, which were built by Syriac/Assyrian monks who lived and worked there for many centuries, there could have been many more, possibly mentioned in sources unknown to us or lost. The number of monasteries is significantly larger than both the number of Coptic monasteries in Syro-Mesopotamia and the number of Syro-Mesopotamian churches in Egypt. Some of them are only mentioned in the sources with a few sentences, while others are described in significant detail: location, number of monks, buildings, libraries, gardens, sources of water, sources of income. Important information has been preserved by the monks in manuscripts, the majority of which found itself in libraries and museums of Western Europe and the United States. Some monasteries were real centres of knowledge.[53]

In a 12th century work attributed to ʿAmrū bin Mattā Aṭ-Ṭayrahānī and supplemented by Mārī bin Sulaymān[54] it has been noted that the "Nestorian" Catholicos ʿAbdīšōʿ I (963–986) ordained in the year 960 a bishop named Sulaymān for the Syriac/Assyrian community in Egypt; that the Catholicos Sabrīšōʿ III Zanbūr (1061–1072) ordained the monk Yuḥanna from Ḥdīṯa (northern Iraq) a bishop in Egypt; that the ordination of Catholicos Makkīḵā I (1092–1109) was attended by the Syriac/Assyrian bishop of Egypt named Marqos; and that the Patriarch Eliyya II, called Ibn al-Muqalli (1111–1131), moved the bishop of Halwan[55] (unnamed) to Egypt (Ṭayrahānī 2012, pp. 372, 391, 412). This information allows us to conclude that unlike the Syriacs/Assyrians who belong to SOC, the Asyrians of the "Nestorian" branch living in Egypt had survived the wave of persecutions by the Fatimid Caliph Al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (996–1021), described by the Arab sources as follows:[56]

> The Caliph ordered his governors to allow Muslims to destroy churches and monasteries. Over the period of two years (1012–1014) in Egypt, Syria and neighbouring provinces more than 30 thousand temples were ruined, golden and silver liturgic vessels were confiscated, real estate and land was expropriated. Some Christians converted to Islam, some ran away to the Byzantine territory, as well as to Nubia and Abyssinia, others lived in hiding.[57]

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[53] A comprehensive and critical description of monasteries is presented in the monumental work by White (1932, p. 552).

[54] The names of these authors sound Arabic, but they were neither Arabs nor Muslims, just as many other authors who wrote their works in Arabic.

[55] The town of such name is located in Persia, not far from Kermanshah, near the mid-western stretch of the border with Iraq. Naṣrī (1905, Vol. 1, p. 509) claims that the city of Sulaymaniyya in the present-day Kirkuk diocese in northern Iraq was built on its ruins.

[56] The Caliph's title translates as "One who Rules on Allah's Orders".

[57] Diāb 1898, p. 47.

Dayr as-Suryān

Dayr as-Suryān, meaning "Monastery of the Syriacs," also known as Monastery of the Mother of God, is currently the only known object keeping the memory of hundreds of Syriac monks and great Church Fathers, while also being a witness to lasting relations between the Syriac and Coptic Churches.

The exact year in which the monastery was founded is unknown; the discrepancy between the oldest (603) and most recent (836) date given by various sources exceeds two hundred years. The information about the circumstances of founding is just as chaotic: the Syriacs defending the earlier date attribute its beginnings to merchants of Tikrit (contemporary Iraq) led by Mārūṯa bār Ḥabīb. Having noticed the increased outflow of monks from that city into Egypt, as well as their determination, those merchants decided—according to one version—to built a monastery for them, or—according to another version—to buy an existing one from the Copts in order to extend it and furnish with manuscripts collected from other centres on the way to Egypt. Others, mainly Copts, are of the opinion that the monastery was built after the Berber attack on the monks in Wādī an-Naṭrūn in 817. The Syriac monks, having found themselves in dispersion, decided to build a monastery for themselves. Here appear the names of three originators of the idea, all monks from Tikrit in Mesopotamia: Mātāy, Afrem and Yaʿqūb (the first two supposedly brothers). After their small Mār Mīḫōyel monastery were destroyed, they began to construct a new residence for themselves, to which they took only ten remaining manuscripts. A third theory states that the idea for the monastery, which was meant to bring together the numerous dispersed Syriac monks of Egypt, came from Patriarch Mār Dionosiyyos Telmaḥrōyō (817–845), who had arrived in Egypt together with Caliph Al-Ma'mūn after the Coptic insurgency against the Muslim rule.[58] Regardless of which version is closest to the truth, the monastery grew more and more famous with centuries and monks from Palestine, Phoenicia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia began to settle there.[59]

Names of several priors were preserved in the sources. One of the first, who is known to occupy this position in 720, was Mārūṯā bār Ḥabīb from Tikrit (a different Mārūṯā from the aforementioned). His successors, whom

[58] More on the Berber invasion and Patriarch Dionosiyyos's visit see Abdalla 2018a, pp. 143–162.

[59] In December 1712 the monastery was visited by the French Jesuit C. Sicard (1677–1726), who described it as the most interesting one in Wādī an-Naṭrūn, with a garden full of trees. He found it inhabited by fifteen monks whose diet was based on lentil and bread (it was probably a period of fasting unknown to the Jesuit). More on this monastery and its role in the Syro-Coptic relations see Den Heijer 2000, pp. 923–938.

Armala managed to identify, included: Sewīrā Quryaqos (in 773), Anbā Yausef (in 798), Bār ʻĪdō (in 866), Yūḥānon bār Maqārī (in 894), Mūšē Nṣībīnōyō (from Nisibis) (in 920), Ṣalībā (in 962), Dāwūd (in 1007), Yūḥānon (his predecessor's brother) (after 1007), Bāseliyyos (in 1222), Yēšūʻ (in 1237), ʻBēḏ-Mšīḥō (in 1483), Sāwīros Quriaqos (originating from the area near Tripoli, Lebanon) (in 1492), Sāwīros (from March 15, 1516), Eliʻōzor (date unknown), Qusṭanṭin I and Qusṭanṭin II (dates unknown).[60]

The library of Dayr as-Suryān Monastery

The history of the library of Dayr as-Suryān Monastery in Wādī an-Naṭrūn and the fate of its collections is described by White.[61] Armala[62] in turn reported that the library used to contain hundreds of manuscripts, some of which were authored by resident monks, while others were translations or duplicates. Most were donated or deposited at the monastery in order to save them from dangers. A few works, except for those written in Arabic, were dated to the 5th and 6th century. Some works were in Greek or Coptic.

Library collection grew as Syriac monks from different towns in today's Syria, Palestine, Turkey and Iraq moved to this monastery, taking with them books which they treated as spiritual provisions, but also which they wanted to spare from frequent attacks by Kurds or Turks. Those people had no written traditions and looked with disdain at written word in the language of infidels.

Most manuscripts arrived in the monastery in the first half of the 10th century. The prior at the time, Mūsa (Moses) from Nisibis, had travelled around Syria and Mesopotamia for six years, looking for both financial help for the indebted monastery and manuscripts for the monastic community. In 927 he acquired 250 volumes in Baghdad, which he bound and catalogued upon his arrival in the monastery. Valuable works were calligraphed by scribes, also

[60] Armala 1925, pp. 42–44. Toson (1996, pp. 45–46) lists monasteries located in this valley, including two with Syriac names: Kūmā (Kāmā, Ukāmā, meaning Black, from the name of its founder, Yūḥānōn Kāmā, Ḥannā al-Aswad in Arabic. In the next edition of the book only the Arabic translation of the name is mentioned: al-Aswad = Black), with 25 monks around the year 1000, and the monastery called Suryānī, i.e. Syriac, with 60 monks. In 1931 the former did not exist, while the latter was inhabited by 49 monks. The same book mentions that in the 4th century there could be up to 50 monasteries in the valley, with up to 50,000 hermits. Omar Toson (1872–1944) was a great-grandson of the wali of Egypt, Muḥammad ʻAlī Pasha. Between January 23 and 27, 1799, the valley was visited by General Andréossy, one of Napoleon's men, who described each monastery in detail.

[61] White 1932, pp. 439–458.

[62] Armala 1925, pp. 42–44.

in order to practice their writing. The colophon in a 1262 work states: "Calligraphed and bound in 1492." In another colophon we can read:

> I, humble servant, Father Tūmā of Mardin, when entered the monastery in the year 1624, saw an orderly library with 403 manuscripts in corresponding departments.[63]

In subsequent centuries however the manuscripts of Dayr as-Suryān, in a more or less controlled way, moved to other locations. One of them, dated 569 and including speeches by Antiochian Patriarch Severus († 538)[64], included a note written in hand by Patriarch Mār Mīḫōyel Rābō:

> This book we took from Egypt to Syria and decided to preserve in the monastery of Mār Barṣaumā in Melitene[65], in the patriarchal library. This note we wrote in the year 1190.

A dozen manuscripts have been moved to St Mark's monastery in Jerusalem that belongs to the SOC. One of these, from the 11th century, contains a note:

> This is one of the 250 manuscripts which Father Mūsā of Nisibis took to the Monastery of the Mother of God in the Egyptian Sketis, and which is property of the aforementioned Monastery.[66]

Others returned to their original locations, often with a detour. The Uniate patriarchal library in Baghdad was enriched with a book dated 1346, containing the correspondence of patriarchs of the Eastern Churches. Returned to Mardin, it arrived in Baghdad after the seat of the Uniate "Chaldean" Church was moved there.[67] The notes included in the book show that it had been read by both "Jacobites" and "Nestorians."

Some manuscripts can be encountered even in private homes in Alexandria or Cairo, which is confirmed by the Syriac Father Faulos Sabat of Aleppo, who, serving in Cairo in 1915, saw and touched 8th and 9th century manuscripts.

In the 18th century the Middle Eastern Christians, marginalized and discriminated against by the Muslim rulers for hundreds of years, were subject

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[63] De Tarrazi 1947, pp. 545–549.

[64] Patriarch Severus spent the last 20 years of his life in Egypt, hiding from Byzantine persecution. Probably that is where his speeches were collected and written down, even though the Syriac monastery was built later.

[65] It was an important monastery, from where originated five patriarchs and forty-three bishops. Between 11th and 13th century it was the Patriarch's residence. Several times devastated and burned down by the Kurds in the mid-17th century it descended into ruin.

[66] Dolabany 1994, p. 469.

[67] The proselytic activity of the Catholic Church among the Christians of Mardin began in 1641, when first Capuchin monks appeared in the city. By Pope Pius IX's decree of March 18, 1852, Mardin became the headquarters of the ex-SOC Uniate Patriarchate (De Tarrazi 1910, p. 16).

to mass proselytic activity by the Vatican. Head of the French Jesuit mission to the Copts C. Sicard informs:

> In the year 1707 Pope Clement XI delegated the Maronite Elias Assemani (As-Sim'ānī) to Egypt; he returned to Rome with forty manuscripts taken from an Syriac monastery. Their professional compilation was commissioned to the intellectual Joseph Assemani, a relative of Elias.[68] The high quality of the job compelled the Pope to task Joseph in the year 1715 with collecting further manuscripts. This time the yield was even higher: 400 Syriac volumes, 75 Coptic, 171 Arabic and a dozen Greek. Those which the monks refused to sell even for gold by weight equivalent, Joseph is said to have transcribed on the spot.[69]

There are some doubts concerning the information that the prize was divided between three ships and sent to Vatican by sea; two of the ships supposedly sank, together with the manuscripts, after being overthrown by strong winds.

The information about those manuscripts evoked European scholars' interest with the language and literature of Middle Eastern Christians as an essential addition to the ideas of the Orient perpetuated by Muslim literature, translated in Spain into European languages. Looking for manuscripts, almost to exhaustion, Italians, Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen and others began to tour the Middle East. In the years 1838 and 1842 Englishman Henry Tattam bought at the Mother of God monastery 300 manuscripts preserved on parchment, which he donated to the British Museum.[70] Some of the books ended up in libraries in Paris, Berlin, Oxford, Cambridge, Milan and many other cities.

After the Dayr Aš-Šurfa monastery was built in 1786 for the Syriac Uniates in Lebanon, the Patriarch Iġnāṭiyyos Michael III Ǧarwa (1782–1800) delegated Father Šukralla Barāġīṯ to Egypt in order to collect donations, liturgical vessels and manuscripts for this purpose. The most generous donor was said to be Ḥannā Ǧarwa, the Patriarch's brother residing in Cairo. Among the 13 manuscripts taken from the Mother of God monastery were the *Book of Psalms* from 1498, *Speeches of Isḥāq of Nineveh* from 998 and 1195,[71] a 1000-pages-long compilation by Abū Šākir ibn ar-Rāhib ibn al-Muhaḏḏab from 1280 (written in *garšūnī* script in the Saffron monastery in Turkey ca. 1745), as well as others, originating from the Nineveh Valley in northern Iraq, dated: 1261, 1409, 1593, 1605, 1680, 1754.

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[68] In Rome there was a Maronite collegium, erected on June 27, 1584, by Pope Gregory XIII, and run by the Jesuites.

[69] De Tarrazi 1947, p. 546; 'Alī 1983, vol. 6, p. 193.

[70] The oldest copy of the New Testament in Syriac designated syr^{s} (4th century), deposited in the British Museum, originated from the Ṭūr Sīnā monastery (St Catherine of Sinai) (De Tarrazi 1947, p. 551). Barṣaum (1976, p. 512) claims that in 1934 there were 280 Syriac manuscripts in Ṭūr Sīnā, which currently belongs to the Melkite Orthodox Church.

[71] ŠēḤō 1909; De Tarrazi 1947, p. 493.

These and other works have been described by ARMALA.[72] Vatican used to take away manuscripts even from this library, seemingly not endangered, with the silent approval of its owners. So did in 1880 Father Agostino Ciasca (later Cardinal) with 18 manuscripts, the oldest of which had no date while the others had been written in 1343 or later. Their list was published in the introduction to the aforementioned book by I. ARMALA, pp. V–VI. Most manuscripts are dated according to the Coptic calendar, which starts in the year of enthronement of Emperor Diocletian (284), called Year of the Martyrs.[73]

Syro-Mesopotamian borrowings in Coptic

Modern Copts speak Arabic, while Coptic is only used in liturgy. However, centuries-long contacts with the non-Arabic, Syro-Mesopotamic neighbour and the close relationship between the two Churches had to result in linguistic influences. Interestingly, those influences are only observed in one direction: from Syro-Mesopotamia to Egypt.

The Copts borrowed and adapted many notions, terms, formulas and words from the Syriac language, which is used to this day not only in liturgy, but also in everyday life. According to A. VÖÖBUS[74], even the ascetics in the deserts adopted their name *abba* "father" which is a Syriac term. A frequent term in both literature and speech is *ṭūbānī* (from ܛܘܒܢܐ *ṭūbōnō* "blessed"), with the sound *n* instead of the Arabic *ṭūbāwī* (طوباوي) with a *w*. A popular Coptic verb is *tanayyaḥa* (تَنَيَّحَ) (from ⲉⲧⲛⲏϩ *eṭṭnīḥ* "he rested, he passed away, he went to God"),[75] which fully replaced the Arabic *irtāḥa* (ارْتاحَ). In the Lord's Prayer the verb *li-ya'ti* (لِيَأْتِ—"come"), indicating the masculine gender of the Kingdom as it is in Arabic, has been replaced by the Copts with *li-ta'ti* (لِتَأْتِ, from ⲧⲏⲧⲉ *tīṭē*), according to the Syriac rule, where "Kingdom" is feminine.[76] In lieu of the Arabic word *ṭanāwul* (تَناوُل), *stricte* meaning receiving communion, the Copts use *aḫḏ* (أَخْذ), which is a direct translation of the Syriac ܢܨܝܒܘܬܐ *nsībūṭō* ("receiving, taking").

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[72] ARMALA 1936, pp. 18, 38–39, 211, 283–184, 366.

[73] ISKANDAR 2012, Part 4, p. 49.

[74] VÖÖBUS 1988, pp. 8–14.

[75] Clergymen are however described with the verb *šānī* (moved on, departed; Arabic *intaqala*), while *eṭṭnīḥ* (rested) is more often used to describe laypeople, especially those who passed away after a long illness. The verb *tanayyaḥ* is used not only by Copts, but also by Egyptian Muslims, which indicates that the latter have borrowed it from the former. The same verb in the form *nayyiḥhum*—"Bestow peace upon them," is used in the Coptic church when praying for the dead.

[76] There is no neutral grammatical gender in Arabic.

In the Coptic liturgical book, published in 1903, in spite of revisions there are still many words of Syriac (Aramaic) origin, e.g. *kanīsa* "church" (from ܟܢܘܫܬܐ *knuštō* "gathering")[77], *bī'a* (from ܒܝܥܬܐ *bi'tā* "egg")[78], *qass* (from ܩܫܝܫܐ *qāšīšō* "priest, presbyter")[79], *šammās* (from ܫܡܫܐ *šāmōšō* "deacon, altar boy")[80], *išbīn* (from ܐܝܫܒܝܢܐ *šaušbīnō* "representative, sponsor, guardian", i.e. godfather) [81], *rašama* (from ܪܫܡ *ršām* "to ordain")[82], *maymar* (from ܡܐܡܪܐ *mimrō* "speech, sermon"), *abbahātunā* (from ܐܒܗܬܢ *ābōhōṯān* "our Fathers") (instead of correct Arabic: آباؤنا *ābā'unā*), *ḥiāṣā* (from ܚܨܐ *ḥyōṣō* "belt—part of a priest's liturgical robe"), *abbā* and *anbā* (from ܐܒܐ *ābō* "father")[83], *mart* (from ܡܪܬ *mort/i/* "Lady, female saint"), *rā'ī* (from ܪܥܝ *ra'yā* "shepherd"), as well as *ra'iyya* (from ܡܪܥܝܬܐ *mar'īṯā*—"flock")[84], *batūl* (from ܒܬܘܠܬܐ *bṯultā* "the Virgin")[85], *ṭūr* (from ܛܘܪܐ *ṭūrā* "mountain")[86].

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[77] This term is common in Arabic, originating from Aramaic *kānēš*—"to collect, to gather," related to the Hebrew *kneset*—"the gathering." The Arabic writers of the Middle Ages often used *kannāš* meaning "a collection, compendium."

[78] The accepted interpretation relates a dome crowning a building with the shape of an egg, especially in the areas where the Aramaic language was widely used. An oval dome has been conceived not just as an aesthetic decoration—its most important function was practical, dictated by the climate, as it ensures internal air circulation depending on the angle of falling sunrays. Iskandar (2012, p. 18) mistakenly explains the origin of the word *bī'a* as a noun derived from the Arabic verb *ibtā'a*—"to buy out," relating it to the idea of human sins being "bought out" with the blood of Christ. Domes are rare in Coptic church architecture.

[79] The noun *qāšīšō* means an old man or—in family relations—grandfather. It conveys the meaning of the Greek word πρεσβύτερος (presbyter, church elder).

[80] The signifcance and role of the *šāmōšō* (from the noun *šāmēš* "to serve") are identical to the Greek name διάκονος. This word is also known to the Arabs as *šammās*, specifically in countries with a Christian population.

[81] Iskandar 2012, Part 1, pp. 17, 20, 22, 72; Part 2, p. 31. The last four terms: *kanīsa*, *qass*, *šammās* and *išbīn* are commonly used by Arabic-speaking Christians. In Syriac the first term describes the community of believers, while a church building is described with the word *'īt/d/ō*.

[82] The verb *ršām* and its Arabic counterpart رَسَمَ *rasama* have many meanings, including: to stake off, to appoint, to indicate, to draw, to sculpt, to note, to assign, to flag, as well as to make the sign of the cross (Smith 1998, p. 551). The noun *rašm* (pl. *rušūmāt*) in Coptic liturgy means to give blessing or perform a purification ritual by making the sign of the cross with a hand or with a cross, as well as anointing the ill with oil.

[83] Also Melchite (post-Chalcedon, both Orthodox and Uniate) Copts address their Patriarch with this title.

[84] Clergymen in Islam are not described as shepherds. In the Semitic culture a shepherd is associated with sheep rearing, therefore the word *ra'iyya* should be translated not as "flock", but rather as "herd".

[85] The Mother of God is more often described in Arabic with the equivalent *'aḏrā'*, while the word *batūl* also refers to a hermit.

[86] E.g. Ṭūr Sīnā (Mount Sinai). The 52nd Sura of the Quran also bears the name Ṭūr (aṭ-Ṭūr), hence this word is commonly known not just by Arabs, but by all Muslims.

In the Coptic calendar, there remain two feasts with a Syriac-sounding name: *ʿĪd as-Sullāq* (from ܣܘܠܩܐ *sūlaqā* "Ascension") and *ʿĪd ad-Dinḥ* (from ܕܢܚܐ *denḥō* "Appearance of the Trinity, Epiphany, Baptism of Christ")[87]. Finally even in the title of the Coptic Pope: "Bābā al-Iskandariyya wa Baṭiryark al-Karāza al-Marqusiyya" (Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of Mark's Teaching) the word *karāza* is of Syriac origin (from ܟܘܪܘܙܘܬܐ *kōrūzūṯō*, meaning Gospel, teaching, sermon), while St Mark the Evangelist is described in Coptic writings with the verbal participle *kārūz* (ܟܪܘܙܐ *kōrūzō* "the preacher," from ܟܪܙ *krāz*, ܐܟܪܙ *akrēz* "preach the Gospel, say a sermon")[88]. Among other terms the ones worth mentioning are: *tadšīn* (probably cognate of the verb ܬܕܫܢ *dāšēn* "to offer")[89], *syāmīḏ* (a merger of two Syriac words: ܣܝܡܐ *syāmā* "placement" and ܐܝܕܐ *ʾīḏō* "hand"), that is "placement of hands"—ordination, consecration.[90]

A branch of the Coptic Church is the Ethiopian Church, where Syro-Mesopotamian priests also served in different periods of time. It has to be noted that the Bible was translated into Geez from Syriac, which is why it contains numerous borrowings from that language. The Ethiopian church uses the Anaphor of St James, Lord's Brother, slightly modified by St Basil the Great († 379), and at the end of a service a prayer in Syriac is said, beginning with words: ܡܪܝ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܠܐ ܬܣܟܪ ܠܢ ܒܪܚܡܝܟ ܕܐܦ (Our Lord Jesus Christ, do not lock the doors of Thy grace before us), while the *trisagion* ends with the words: ܕܨܠܝܒܬ ܥܠܝܢ (Thou who wast crucified for our sake).

Additional evidences

The close relations between the Syrian and Coptic Churches are seen also in the content of colophons in Syriac manuscripts, regardless of where they were written. The authors or scribes tend to mention in the last sentence the reigning Patriarch of both Antioch and Alexandria, which reflects the idea

[87] The names of both feasts appear in DIĀB 1898, p. 144. *Denḥō* (from the verb ܕܢܚ *dnāḥ*) means "appearance, rising." To this day some Eastern Churches celebrate Christmas on the night of 6th–7th January, when other churches which had accepted the Gregorian calendar celebrate the Baptism of Christ, while others celebrate the so-called "Three Kings," or Revelation of Christ.

[88] In the title of the chapter describing the life of St Mark the Evangelist, MIṢRĪ (2003, vol. 3, p. 20) used the word *kārūz*.

[89] In Arabic the word *tadšīn* describes inauguration, first use (e.g. of a garment), while the parallel word *takrīs* (consecration) does not point to a spiritual celebration. Both terms are understood by Christians as the consecration of a building. The Arab equivalent of this celebration is *taqdīs*.

[90] The word *syāmīḏ*, encountered in many words in Arabic even in the early 20th century, was eventually shortened to *syāma* or *siyāma*. The Arabic equivalent is *rasāma*.

of *primus inter pares* that is still alive to this day, but also allows to estimate the date of writing when it is not given explicitly.

Even in the 18th century the Syriacs in Egypt were a noticeable community. The first publishing house, established there by Napoleon in June 1798, was fitted with Syriac types, and the Emperor's decrees were printed in French, Arabic and Syriac.[91] Currently the Syriac comunity counts only several hundred members, with the Uniates as the dominant group.

In Egypt the Syriac language is officially taught since 1908, currently at thirteen state universities. The pioneer of Syro-Mesopotamian literature study in the country was a Copt, Murād Kāmil († 1975), the first author of the work *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suryānī*, which has been quoted in this article. Syriac was known by the famous Egyptian writer and scholar Ṭāhā Ḥusein († 1973), who even made speeches in this language, which he mentions in the third volume of his work *Al-Ayyām.*[92] The activity of Egyptian syrologists is attested to by their participation in international conferences, as well as by the fact that a work by an Egyptian author, usually in linguistics, appears in almost every issue of the Iraqi-published Syrian quarterly "Simta."

Conclusions

From the analysis of several common elements in liturgy and language, it can be seen that the Coptic and Syriac Antiochian Orthodox Churches have very deep common tradition traced back to the Apostolic times. During the two millenia, many patriarchs from one Church were reigning over the other, ordination of each other's priests took place, monasteries were built on each other's territory, where up to hundreds of monks of both denominations served, including famous theologians, writers, translators and scholars. Among the ancient Apostolic Churches only these two conserved an unbroken, transparent and full ecclesiastical unity, nurturing the complementary heritages not just nominally at the level of Church hierarchy or complicated theological issues. They are true sister Churches, also literally: in Semitic languages the word "Church" is feminine. At the same time both retain its national and cultural genuinity and kept administrative boundaries of each other with true respect. This millenia-long tradition of mutual support brings hope and positive perspective on the conflicts-torn region of the Middle East.

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[91] Bustānī 1884, p. 152.

[92] Ḥusein 1978, vol. 3., pp. 54–55. *Al-Ayyām*, Cairo 1978, vol. 3, pp. 54–55. The first volume was annotated as 55th edition, the second as 26th edition and the third as 4th edition.

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