

Fragmented Geographies: The See of Alexandria, Its Following, and the Estrangements of  
Modernity

Joshua T. Georgy

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Fragmented Geographies: The See of Alexandria, Its Following, and the Estrangements of Modernity**

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This dissertation focuses on the ecclesiastical formation of the Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian See and its following, primarily during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For hundreds of years, this Christian Orthodox communion had a distinctive "geography" which, in a sense, has been "carved up" in the modern period. Today, its territories are incorporated within the boundaries of a number of national states, while the sweeping abstraction of "world regions" has bisected the territorial reaches of communion, assigning one parcel to the "Middle East" and the other to "Africa." This fragmentation is reflected in the scholarship, where the "parts" of this geography have been scattered across multiple, and sometimes mutually isolated fields of inquiry. In the coming chapters, we set out in search of an Alexandrian Orthodox Oecumene which modern discourses, constructs and analytical frames have concealed. We will shed light on various dimensions of a formation which was constituted by myriad relationships and characterized by nebulous frontiers. We will contemplate an arrangement in which "Egyptian" Copts, "Ethiopian" Orthodox and others were linked in shared communion, while situating this within the wider context of an ancien regime order. We will also explore the metaphorical hinterlands of communion, where manifold relationships existed linking Christians and Muslims, monks and bedouin and others, sometimes in most intimate ways. Over the course of these chapters, we will follow processes, discourses and conceptual changes of the nineteenth century that invaded the "hinterlands," severing and reordering relationships while gradually erecting an edifice of boundaried constructs (territorial, institutional, communal.) The exploration of these

novelties, together with a host of starkly drawn binaries (among them "religious"/"secular" and "spiritual"/"temporal") will provide insights into the emergence of modern nation-states, national minorities and national churches. But the apparition of these restricting and fragmenting objects coincided with an apparently paradoxical development; the so-called "globalization" of the patriarchal see of Alexandria. This set of circumstances is inexplicable without a rigorous inquiry into the profound transformations that have characterized the modern period. The coming chapters constitute, collectively, a building block to this larger purpose.



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## GLOSSARY

- abun** Literally "our father." Historically, this was one of the primary titles for the metropolitan archbishop in Ethiopia.
- aqalim** districts (plural of *iqlim*)
- arkhon (pl. arakhina)** Term for high ranking Coptic notables. Derived from the Greek "arkhōn."
- dayr** monastery
- defterdar** senior official, sometimes referring to a chief treasurer
- dejazmach** Traditional Ethiopian military title. Literally "commander of the gate," but used as an honorific for provincial rulers (a rank below "ras")
- echage** the head of the Ethiopian monastic system. He ranked second to the *abun* in the church hierarchy.
- Fetha Nagast** traditional Ethiopian religious/civil law code
- Galla** - dated term for the Oromo, a Cushitic-speaking ethnic group, inhabiting regions of modern Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.
- gult** term for non-heritable grants in traditional Ethiopian land tenure, often awarded by the crown in exchange for some service.
- hukumdar** title of the governor-general of the Sudan provinces during most of the period of Turco-Egyptian rule.
- iltizam** tax farm
- itege** empress
- ka'aba** Islamic sacred site at Mecca
- kashef** district governor
- kiswa** The ornamental covering for the Ka'aba in Mecca.
- feddan** measure of land, only standardized during the nineteenth century. Approximately equivalent to an acre.
- mahmal** palanquin used during the Islamic Hajj. This was a central feature of the pilgrimage, and a sign of sultanic authority.
- makanent (makwanint)** appointed nobility, frequently of humble origins.
- mesafint** hereditary princes.
- millet** lit. "nation." The "millet system" refers to the pluralistic system whereby various religious confessions were granted a degree of legal autonomy in matters related to personal status law.
- miri** tax reserved for the state treasury.
- mu'allim** title for prominent Copts in areas of finance and administration
- mubashir** "steward." Title for high-ranking Coptic officials.
- multazim** tax farmer.
- mutran** metropolitan (archbishop).
- negus** Ethiopian title for king or emperor.
- Pseudo-canons of Nicaea**
- qadi** judge in Islamic legal system
- qa'immaqam** "sub-governor"
- Qibla** direction of prayer in Islam.
- ras** powerful regional
- rist** heritable usufruct rights in traditional Ethiopian land tenure.
- ruznamgi** The official who oversaw the *ruzename*

**ruzname** the primary administrative bureau for the treasury of Misr to which all the other divisions of the treasury were subordinated.

**sarraḥ** money changer, collector of taxes

**sharif** In Islam, one who is recognized as a descendent of the prophet. Pl. *ashraf*.

**sudd** massive swamplands along the White Nile in the Sudan which hindered navigation

**tanzimat** "reorganization." Ottoman term for the programs of modern "reforms" initiated during the nineteenth century, beginning in 1839.

**tariqa** generic term for a specific Sufi order; lit. "path."

**'ulema** Term for Islamic scholars, in the collective.

**wakil** agent or steward

**waqf** Pious foundation

**Zemene Mesafint** "Era of the Princes," often used to describe the period in Ethiopian history between 1769 and 1855, when the central authority was weak and multiple provincial grandees competed for ascendancy

#### **LIST OF ANTI-CHALCEDONIAN PATRIARCHS OF ALEXANDRIA, 1676-PRESENT**

Yuannis XVI (1676-1718)  
Butrus VI (1718-1726)  
Yuannis XVII (1727-1745)  
Murqus VII (1745-1769)  
Yuannis XVIII (1769-1796)  
Murqus VIII (1796-1809)  
Butrus VII (al-Gawali) (1809-1852)  
Kirulus IV (1854-1861)  
Demetrius II (1861-1870)  
Kirulus V (1874-1927)  
Yuannis XIX (1928-1942)  
Makarius III (1944-1945)  
Yusab II (1946-1956)  
Kirulus VI (1959-1971)  
Shenuda III (1971-2012)  
Tawadros II (2012-)

#### **LIST OF ABUNS OF AL-HABASH, 1635-1959**

Murqus VIII (1635-1672)  
Krestodolos II (1640-1672)  
Shenuda (1672-1687)  
Murqus IX (1689-?)  
Murqus X (1694-1716)  
Krestodolos III (1718-1745)  
Yohannes XIV (1747-1770)  
Yusab III (1770-1803)  
Makarius (1808)

Kirulus III (1816-1828/9)  
Salama III (1841-1867)  
Atnatewos II (1868-1876)  
Butrus VII (1876-1889)  
Matewos X (1889-1926)  
Kirulus IV (1926-1936) - deposed by the Italians  
Abraham (1936-1939)  
Yohannes XV (1939-1945)  
Kirulus IV (1945-1950) - restored  
Basilius (1951-1959)

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## Introduction

### "Fragmented Geographies"

This project began with a number of interrelated questions. How has "Coptic Christianity" become identified as a "minority religion" of the modern national state? What would a regional approach to the study of "Coptic history" look like, and could such a framework serve as a strategy for breaking free from the constraints of "minority" history? Certainly there were many incentives for casting the net beyond the territorial boundaries of modern Egypt. The Coptic bishop (patriarch) of Alexandria was the head of a communion that had a presence in the "Holy Land" from the early Christian centuries, and that had its own metropolitan (*mutran*) for Jerusalem since the thirteenth century. Additionally, his see comprised dioceses and archdioceses covering, at various periods of history, the North African littoral, the regions of Egypt and Nubia, and territories that are within the boundaries of the modern state of the Sudan. Perhaps most compelling, the patriarchal see has also encompassed regions within what is today the national state of Ethiopia. In an arrangement that lasted well over 1000 years, the sprawling archdiocese of "*al-Habash*" was, according to the pseudo-canon of the church Council of Nicaea, required to have a metropolitan archbishop from the "country" of the bishop of Alexandria, or at least from outside the territories of *al-Habasha*. When translated into the parlance of modern nations, the "foreign" prelate would come to be described anachronistically as the "Egyptian" head of the "Ethiopian" church, and the relationship was sometimes characterized as one of ecclesiastical imperialism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The national model has been pervasive in the scholarship. For examples of Alexandrian Orthodoxy as "national" Christianity, see Edward Hardy, "The Patriarchate of Alexandria: A Study in National Christianity." *Church History* 15 no. 2 (1946): 81-100; and *Christian Egypt: Church and People, Christianity and Nationalism in the Patriarchate of Alexandria*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952). To emphasize the distinctly Egyptian character of the church, he even referred to the Late Antique patriarchs of Alexandria as the "Pharaohs of the Church," and argued that "the history of the Coptic Church, ancient and modern, shows that the Christianity which can survive in Egypt... [combines] the universal Christian tradition with national thought." (*Christian Egypt*, 79, 200).

Despite this "regional" story, historical attention to ecclesiastical dimensions beyond the boundaries of modern Egypt has been slight. In recent decades, there has been considerably more interest in the "globalization" of Coptic Christianity as Coptic diasporic communities developed in Europe, North America, Australia and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> But quiet assumptions often seem to undergird this story; that of an ancient form of Christianity at last breaking out of its provincial, largely "Egyptian" margins by virtue of the interventions of modernity. The Coptic Church, so the narrative has sometimes gone, even regained its evangelical moorings - which had disappeared for 13 centuries - spreading to many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, partly in response to the appeal of an "authentic," apostolic, "African" Christianity in the postcolonial period.<sup>3</sup> As this story unfolded, a seemingly contradictory process was underway, which has arguably reinforced the image of the "provincial" Christian relic. The centuries-long

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As for the claims of ecclesiastical imperialism, these probably originated in the 1920s. At that time, *Abuna* Matewos was sometimes criticized for his "Coptic imperialism;" Calvin Shenk, "The Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Its Relationship with the Ethiopian Government from 1930 to 1970," (PhD diss., New York University, 1972), 61. In the mid-1950s, as the Ethiopian Church was on the cusp of complete autocephaly, the Greek Orthodox archbishop of Aksum, Nicolas, offered his own commentary on the "Coptic-Ethiopian" connection. He considered it to be nothing more than an historical accident owing to Ethiopia's severance from the rest of Mediterranean Christendom. This "seclusion," he noted, "brought it fatally and involuntarily into the arms of the Jacobite (Coptic) Church in Egypt." The intercultural processes and other dynamics of this long-term relationship were elided in favor of a nationalist reading of church history in which the Ethiopian Church became a "'sui generis' branch of the ancient eastern church." The "long dependency" was all the more remarkable, he added, "in view of the strong nationalist feeling of Ethiopians. A general heartfelt desire lulled each Ethiopian: 'A free Church in a free State!'" Nicolas, Archbishop of Axum, *Church's Revival: Emancipation from 1600 years of guardianship, Free Church in a Free State achieved by His Majesty Haile Selassie Ist*, (Cairo: Costa Tsoumas & Co. Press, ~1955), 12, 14.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Ghada Botros' fascinating "Religious Identity as an Historical Narrative: Coptic Orthodox Immigrant Churches and the Representation of History," in *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19, no. 2 (June 2006): 174-201. She explores the Coptic Church's narration of its history, particularly as it "transcends the national boundaries of Egypt" to serve the needs of a growing Coptic diaspora. By contrast, our present study is not so much concerned with the transcendence of national boundaries, but with a historical development that brought those very boundaries into being.

<sup>3</sup> For Christians living under racist colonial regimes, the appeal of apostolic, "non-colonial" communions was attractive. It is not clear whether queries were directed to the Anti-Chalcedonian see of Alexandria before mid-century. However other sees (including the Greek Orthodox - Melkite - see of Alexandria) had been approached from the 1920s. For the origin and spread of these movements, see Theodore Natsoulas, "Patriarch McGuire and the Spread of the African Orthodox Church to Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12, no. 2 (1982): 81-104. The African Orthodox Church originated among African American Episcopalians in the United States who desired an independent, apostolic church. Their first patriarch, George Alexander McGuire (Patriarch Alexander I) claimed apostolic succession from Saint Peter, by way of the Anti-Chalcedonian (Syriac) see of Antioch; A.C. Terry-Thompson, *The History of the African Orthodox Church* (New York, 1956), 41-42; 49-52.

ecclesiastical relationship with Ethiopia strained under the pressures of these same modern processes, and the Ethiopian Church ultimately achieved autocephaly in 1959. Meanwhile, the Coptic presence in the Sudan, Palestine, Libya and elsewhere would settle on the peripheries of a mainly "Egyptian" national Christian story.

This dissertation begins from the premise that during the nineteenth century, processes were inaugurated that effected a profound transformation of an ancient regional formation/communion, that of Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian Orthodoxy and its following. A range of novel practices and discourses began to eliminate or rearrange key features of a multilayered and diffuse order of relationships while giving rise to a constellation of bounded constructs. In denominating the "Alexandrian Orthodox communion" as a subject for study, we take pains to avoid simply replacing these with another construct that happens to be "regionally-inflected." Rather, we approach it as an intrinsically "transnational" starting point for thinking beyond territorial boundaries that continue to restrict the historical imagination. At the same time, it is a point of departure for transgressing other perceived boundaries - communal, institutional - that have their own genealogies and that have also acted to stunt the historical imagination. In the coming chapters, we seek out the cracks in established national, communal and other narratives, pursuing relationships and conventions that existed along a multiplicity of vaguely defined frontiers. We follow a historical trajectory which would not only make it possible to imagine a "Coptic minority" and a "Muslim majority," but also to imagine stark lines of separation between "Egyptians" and "Ethiopians" or between "Coptic Orthodoxy" and the Ethiopian "daughter church," and indeed between "Egypt" and "Africa."

The approximately 100-year period spanning the mid-eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries will serve as the principal focus for this study, although the varied themes of

the chapters will present occasion for reaching backward and forward in time. The first two chapters are largely devoted to the identification and analysis of an order that would become increasingly alien and even unrecognizable in the modern period. The final two chapters focus more specifically on the transformations that were to gradually send that order into eclipse. It is scarcely possible to overstate the significance of the changes that occurred during the nineteenth century and following. Yet, their very magnitude and complexity make it difficult to speak of them corporately without recourse to a vexingly ambiguous term. In the coming pages, we will speak frequently of "modernity" (and the "modern") and it is therefore necessary to provide an idea of what we intend by this unwieldy term. We have in mind the rising tide of "the West" and the corrosions of capital; novel modes of governance, techniques of power (surveillance, discipline) and forms of knowledge; the appearance of stark binaries and boundaries; the proliferation of Enlightenment principles and pretensions (objectivity, reason, moral autonomy, the secular) and the linked metanarratives of progress and civilization. We look to the edifice of what we are calling "modernity," and feel our way around its weighty beams and crossbeams. We do so in order to grasp some of its distinctive features, and to apprehend its capacity to so effectively efface earlier appreciations of time and space, kinds of connectivity, ways of knowing. Even as we contemplate these modern effects - the barriers of mind and radical reorientations toward time and space - we seek to evade them in search of lost histories at the heart and on the hinterlands of communion.

### **The Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian See and Its Following**

In the early centuries of the Church, Alexandria was the intellectual bastion of Christendom, and it later became the seat of one of the five ancient patriarchal

sees, alongside Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople. During the early fourth century, it was an Alexandrian bishop, Saint Athanasius, who led the fight against the Arian heresy and who was instrumental in clarifying and defining the orthodox understanding of the Trinity. But doctrinal disputes persisted across these early Christian centuries, and in 451 CE, a fateful ecumenical council was convened to resolve a Christological controversy. At issue was a question of the nature of the person who, according to orthodox Christianity, became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Some Christian communities (mostly those on the outer reaches of empire) rejected the canons of the Council of Chalcedon, arguing that it had yielded to the errors of Nestorius, which had been condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE.<sup>4</sup> These dissenting bodies, known today as the Oriental Orthodox or Anti-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches, include the Armenian, Syriac, Coptic and Ethiopian Tewahedo churches. The Council of Chalcedon thus gave rise to the first major schism in the universal church as the "Oriental Orthodox" bodies were separated from the (Latin) Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communions. After the council, there would be two patriarchal claimants to the See of Alexandria, one representing the "pro-Chalcedonian" party, and the other the vastly larger "anti-Chalcedonian" party. In the course of the present study, we will make guarded use of the term "Coptic" in certain contexts, although in addressing the "*transnational*" dimensions to the communion, the more inclusive expression "Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian Orthodoxy," is preferred.<sup>5</sup> Its

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<sup>4</sup> The theological divisions were probably at least in part the result of misunderstandings that were engendered in translation. In the discourses about the divinity and humanity of Jesus, "terminology," as Hardy noted, "was still fluid." Kirulus I (412-444 CE), the last Patriarch of Alexandria before the schism, used both *physis* (nature) and *hypostasis* (person) in reference to the "single concrete Being who is God and became man;" *Christian Egypt*, 106. Proponents of the council canons erroneously ascribed to its opponents a denial of the two *natures* of Christ, while the dissenters claimed (also erroneously) that its proponents denied the one *person* of Christ. For an excellent discussion of the doctrinal differences and the state of the scholarship on the topic, see Maged Mikhail, "Egypt from Late Antiquity to Early Islam: Copts, Melkites, and Muslims Shaping a New Society," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004), 130, 30-40.

<sup>5</sup> For simplicity, we will often abbreviate this to "Alexandrian Orthodoxy."

jurisdiction comprised the lands belonging to the evangelical mission territories of Saint Mark, who is regarded in pious tradition as the first bishop of Alexandria.

There is an indefinite quality to the jurisdictional reach of the see, a feature that will be very important over the course of this study. For now, we simply note that these vaguely defined territories suggest a particular and unique "geography" for study which naturally transgresses national and other barriers while inviting critical attention to the peculiarities of a modern regime that gave rise to those very barriers. Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian Orthodoxy is a rich historical idea, which was constituted by formal and informal relationships that enlivened the idea. It enables us to contemplate centuries of interaction, cultural and otherwise, that could connect people from remote localities in many ways. While the Alexandrian Orthodox communities of North Africa and the Sudan largely disappeared over the course of time, the idea of "Alexandrian Orthodoxy" lived on in the lands of "Egypt" and "Ethiopia" and elsewhere. In the sixteenth century, a most profound test to this endurance struck the "distant" lands of Ethiopia, where the royal court, facing an existential threat from the Adal Sultanate to the east, turned to the Portuguese for assistance. Jesuit fathers accompanied the Portuguese with the intention of initiating a union with the Catholic Church. Their endeavors were primarily directed toward the rulers and court officials, and in the seventeenth century Catholicism became the official religion of state when Emperor Susenyos transferred allegiance to Rome. Popular rebellions ensued, and eventually the allegiance of the church was restored to Alexandria under Susenyos' successor, Emperor Fasiladas. The profound disruptions of this period were so intense that Catholic missionaries were barred from the kingdom until the nineteenth century. Although this interlude began a long period of doctrinal disputation and factionalism, the foundational idea of the Orthodox Alexandrian inheritance remained.

The relationships and varied practices that constituted this idea were by no means confined to ecclesiastics and monks. Thus, in addressing the subject of the present study, we frequently speak of "Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian Orthodoxy *and its following*" or the "Alexandrian Orthodox *communion*." We do this with the intention of encompassing, at least in principle, all of those who identified with or belonged to the Alexandrian Orthodox communion. Here, three points of clarification are in order. In the first place, we do not wish to give the impression that Alexandrian Orthodoxy existed in isolation from other Christian "bodies" or churches. Certainly this patriarchal formation was part of a larger "family" of Anti-Chalcedonian churches, which included for example the Anti-Chalcedonian Church of Antioch. Although it is possible - and in some sense even more accurate - to speak of these bodies collectively as a "communion," we mainly deploy the term in a more specific, and even idiosyncratic way. It is true that the word "church" can also be understood as comprising all of the people who followed or belonged to Alexandrian patriarchal see. However, in common parlance this term is too easily identified specifically with ecclesiastical institutions, and we wish to avoid conveying this narrow connotation.

Our next point of qualification concerns the frontiers of the "communion" we have identified, which were porous and admitted varying degrees of inclusion and exclusion. We will have occasion to contemplate these nebulous frontiers, but not only as they applied to the wider communion of Anti-Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. In pondering a particular ancien regime order, we will explore the ways in which Muslims and other extra-confessional actors were admitted into the "life" of the communion, sometimes in very intimate ways.

Finally, we might anticipate a question that the reader may justifiably ask. Does our focus on the "religious" identification of the followers of Alexandrian Orthodoxy give "religion" or

"religious" topics too much prominence to the neglect of other "social" and "cultural" dimensions? At this point, we simply submit that the identification of a "religious" essence that may be isolated from other areas of life is a distinctly modern phenomenon, which in fact hinges on novel discourses of the secular. In the coming chapters, we eschew religious-secular binaries, while reflecting upon the distortions that these starkly drawn dichotomies have engendered in the scholarship. When the binaries are stripped away, an ostensibly "religious" subject perforce implicates numerous facets of human existence that today would hardly be defined as essentially "religious."

### **Relationships, Boundaries and Regional History**

In 1816, the ruler of the northern Ethiopian region of Tigre succeeded in acquiring from the Alexandrian patriarch in Cairo a metropolitan archbishop (*abun*) by the name of Kirulus III. Once the newly consecrated *abun* arrived in Tigre, he set out to confirm the historical rights that came with his office. During the second year of his tenure, he demanded control of certain lands that had traditionally belonged to the *abun*. When the acting governor of these districts objected to this demand, Kirulus placed an interdiction on all ecclesiastical activities. There would be no prayers over the dead, and anyone cooperating with the recalcitrant governor would be excommunicated. After a short while, Kirulus made an appearance at the weekly market, and discovering where the *negarit* (kettledrum) was held, he began beating upon this traditional symbol of governing power. His belligerent address, which was communicated through a translator, included the following remarks:

I desire that none of you buy or sell, take or bring anything to or from the market, eat or drink, or have any communication with each other, until the drum is beaten by order of ... Guebra Michael, to proclaim me governor over all the districts called Addi Abun, consisting of 220 towns and villages;



and all the soldiers, natives of said villages, shall be placed under my command.

The tactic was successful and Guebra Michael yielded to the episcopal ultimatum.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to his elevation to the episcopate Kirulus was a monk by the name of Mena, residing in a monastery in the Eastern Desert approximately 100 miles southeast of Cairo.<sup>7</sup> After he had been selected, a group of bedouin (usually referenced in late Ottoman sources as *'urban*) participated in his procurement, according to a long-established custom. They seized and escorted him to *Misr*, where he was prepared for the journey to his new archdiocese. While Kirulus' biography is sketchy, he may very well have been the son of a poor family of little notice. As the nineteenth century progressed, a regime that allowed an obscure, "uneducated" desert monk to attain positions of power would become increasingly out of place, at least from the point of view of an emergent strata of "enlightened" leaders and elites. A condition wherein "isolated" desert locales could represent loci of power would also place a strain on modern "enlightened" sensibilities.

This account of *Abuna* Kirulus is important for a number of reasons. In the first place, it cuts across multiple breaches of mind and draws into relief the kind of "interregional" connectivities that have largely fallen through the cracks of dominant frameworks in the scholarship. It also underscores the problematic nature of our interpretive categories and concepts. The geographic reach of "Coptic Christianity" since the middle of the twentieth century is many times larger than it ever was before, yet there have been profound changes to "religion" in its modern, universalized usage. The church has expanded across many continents, but the arrangements that constitute this burgeoning formation are much different than those

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<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Pearce, *The Life and Adventures of Nathaniel Pearce, Written by Himself, During a Residence in Abyssinia from the Years 1810 to 1819*, ed. J.J. Halls (London, 1831), 2:129-30, 217.

<sup>7</sup> Tawfiq Iskarius, *Nawabigh al-Aqbat wa Mashahirin fi'l Qarn al-Tasi' 'Ashar* (Cairo, 1910), 1:67.

which characterized the "regional" life of communion in previous centuries. Gone are the days when an obscure monk from the "Egyptian" deserts could wield significant political, juridical and even military influence in a "distant" kingdom. To understand these profound transformations, we must maintain a critical eye to modern interpretive concepts and categories that, when deployed carelessly, can obscure more than they illuminate. Thus, in the course of this study, we will engage a range of concepts as we seek to gain deeper insight into the transformations of the modern period.

The case of *Abuna Kirulus* is also instructive insofar as it illustrates the importance of the *relationship* as an interpretive tool. A number of "counterintuitive" relationships were involved in the constitution of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion, and these not only reached across the vast expanses of "Egypt" or "Ethiopia," but across metaphorical frontiers as well. The responsibility for traveling to the monastery and announcing the nomination rested on bedouin (*urban*) who were instructed to take the chosen candidate by force if he resisted. Upon meeting the monk, they were instructed to announce, "This is the day the Lord has made."<sup>8</sup> Here we find a positive, ritual role for Muslim bedouin in the life of the church. It was a sign of a monk's suitability for elevation that he should not desire the honors of episcopal assignment, and this disposition was symbolically validated by his forcible seizure at the hands of bedouin. Meanwhile, Muslim merchants from Ethiopia would wait at Cairo as part of a formal delegation that was prepared to escort him to his new archdiocese. The history is replete with comparable examples - or glimpses - of such "counterintuitive" relationships. Thus, in the eighteenth century it was the responsibility of Copts to fabricate the *kiswa*, or the ornamental covering for the *Ka'aba* at Mecca, which the Ottoman province of *Misr* furnished. Later, after the Sultan of

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 1:67.

Darfur had begun sending a *kiswa* with the pilgrimage, here too a Coptic agent was responsible for preparing the annual *mahmal* that carried it to Mecca. In other words, the same order that admitted Muslim bedouin into the informal rituals of the church could also admit Copts into rituals of the most important event in the life of Islam.

It would be misleading to say that these relationships operated across territorial or communal boundaries, for these did not yet exist, at least in a modern sense. It would be more accurate to say that these erstwhile relationships were constitutive of an entwined fabric that operated beyond majority/minority and other binaries. Distinctive knowledges, skills and charismas characterized the relationships in an order of differentiated and complementary roles, a condition which we will explore in the coming pages. These relationships "naturally" cut across the familiar limits to the modern geographic imagination, and linked the regions of "Ethiopia" and "Egypt," Darfur and the various lands of "the Sudan," diverse territories of the Ottoman north, and beyond. It is striking that these kinds of relationships would become less noticeable in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as practices that expressed "difference" became signs of social subordination and symptoms of separation or distance. In the coming pages, we contemplate the web of relationships and differentiated roles in a complex of interdependency. But we also explore the processes that subverted that order, including the introduction of practices and discourses that gave rise to distinctly "modern" complications.

There is another very important way in which the interpretive concept of the relationship can contribute to a consideration of regional histories beyond the constraints of territorial units. Timothy Mitchell has pointed out that *Misr*, the Arabic word for Cairo, is often used anachronistically to refer to the modern territorial unit of "Egypt." During the Ottoman period, a governor would be appointed for the provincial capital of *Misr* (Cairo), which referred to the

capital and its hinterlands. These vaguely defined lands were designated according to their *relationship* to *Misr*, which was inherently unstable, and they could expand and retract over time.

<sup>9</sup> In looking toward other geographic designations, we can discern the same phenomenon, including in the regions that would become part of the modern spatial unit of Egypt. Its northern regions have been referred to as *al-Wajh al-Bahri*, literally "the direction of the sea" and the southern regions as *al-Wajh al-Qibli* (the direction of the *Qibla*), or *Bilad al-Sa'id*, literally "the upper lands" (a reference to the upper reaches of the Nile.) These designations themselves could extend well beyond the boundaries of modern Egypt so that in some contexts *al-Wajh al-Bahri* has been used to denote parts of modern Palestine, while *al-Sa'id* was sometimes used in reference to territories that are today within the contemporary state of the Sudan.

It will also be noted that these are not self-standing designations, but are conceived in relation to something else; to the *Qibla*, to the "sea" or perhaps to the movement of the Nile. Recently Michael Gaspar has followed a process whereby the *effendiya* (the urban educated classes) came to conceive of themselves, together with the rural *fellahin*, as a collectivity, sharing a common Egyptian-ness. He notes that this was subsequent to the discourse about the "physical geography of Egypt" which dominated the urban literature from the 1870s to 1890s.<sup>10</sup> However, there is much that is yet to be said about the concomitant process whereby "Egypt" came to be imagined as a bounded territorial entity.<sup>11</sup> In exploring relationships - of people,

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<sup>9</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 180-81.

<sup>10</sup> Michael E. Gaspar, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 8, 191.

<sup>11</sup> Yoav Di-Capua briefly addresses this in *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 48-52. In these pages, he considers earlier conceptions of space as revealed in "traditional" chronicle writing, as well as in "hybrid" works such as 'Ali Mubarak's *al-Khitat*. He then addresses the emerging apprehension of "Misr" in its modern usage, which became more noticeable after the turn of the twentieth century. Recent scholarship is beginning to consider more critically the novelty of "Egypt" as a territorial object; see for example Matthew Ellis, "Between Empire and Nation: The Emergence of Egypt's Libyan Borderland, 1841-1911" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2012), in which he

places, things, ideas - that existed along a variety of "hinterlands," we will have opportunity to comment on the effects of parallel processes, and what has been concealed in their wake.

This brings us to the geography of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion, which comprised those indeterminate lands that belonged to the evangelical territories of Saint Mark, or that were subsumed into the jurisdiction of his see - and which could likewise expand and contract over time. In situating Alexandrian Orthodoxy within a matrix of relationships, and of overlapping and mutable spaces, we can have leave of a historical reading that identifies Coptic Christianity mainly with the spatial unit of "Egypt." In an effort to avoid this, we will prefer the use of Arabic terms that preserve a sense of the indeterminate and relational quality of spatial referents. Thus, unless we are referring explicitly to modern bounded units, we will prefer terms such as *Bilad Misr*, *Bilad al-Sa'id* or *Bilad al-Sudan*, and occasionally *al-Wajh al-Bahri* or *al-Wajh al-Qibli*. We will also employ this strategy for other territorial referents, including the "lands" of Syria (*Bilad al-Sham* - literally "the Lands of the North") and the "lands" of Ethiopia, using the terminology as it appears in the Arabic and Coptic sources.

This final point requires qualification. Referring to the lands of Ethiopia as *Bilad al-Habasha* (or as Abyssinia, its English derivative) can be controversial for at least two reasons. Firstly, the use of Arabic terminology may be taken as a disregard for the distinctive histories and traditions of the peoples of Ethiopia, which have been expressed in rich and manifold ways

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examines the modernity of Egyptian territorial identification. Contrary to common claims, the boundaries of Egypt were still fluid and contested well into the twentieth century. Other critical studies of the "peripheral" geographies of Egypt have been undertaken over the last 15 years. Our present study will give consideration attention to the Egyptian *Sa'id*. In so doing, we draw on a growing body of literature about this neglected dimension in the historiography of modern Egypt. Ten years ago, the edited volume *Upper Egypt Identity and Change*, eds. Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004) appeared, and this helped to bring to light many lacunae in the scholarship of the *Sa'id*. A number of important monographs on topics related to the *Sa'id* have also appeared, including Martina Rieker, "The Sa'id and the City: Subaltern Spaces in the Making of Modern Egyptian History" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2002), Jennifer Leslee Derr, "Cultivating the State: Cash Crop Agriculture, Irrigation, and the Geography of Authority in Colonial Southern Egypt, 1868-1931" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2009) and Zeinab Abul-Magd, "Empire and its discontents: Modernity and subaltern revolt in upper Egypt, 1700-1920" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2008).

over many centuries.<sup>12</sup> And secondly, preferring “*al-Habash/Abyssinia*” to “Ethiopia” can be misinterpreted as a political commentary about modern Ethiopia. Although both “Ethiopia” and “*al-Habasha/Abyssinia*” were in circulation during the nineteenth century, these terms have assumed modern political connotations in the aftermath of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century expansion of the polity, which nearly doubled its size during the reign of Menelik II (1889-1913). The term “Habasha” or “Abyssinia” became identified with the political and cultural “core” of the kingdom, while “Ethiopia” assumed a more “inclusive” connotation, encompassing all the disparate peoples that were included within the expansive “empire.”<sup>13</sup>

Our usage of “Abyssinia” and “*Bilad al-Habasha*” is not a commentary on these contemporary realities, and neither is it a veiled expression of Arabophone “imperialism.” Rather, it should be understood as a strategic device that is employed in the interest of transcending the kinds of spatial obstacles that we have already described. During the modern period, the “Coptic-Ethiopian connection” became a historical anomaly, and it has largely been relegated to the margins and footnotes of modern historiographies. Our frames of analysis are set so squarely within particular discursive, political and institutional structures (world regions, nation-states and the like) that we may fail to ask, or even wonder, what kinds of historical connectivities and relationships these contemporary frames have obscured or obliterated. In exploring the vaguely defined lands that have constituted an “Alexandrian Orthodox geography,” we seek out and try to reconstruct some of these “lost” elements and “lost histories.”

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<sup>12</sup> These include a number of distinctive monastic and ecclesiastical practices and traditions. On some of the unique features of Ethiopian Christianity, including its special reverence for the “*tabot*” (Ark of the Covenant) and its “Judaic infrastructure,” see Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 7-12. Although it should be added that some of the features that he proposes to be unique to Ethiopian Christianity have been shared with the Copts, including the importance of circumcision and the fasting rituals.

<sup>13</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2011), 21. The term “Ethiopia” existed from ancient times to refer in a generic sense to the territories to the south of “Egypt.” From the thirteenth century, Solomonic rulers were sometimes identified as “kings of Ethiopia.” Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia* (London: James Currey, 1991), 1.

At the same time, we cannot approach this "geography" in isolation. Far from privileging one "geography" to the scorn of all others, our approach invites the contemplation of other "geographies" that "cut across" artificial modern demarcations. Ethiopia or "*Bilad al-Habasha*" was much more than an archdiocese of Alexandrian see. It was also a distinctive idea or set of ideas, and imbued with a variety of traditions and practices. But precisely like that of the Alexandrian see, the idea had its own vague hinterlands that gestured "outward." For example, an old Amharic-language term for the regions to the north of Tigre (which today belong to the state of Eritrea) was "Mereb-Melash" - literally, "the land beyond the Mereb [river]." Similarly, the head of a tributary region in the eastern lowlands was addressed by an equally vague and relational term, *bahr negash* - or "the ruler of the sea."<sup>14</sup> Our specific forays into ambiguous spaces and liminal sites by no means foreclose, and would indeed be enriched by, explorations of other layers and entry points into a multidimensional order of overlapping geographies.

### **Alexandrian Orthodoxy, the Copts, Historiography**

These historical inquiries into "Alexandrian Orthodoxy" call our attention to multiple historiographies, and present opportunities to bring into conversation a range of fields and subfields. In addition, following a regional formation that predates the nation-state invites a certain distance from institutions like the modern institutional church and peculiar modern binaries and conceptual frames. In this way, we seek to breach another historiographical barrier, the one that has often isolated topics of Coptic or Eastern Christianity from their immediate milieu. The study of a "minority" community in the "Middle East" is fraught with difficulties,

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Reid, "The Trans-Mereb Experience: Perceptions of the Historical Relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1, no. 2 (July, 2007): 243.

and can become a repackaging of stale Orientalist understandings of a "Middle East mosaic."<sup>15</sup> Scholarship related to "minority communities" diminished after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, as the academic climate became less hospitable to projects that appeared to resurrect earlier Orientalist fixations.<sup>16</sup> The concerns that encouraged this change of direction were certainly justified, and a profound challenge is therefore before us. How are we to focus for example on "Coptic" history without reinforcing or rearticulating a certain depiction of communal isolation that marked a "traditional" historiography of minorities? Over the last several decades, a number of important departures have been made that begin to confront this problematic. It is useful here to briefly address some of these contributions, which have contributed to the conceptualization and development of our project.

In his landmark 1982 essay "The Foundation Myths of the Millet System," Benjamin Braude called into question a dominant framework that informed discussion of minority communities in the Ottoman context. The centralized structures of the "millet system" had been understood as a "traditional" imperial method for dealing with the non-Muslim populations. Braude argued that this was a late development, emerging as the imperial center sought methods

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<sup>15</sup> Worse, it can be used to advance political agendas that thrive on the image of "minority communities" existing in a hostile Islamic climate. For examples of such historical renditions, see Edward Wakin, *A Lonely Minority: A Modern Story of Egypt's Copts* (Great Britain: William Morrow and Co., 1963) and Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (London: McFarland and Co., 2002). For some of the more incendiary presentations, see Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Madison and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001) and Lela Gilbert, *Their Blood Cries Out: The Untold Story of Persecution Against Christians in the Modern World* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Bruce Masters has addressed the concerns which have contributed to the avoidance of research agendas focusing specifically on "minority" communities, including their potential to produce polemical "fodder" for sectarianism, and the doubts about the utility of "religion" as an interpretive category; *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4-5.

The deconstructionist approaches to Orientalism and its legacy, however, also opened space for critical readings on the formation of the Coptic object and "Eastern Christianity" more generally. For two examples of this kind of work, see C.A. Bayly, "Representing Copts and Muhammadans: Empire, Nation and Community in Egypt and India, 1880-1914" in *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, eds. Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 158-203. See also Huda Gindi, "The Copts of Egypt: Neither Christian nor Egyptian" in *Interpreting the Orient: Travellers in Egypt and the Near East*, eds. Paul and Janet Starkey (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2001), 97-110.



of dealing with separatist movements within the empire.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent to his essay, scholars provided a more integrated picture of what Bruce Masters calls a "plural" society, from the common recourse of "*dhimmis*" to Islamic courts to the cultural phenomena that transcended confessional lines - in other words, they investigated a kind of integration of "minority" communities within a shared cultural and social environment. Many studies have demonstrated that groups within a "plural" society could be addressed with nuance and delicacy, and without reinforcing the image of discrete, isolated and inward-looking communities.<sup>18</sup>

Recent trends in Ottoman historiography, insofar as they have taken account of the operations of power prior to the centralizations of the nineteenth century, have contributed further to the scope of analysis for addressing these topics. The growing body of literature on statecraft of an *ancien regime* provides some analytical frames that we will use in addressing "minority" history before there was, so to speak, a minority.<sup>19</sup> These can help to correct certain unhelpful anachronisms that pervade much of the historiography in the subfield of Coptic studies. To take one concrete example, the "confinement" of Copts to particular crafts or secretarial and accounting roles exists in conflict with modern normative ideals of the

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<sup>17</sup> This later usage began to appear in the 1820s. Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System" in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 1:69-88. In the scholarship, the flawed conceptualization of rigidly defined and hierarchical millet structures was originally outlined in H.A.R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 2:210-11.

<sup>18</sup> A good example of the scholarship of "*dhimmis*" in Islamic courts is Najwa al-Qattan's "Dhimmis in the Muslim Court: Legal Autonomy and Religious Discrimination" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (August, 1999): 429-444; Some studies have challenged another stubborn Orientalist approach which ascribed ancient roots to modern conflicts; see for example Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in 19th Century Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and the later chapters of Bruce Masters' *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> The work of Ariel Salzmann is exemplary in this regard. Some of her insights into the transition from an Ottoman "ancien regime" were helpful in the formative stages of this present project, and particularly her exposition of the idea of "interstitial" spaces which were integral to the functioning of imperial rule; see *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 20, 139. Also helpful was Christine Philliou's "Worlds Old and New: Phanariot Networks and the Remaking of Ottoman Governance in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2004), particularly her conceptual deployment of the imperial "network."

autonomous moral subject. When the historical record reveals arrangements and practices which were inconsistent with the principles of modern citizenship, a familiar conclusion has been that there was something wanting or inherently oppressive about that condition. The succeeding chapters will present opportunity for critical commentary on a vast array of tropes that have appeared in communal and “minority” histories. They will also allow us to consider the deep social, political and economic imbrication of Coptic Christians within their broader milieu, which can throw light on an order in which "difference" was not an inevitable barrier to social integration, and neither was it a social or political "problem." If the economic or administrative niches that some Copts held in an earlier period would little by little evanesce over the course of the nineteenth century, this too must be read in the context of a broader set of developments.

Recent departures in Ottoman historiography will provide useful analytical frames, but we must be careful not to overemphasize an "Ottoman" dimension to the historical formation of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion, which existed in - as well as beyond – a specifically "Ottoman" context. In her study of Cairo's middle class culture during the Ottoman period, Nelly Hanna identifies some challenges that we face:

The various dimensions that make up a particular culture - religion, economy, education, and so on, do not all fall within the same physical borders. The borders of Islamic culture, universal in nature, encompassed many different political entities and social groups. The borders of commercial capitalism followed other borders, those of political authority still others, with different degrees of overlapping, of convergence or divergence, operating at all these levels.<sup>20</sup>

In these observations, she draws attention to one of the central problematics that we will consider as we challenge a variety of spatial boundaries. The very framing of "Ottoman" cultural history suggests an initial difficulty, for the subject of our study is not bounded by the Ottoman

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<sup>20</sup> Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 176.

peripheries. And a preliminary assessment of the unique case of the Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian Orthodoxy presents additional "border problems." If indeed it were possible to speak of a singular "Islamic culture," how is a "Christianity" as part of such a culture to be thought? And even if this question can be resolved, the problem of the Alexandrian dimension of "Ethiopia" remains. This most diverse "Christian kingdom" has been deeply embedded in a wider "Islamic" milieu, but it can hardly be uncomplicatedly subsumed under the umbrella of an "Islamic culture." Similar problems might also be mentioned. While the history of the Alexandrian communion cannot be separated from the life of the Nile, precious few studies have attempted to consider the Nile itself as a "natural" subject for study - as a complex and "vast expanse" to borrow Braudel's description of another iconic body of water.<sup>21</sup> Then there is the challenge of how to consider the histories of populations that followed Alexandrian Orthodoxy when these histories are so varied, and when the respective relevance - or irrelevance - of confession was not everywhere and always the same.

After her cautionary words on the multiplicity of overlapping boundaries, Hanna argues our need for "another method of understanding the cultural history of the region, and one which is still not developed." This commentary aptly describes the challenge of our present project, which is intended as an exploratory step toward the contemplation of histories that existing models have foreclosed. This involves the isolation of a basic idea/formation of the Alexandrian communion that is open to the "different degrees of overlapping, of convergence or divergence" at a multiplicity of levels. In the absence of a method for apprehending its regional "histories,"

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<sup>21</sup> Ferdinand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1-17. Robert Collins is notable for his efforts to approach the river as a comprehensive subject for study. See *The Nile* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and "In Search of the Nile Waters, 1900-2000" in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 245-267. The one area in which there has been a more integrative approach is twentieth century hydropolitics. Aside from this, most research has followed national frames; see Meir Hatina and Israel Gershoni, "Narrating the Nile" in *Narrating the Nile: Politics, Cultures, Identities* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 227-31.

we approach the historical formation from various angles and using a variety of methods. In light of this, we must give attention to an "Ottoman" dimension while acknowledging its limitations.

<sup>22</sup> Here, Muhammad 'Afifi has noted a basic deficiency in his discussion of the millet paradigm in the study of "Coptic history." In comparison with other Christian "minority" groups, including Greeks and Armenians, the interest in the "Copts" at the imperial center was much less marked.

<sup>23</sup> The implication is that a category such as "minorities in the Ottoman Empire" is inadequate, for it presumes certain congruities among various confessions that may not have existed.

But compensating for these deficiencies with an appeal to - in our case - a Coptic distinctiveness has its own dangers, not the least of which is the temptation to fall back on national models which have contributed substantially to the fragmentation of regional histories. In the case of Egyptian nationalist historiography, the national framework has not only discouraged regional approaches to the communion's history but it has also discouraged inquiry into specific topics related to the Copts and the Coptic Church. <sup>24</sup> When such topics have been

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<sup>22</sup> For the Ottoman period, Febe Armanios has recently published a study of Coptic, Ottoman-era literary sources. In doing so, she has directed attention to three genres of literature produced by Copts themselves - hagiographies, chronicles and sermons. Through a close reading of these sources, she attempts to refute deeply anchored claims that Copts were culturally barren and socially marginalized during this long period. See *Coptic Christians in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); for the Coptic cultural integration within a wider Ottoman world, see also Magdi Guirguis, *An Armenian Artist in Ottoman Egypt: Yuhanna al-Armani and his Coptic Icons* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad 'Afifi, "The State and the Church in Nineteenth Century Egypt" in *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series 39, no. 3 (November 1999): 273-88 at 275.

<sup>24</sup> This can be observed even in the neglect of the "Coptic Era" of Egyptian history. Ghali Shukri has noted that although the distinct features of Egyptian civilization developed over many centuries, with Pharaonic, Greek and Roman, Coptic, Arab and Islamic imprints, the Coptic Era has largely been elided from the nationalist historical gaze. He points out that this absence is even more striking in light of the attention that European Christian and Church history have received from the Egyptian faculties of philosophy and history; Ghali Shukri, *al-Aqbat fi Watan Mutaghayir* (Cairo: Kitab al-Ahali, 1990), 9.

For a good introduction to the "Coptic question" in its various Egyptian historiographical articulations, see Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 147-73. Gorman also addresses the institutional biases that have discouraged the advancement of historians of Coptic background; *Ibid.* 150-51.

The avoidance of the "Coptic question" in nationalist historiography has contributed to the isolation and parochialization of the subfield of "Coptic history." There are exceptions to this, including Tariq al-Bishri's *al-Muslimun wa al-Aqbat fi Itar al-Jama'at al-Wataniya* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1988), in which he critically assesses the secular national approach to the question of Copts and Islam.

addressed, they have tended to focus on the role played by Coptic politicians of prominence in the national life. 'Afifi has noted one consequence of this, which is that the church has not been studied *as an institution* as other institutions such as *al-Azhar* and the guilds have been studied.

<sup>25</sup> In effect, the scope of "Coptic history" narrowed to correspond with the boundaries of the Egyptian nation-state. Within these constraints, the history was then further encumbered by the protocols of "national unity" which discouraged interrogations into topics of Muslim-Christian relations. When Copts have emerged in national histories, they have often done so in "stereotypical cameo appearances," as Van Doorn-Harder has described the historiographical dilemma. <sup>26</sup>

A number of projects have begun to confront some of these problems. Here, Paul Sedra's dissertation "Textbook Maneuvers" - (subsequently published under the title *From Mission to Modernity*) merits special attention. <sup>27</sup> In it, he provides a critique of the deep entrenchment of modern Coptic history in the narrative of "awakening" and its stifling effects on the historiography. He challenges this model with a thoroughgoing study of education reform in modern Egypt, and the efforts of missionaries - and later, "modernizing elites" (both clerical and lay) to eliminate "superstitious" practices and in the process to "bring faith under control." <sup>28</sup> His work was a guiding light in the formative stages of the current project insofar as he identified important historiographical challenges to the contemplation of "Coptic history," and deployed a number of strategies for overcoming them. His exposition of the case of Patriarch Kirulus (Cyril) IV (known as the "Father of Reforms") was particularly illuminating, drawing important

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<sup>25</sup> Afifi, "The State and the Church," 273.

<sup>26</sup> Nelly Van Doorn-Harder, "Finding a Platform: Studying the Copts in the 19th and 20th centuries" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 479-82.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Sedra, "Textbook Maneuvers: Evangelicals and Educational Reform in Nineteenth-century Egypt," (PhD diss., New York University, 2006); Paul Sedra, *Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (London: I.B. Taurus and Co., 2011).

<sup>28</sup> He provides a fascinating study of the effects of Enlightenment discourses and practices as the "hegemony of the text" gradually marginalized Coptic oral culture.

parallels between this "reforming" patriarch and the emblem of "modernist" Islam, Muhammad 'Abduh. More broadly, he has thrown some light on the analogous processes (including the "textualization" of faith) that were acting upon Coptic Christianity and Islam in nineteenth century "Egypt." In so doing, he has contributed to the important task of overcoming the isolation of the Copts in the historiography of modern Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

As we have noted, our exploration of "Coptic" and Alexandrian Orthodox history will draw on insights from multiple academic fields and subfields, including the historiography of Ethiopia. In this regard, the work of the late Donald Crummey merits special mention. Among his many contributions to Ethiopian historiography, Crummey demonstrated the importance of "Alexandrian Orthodoxy" across centuries, including the role that this served ideologically during the nineteenth century as successive monarchs set out to "reestablish" the Solomonic kingdom.<sup>30</sup> The sometimes bewildering din and discord of doctrinal conflict can conceal an enduring thread, which Crummey detected and explored. He noted that the "ostensible framework of "Alexandrine teaching" persisted. Although he was fundamentally interested in the "Ethiopian" context to this framework, his contributions to the "Alexandrian" aspect of Ethiopian history have been an indispensable reference. But more so, his demonstration of these enduring bonds of "Alexandria" helped to substantiate our suspicion that a "regional" approach to Coptic/Alexandrian Orthodox history deserved much greater attention than it has been given in any field of modern historiography.

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<sup>30</sup> Of particular note in this regard are Donald Crummey, "Doctrine and Authority: Abuna Salama, 1841-1854" in *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1972), 567-78 and "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction in Ethiopia, 1854-1878," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29, no. 2 (October 1978): 427-442. He also addressed many important themes of Alexandrian Orthodoxy in *Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

## **This Project: Limitations and Qualifications**

These inquiries into the tangled pasts of "nations" are in no way intended to negate the "authenticity" of modern national identities. Here, I speak specifically of Egypt, but only as an example to illustrate a more general phenomenon. My brothers and I grew up hearing our father's stories of the homeland; We experienced, outside of time and from afar, the beauty, simplicity and struggles of village life in the 1940s and 1950s; the blessings of the Nile and the goodness of the people; the bitter indignities of colonialism; the dreams that came with revolution, land reforms, nationalizations; a unity of "Cross and Crescent;" a sense of the collective destiny of a people to be free; a collective will which was articulated in a moment of serendipity; in an utterance of 'Abd al-Nasir, the "*Ra'is*" or in the course of a song of Um Kulthum or 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz. At a young age, we learned to love something that was vivid and real. We learned to love Egypt.

In the present study, I will scrutinize an array of received "orthodoxies," exploring directly and indirectly the contingencies of modern nations, identities and conceptual frames; crossing received boundaries; examining fragments of suppressed or forgotten histories, affinities and ways of apprehending the world. This is not to denigrate modern imaginaries, nor to trivialize for example the nation as an object of devotion and as a historical rallying point for anti-colonial objectives. Or to take another example, I will critique the idea of Alexandrian Orthodoxy and its emerging embeddedness in discourses and practices of the "secular." By no means do I intend to diminish the significance of novel understandings of church and communion. Rather, in all of this, I wish to affirm a historical richness which contemporary ecclesiologies or national-state orthodoxies are far too restrictive to contain.

In light of the many trials, traumas and uncertainties which affect so many lives in the region, it might be argued that this is not the time to challenge the foundations of national identity, and that it is particularly ill-advised to do so while focusing on a "minority community" of the national state. To be sure, there are certain political currents that might call into question the legitimacy of Coptic "belonging" in Egypt. Insofar as "Egyptian" identity is imagined, this must apply to everyone. An exploration into the "Egyptianization" of Coptic identity cannot be undertaken in isolation from the "Egyptianization" of all those who now identify as "Egyptian;" Egyptian Copts are neither more nor less "authentically" Egyptian than Muslims or any other Egyptians. Whatever it means to belong to a locality, to a region, to a people, this "belonging" existed long before talk of citizenship and the trappings of the modern state. Innumerable fragments quietly testify to this truth; it existed in layer upon layer of connectivities and intimacies of all sorts. These fragments may speak to a "world" beyond the narrows of the modern state, before the apparition of reified boundaries and desolate binaries, and before "majorities" and "minorities" and all the other things of the modern.

This leads me to a final point that is perhaps not made as clearly in the text as it might have been. The "modern condition" is about much more than sophisticated techniques of governance and control, meticulously drawn blueprints and totalizing claims. Plans break down, resistances and "unorthodoxies" persist, lines need constantly to be negotiated and renegotiated, policed, drawn and redrawn. I trust that echoes of "lost" pasts can contribute insights and clues about more just, equitable, and perhaps as yet unimagined futures.

## **A Note on Sources**



Due to the political climate in Egypt in recent years, it was not possible to access archival sources on this topic in the country. This necessitated significant revisions to the original research plan and a heavier reliance on Western sources than was anticipated. However, the available materials have allowed us to take early steps toward identifying and addressing lacuna in the scholarship, and to contribute original work despite these shortcomings. Because the existing scholarship on topics related to what we might call the "regional life of Alexandrian Orthodoxy" is limited, it has been possible to extract neglected material from even the more frequently cited primary sources. Materials as unremarkable (from a scholarly point of view) as official ecclesiastical and royal chronicles contain numerous details that have not been pursued in any great detail in the scholarship. In addition, the endeavor to bring into conversation historiographies that have been largely isolated from each other (particularly Ethiopian and Egyptian/Ottoman historiographies) allows us to deploy sources in fresh ways.<sup>31</sup> For example, there are many published primary materials that are familiar within the limits of Ethiopian studies, but that are almost completely alien to the fields of Coptic and Egyptian historiography. The very act of bringing these sources together is the preliminary work that might help to bridge the chasms separating the historiographies, and contribute to the contemplation of regional histories. To this end, we will utilize a range of sources, published and unpublished, including Arabic and, in translation, Ge'ez or Amharic materials that can shed new light on important and neglected dimensions to the regional life.

A wide range of Western sources have been consulted, drawing on hints and allusions that disturb ingrained points in the historiographies. Reading consular, traveller and missionary

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<sup>31</sup> The importance of encouraging "conversations" across the frontiers of "area studies" cannot be overstated. Although they explore a somewhat later period, Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C.A. Bayly provide a convincing statement on the significance of such initiatives in "The Connected World of Empires," *Modernity and Culture*, eds. Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-27.

accounts "against the grain" has been useful not only in analyzing some of the peculiarities and distortions of the "Western gaze," but it has also allowed us to occasionally "hear" the voices of "local" interlocutors - albeit through the dim mist of translation. This project also draws on many published accounts and memoirs written by actors serving in various capacities to Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Palestine and elsewhere, as well as materials from *Description de l'Égypte*, *Memoires sur l'Égypte* and other descriptive and "scientific" works of this kind. The holdings of the National Archives (UK) have also been consulted, with a primary focus on records pertaining to Egypt and Ethiopia, Jedda, the Sudan and Jerusalem. In the British Library, the papers of Hekekyan, Pococke, Burckhardt and Burton yielded valuable information. In addition, the Church Missionary Society archives in Birmingham helped to uncover topics related to Egyptian-Ethiopian affairs in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. This was due in large part to the proximity of CMS missionaries to the ecclesiastical hierarchs in Egypt as well as their significant interest in Ethiopia as a mission territory. The archives provide a rare glimpse of important dynamics of the period, and contain valuable materials, including letters written by *Abuna Salama III*, the former CMS student who was elevated as the metropolitan archbishop for *Bilad al-Habasha* in 1841. Meanwhile, the Moravian archives provided some insights into an earlier period, given their relatively early (mid-late eighteenth century) efforts to penetrate the "mission fields" of Ethiopia and Egypt.

As for the Arabic language sources, a number of standard published materials have been used, such as the chronicles of al-Jabarti, al-Damurdashi and the later encyclopedic work of 'Ali Mubarak. In addition, turn of the twentieth century "Coptic" histories and compendia have also been exploited rather extensively. Although in many ways these were foundational texts for later renditions of Coptic communal history, they were written at a time when the shape and

lineaments of that history were still in formation, and they sometimes reveal fascinating traces of kinds of connectivity that would largely disappear over the course of the twentieth century.

## **Chapter Summaries**

This dissertation can be considered very broadly in two parts; the first two chapters deal primarily with the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while the two final chapters follow themes across approximately six decades in the mid-nineteenth century. In Chapter One, "Exploring the Frontiers of Alexandrian Orthodoxy," we introduce basic threads that will be developed over the course of the four chapters of the dissertation. We proceed from the premise that modern processes and constructs have had a fragmenting effect on the historical complex of the Anti-Chalcedonian See of Alexandria - a fragmentation that is reflected in the scholarship. To probe this condition, we introduce the emergence of a set of modern boundaried objects and constructs - institutional, territorial and communal - while looking past these in search of historical relationships that have fallen into the shadows of these imposing structures. A range of binaries will be challenged, including majority/minority, clerical/lay, sacred/profane, as will the boundaried territorial objects that have alienated and isolated "Egypt" and "Ethiopia" from each other. Chapter Two, "The Deserts and Beyond," serves as an elaboration on themes that were opened in the first chapter, but with more concentrated focus on "peripheral" regions of a wider "Alexandrian geography." It begins with a discussion of the location of the deserts in the historiography, arguing that these "intermediate" sites have presented cognitive barriers to the contemplation of transregional history. We engage some of the tropes attached to two specific groupings that have been associated with the desert - monks and bedouin - considering how these have obscured not only the wide range of relationships in which followers of the Alexandrian

See were implicated, but also the very mechanisms that made intercourse over long distances possible. We then seek to "cross" the deserts - considering in greater depth some aspects of the ties linking *Bilad al-Habasha* with *Bilad Misr/al-Sa'id*.

Together these first two chapters constitute a quest for kinds of relationships and tangled histories that have become, to borrow from Walter Benjamin (via de Lorenzi), the "debris" of modern historical teleologies.<sup>32</sup> In the final two chapters, we give more concentrated attention to the processes that affected these fragmentations - including emerging practices, discourses and interventions, and their effects on the regional life and relationships of the Alexandrian See and its following. Chapter Three, "Out of Africa?," begins by addressing novel discourses and narrations that contributed to an effect of distance between "Egypt" and "the Copts" on one side, and "Africa" and "the Sudan" on the other. We then follow some of the material processes and interventions that profoundly affected the region, its dynamics and relationships, taking Mehmet 'Ali's "opening" (*futuh*) of the Sudan as a point of departure. Chapter Four, "Ancient Ties, Modern Strains," covers roughly the same timeframe and many of the same themes, but with an emphasis on relationships linking *Bilad al-Habasha* with *Bilad Misr* as they came under modern strains. Here, we begin in 1816 as an "Egyptian" metropolitan arrived in his new archdiocese of *al-Habash*, intent on restoring the "traditional" prerogatives to his office, while all around he confronted obstacles to that object. We then turn toward Jerusalem and the emergence of a conflict between "Egyptian Copts" and "Abyssinians," seeking to situate this within regional and international developments that would accentuate fractures along the networks of a shared

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<sup>32</sup> James de Lorenzi, "Caught in the Storm of Progress: Timoteos Saprighian, Ethiopia, and the Modernity of Christianity," (*Journal of World History* 19, no. 1 (2008): 112-13. In the mid-nineteenth century, an Armenian bishop of Jerusalem visited Ethiopia and left a published account of his travels. De Lorenzi uses Benjamin's insights in his analysis as he explores the estrangement of the Armenian from his Ethiopian co-religionists. There are strong consonances between the phenomenon that he discerns, and developments in Coptic-Ethiopian "relations" during the same period.

communion. Finally, we open the case of *Abuna Salama III*, the Metropolitan of Ethiopia from 1841-1867, whose life and career straddle multiple modern breaches. Although the chapter draws more concentrated attention to "ecclesiastical" questions, it will become clear that these cannot be treated in isolation from the complex in which they existed.

In the conclusion, "The Nations and the National Church," we will look forward to the aftermath of our meandering course, as the objects and constructs we have adumbrated became enshrined within a universalized political order of nation-states, and naturalized with the assistance of discourses of the "secular" and other modern enchantments.

## Chapter One

### “Exploring the Frontiers of Alexandrian Orthodoxy”

In Chapter One, we look at the Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian communion from various angles in an effort to identify some of the historiographical and conceptual barriers to the contemplation of this historical formation while seeking means of transcending these. In each of the first three sections, we focus on a different "object" or concept, and investigate these from various metaphorical "frontiers." In the first section, we look at the phenomenon of the "minority community" of the modern national state. Before the "minority" was ever imagined, and indeed before "difference" became a social problem, Copts existed in an order of specialized and localized knowledges and complementary roles.<sup>1</sup> To contemplate the logic of an antecedent order and to consider the kinds of processes that would eventually lead to the apparition of the "minority," we focus on the case of "Coptic scribes." In the second section, we problematize the boundaried territorial object, which has contributed to a conceptual fragmentation of the "regional" life of Alexandrian Orthodoxy. Finally, we interrogate the conceptualization of the church as a "boundaried" institution, while considering formal and informal relationships that have constituted the life of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion, and that challenge the clerical/lay binary, as well as other starkly drawn divisions. In the fourth and final section, we

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<sup>1</sup> There were many expressions of this order of difference and complementarity, including distinctive clothing and other practices. The existence of legal codes governing dress and social mores have been used to affirm the degraded state of Copts and other minorities. However, differentiating codes pervaded the entire social order, and were not specific to a "minority" condition. On the role of dress codes in an Ottoman context, and their modifications in the nineteenth century, see Donald Quataert, "Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 3 (1997): 403-425. The norms also varied according to locale. For example, it does not appear that the familiar injunctions against Christians riding horses extended far beyond *Misir*, at least in the late eighteenth century. When the Moravians visited the patriarch in 1771, they learned that "both Christians and Turks may ride as much as they please on horseback in the country and also in other cities;" Moravian Archives UK, Letters and Papers from Egypt and Ethiopia, 1769-1788 (August 15, 1771), f. 20.

examine the cases of two high-ranking Coptic lay elites, *al-Mu'allim* Ibrahim al-Gawhari and his brother *al-Mu'allim* Girgis al-Gawhari. The details of their careers illustrate an entangled order of relationships, and bring together a number of themes addressed in the first three sections.

### **Coptic Christians: Condemned to Be the Scribes**

In his article "The Church and the State in Nineteenth Century Egypt," Muhammad 'Afifi allows that while Copts had traditionally held positions of influence in specialized areas, and notably the financial administration, their religious affiliation prevented them from serving a "commensurate role in public life until the late 19th century."<sup>2</sup> Even if followers of the confession could potentially wield considerable influence, this had little equivalency or expression in the "public life." In other words, Copts did not enjoy privileges of the modern national citizen until the modern period. Their absence from a "public life" suggests that there was something wanting in their condition. This appraisal is not inconsistent with those of the dominant Coptic communal histories, which have largely been written in a narrative structure of "awakening," as an indolent and dispossessed population stirred from its debased state.<sup>3</sup> In the case of the Copts, they gradually were enlivened to the possibilities of participating as equal citizens in the life of the Egyptian "nation."

Perhaps no trope is more indicative of the bleak anterior centuries than that of the "Coptic scribe." Ferdinand Werne, a German physician accompanying Mehmet 'Ali's exploratory expedition along the course of White Nile, offered a familiar assessment of this sorry lot when he observed: "in the whole Egyptian kingdom the Copts are condemned to be the mallems [here,

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<sup>2</sup> Muhammad 'Afifi, "The State and the Church in Nineteenth Century Egypt" in *Die Welt Des Islams* 39, no. 3 (1999): 277.

<sup>3</sup> Sedra, *Mission to Modernity*, 10.

scribes]." <sup>4</sup> The sense of the ignobility of the occupation is fairly pervasive in the writings of occidental observers, and later nationalist narratives that championed the universalized ideal of the modern political subject (citizen) would also find little redeeming in a condition of differentiated roles.

The role and power of Copts in administrative and financial affairs was subject to change over time, and obviously only a limited number of Copts attained to these positions. In addition, the departments of state also included Muslim scribes, who during the Ottoman period generally carried the title of “*effendi*” while Copts were commonly known under the title of “*mu'allim*.” <sup>5</sup> However, there is no question that Coptic Christians had distinctive access to certain positions. They were frequently employed as secretaries and intendants, and they also served as land surveyors and agents, and in the fields of tax collection and accounting. Nearly every village in the Ottoman period had a Coptic *sarrafi* who was appointed by the Coptic intendant to the *multazim* (tax farmer.) These agents verified specie, collected taxes in cash, covered local administrative outlays and witnessed land surveys. Additionally, Coptic *wakils* (also known as *'amils*) were appointed to villages, and their responsibilities included the collection of taxes in kind. <sup>6</sup> These positions were associated with a set of "specialized skills," which students would begin to acquire in Coptic *kuttabs*. As part of their curriculum, they committed to memory sections of sacred scripture (in Arabic), especially the Pauline epistles and the Psalter, and they studied arithmetic and geometry, while gaining competency in the Arabic language. In addition,

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<sup>4</sup> Ferdinand Werne, *Expedition to Discover the Sources of the White Nile in the Years 1840, 1841* (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), 38.

<sup>5</sup> A formulaic description of the prescriptive roles of the *effendis* is provided by Husayn *Effendi*, the *ruznamgi* at the time of the French expedition. See Stanford Shaw's translation in *Ottoman Egypt in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> Helen Anne Rivlin, *The Agricultural Policy of Muhammad 'Ali in Egypt*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 28; Michel-Ange Lancret, "Mémoire sur le système d'imposition territoriale et sur l'administration des provinces de l'Égypte dans les dernières années du gouvernement des mamlouks," *Description de l'Égypte*, ed. Edme François Jomard (Paris: Imprimerie de C.L.F. Panckoucke, 1821-1829), 11:479; 490.



they learned elements of the Coptic language, including the Coptic script that was used in the arcane and coded methods of bookkeeping.<sup>7</sup>

Many European observers disparaged the state of Coptic education and Coptic practices. They were particularly mystified by the continued liturgical and secular usage of the Coptic language in light of the fact that it was scarcely "understood" by anyone. Richard Pococke, an Anglican bishop who traveled to Cairo and its hinterlands during the eighteenth century gave voice to this line of criticism when he wrote that the "Coptis" are exceptionally ignorant, "both priest and people, the former perform the service in the Coptic language by rote, which they do not understand."<sup>8</sup> As new educational methods and bureaucratic practices eroded "traditional" forms over the course of the nineteenth century, the Coptic language would indeed be "revived" as a modern cultural phenomenon. But its much celebrated "revival" was arguably bound up with the very process that was turning it into one of modernity's "dead" languages.<sup>9</sup>

Despite claims to the contrary, features of the Coptic language were in fact very much "alive." The Coptic writing system was passed from teacher to student in the *kuttab*s, and the knowledge of the Coptic script and numerals helped to protect "secretive" forms of bookkeeping and idiosyncratic methods of calculation, guarding that most easily hidden form of capital, cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu asserts that the modern period has witnessed a neglect of the non-economic forms of capital. But he goes further in arguing that this reduction of exchange to

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<sup>7</sup> Heyworth-Dunne, J., *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Luzac & Co.), 85. Edward Lane noted that the Psalms, Gospels and Epistles were studied in Arabic, after which the Epistles and Gospels would be taught in Coptic. But Lane communicated a sentiment that would become a common refrain of "Western" observers when he noted that "they do not learn the Coptic language grammatically." He added: "there is not to be found, among the Copts, any person who can write or speak that language with correctness or ease; and that there are very few persons who can do more than repeat what they have committed to memory." See *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptian*, (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1908), 541-542.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Pococke, Register of Letters to Bishop of Waterford written during his travels in Egypt, Syria, and Cyprus, British Library (henceforward "BL") Add. Mss. 15779 (17 Sept. 1737-march 1739), ff. 53.

<sup>9</sup> However, Mariam Ayad has critiqued the very characterization of Coptic as a "dead language," pointing out that this position is in part based upon the regular exclusion of biblical and liturgical manuscripts in studies of the language's decline; see "The Death of Coptic?" *Coptic Culture: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Mariam Ayad (Shephalbury Manor: The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre 2012), 11.

a mercantile nature cannot be accomplished "without producing the purposeless finality of cultural or artistic practices."<sup>10</sup> The standardization of bookkeeping and other practices would gradually eliminate the practical employment of elements of the Coptic language, while its use in ecclesiastical matters would be subject to mounting criticism as well. By 1910 Ramzi Tadrus, a thoroughly "modern" Coptic commentator, argued that when a religious topic is addressed in the Coptic language, "its benefits are lost."<sup>11</sup> As he wrote these words, others were setting out to "revive" the Coptic language, but it was now refashioned within the "pure" realm of modernity's culture. The Coptic language was, so to speak, "dying" at the very threshold of its revival.

The specialized or secret Coptic "knowledge" cannot be understood in isolation from the milieu that gave it rise. At the level of statecraft, one finds that what has sometimes been considered to be a *sui generis* characteristic of "the Copts" (owing to a peculiar history or innate genius or natural cunning) is in fact hardly unique. Describing the Funj Sultanate of Sennar during the early eighteenth century, Jay Spaulding notes that certain clerical tasks were "beyond the capacity" of noblemen and were thus turned over to functionaries of special status. The description of these functionaries bears some remarkable parallels with that of the Coptic "scribes." The national treasury employed a "corps of officials, predominantly slaves, who seem to have possessed a tradition of account keeping using strings of beads, a non-Arabic system of

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<sup>10</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Social Capital," in *Handbook of Theory for Research in the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.E. Richardson, 242-243. I am taking some liberties with Bourdieu's argument.

<sup>11</sup> Ramzy Tadrus, *al-Aqbat fil-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Garidat Misr: Cairo, 1910), 2:103. The process that eliminated the vestiges of Coptic notation began during the earlier part of the nineteenth century. When Muhammad 'Ali was adapting records and bureaucratic methods during the 1820s, the "Coptic signs for the fractions of the piaster soon disappeared." The cadastral units remained in the Coptic notation until the British occupation. See H.G. Lyons, *The Cadastral Survey of Egypt 1892-1907* (Cairo: Ministry of Finance Survey Department, National Printing Department, 1908), 45-6.

As for the fruitlessness of using a "dead" language to address religious topics, a similar theme was circulating in Ethiopia in the early twentieth century. Emperor Haile Sellassie recalled that many people would "return home without comprehending the words explaining the mysteries" because they were communicated in Ge'ez, the sacred language of the Ethiopian Church. During his reign, the sacred texts and liturgy were translated into Amharic and distributed to all of the churches; Haile Sellassie, *The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Sellassie I: My Life and Ethiopia's Progress 1892-1937*, trans. Edward Ullendorff (Chicago: Frontline Distribution International, Inc.), 1:164-65.

written notation, and perhaps a quinary system of arithmetic calculation." <sup>12</sup> The existence of such a correspondence is only explicable within the context of a wider, *ancien regime* order that was characterized by, among other things, a pervasiveness of particular and guarded knowledges. Again and again in the sources, this pervasiveness is revealed. We need to look no further than the Red Sea transit to discover one of its more striking illustrations. For the immense economic and strategic importance that the Red Sea carried as the great "Ottoman" sea, the nautical knowledge that enabled traffic belonged to particular families who passed it on from one generation to the next. In fact, those who guided the voyages from Jedda to Suez seem to have come from a single village which was located on the western coast of Sinai to the south of Tur. <sup>13</sup>

In this particular detail, we discover a related dimension - that of *localized* knowledge. <sup>14</sup> Historical descriptions of the villages and towns that dot the eastern and western banks of the Nile are replete with references to the specialized crafts and trades of the various localities and communities. One finds for instance that the Copts of the Upper Egyptian town of Girga were famous for carpentry, an art which was passed on from one generation to the next and held in confidence. Such specialized skills, though superficial marks of "separation," in practice drew the craftsmen across confessional lines as they participated in the construction of mosques and a wide range of other facilities. It also occasionally drew them across considerable distances, to

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<sup>12</sup> Jay Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnar* (The Red Sea Press Inc.: Trenton, 2007), 43-44. In another parallel, Spaulding notes that the officials of the treasury were often referred to collectively as "scribes."

<sup>13</sup> The village was called Gabal. Andre Raymond, *Artisans et Commerçants au Caire au XVIII Siècle* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1973), 2:113. In the course of the nineteenth century, rulers would endeavor to deploy modern technologies for the mastery of expanding territories. One can readily imagine the threat that this posed to an array of "local," guarded knowledges, such as those preserved by the families of Jabal which navigated the Red Sea or the "Arab tribes" navigating the great seas of the desert.

<sup>14</sup> The subject of local knowledge, as well as modern technologies for redistributing knowledge is addressed in chapter three of Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 80-122.

locales as far afield as Istanbul and Aswan.<sup>15</sup> In his encyclopedic late nineteenth century survey of the towns and villages of Egypt, 'Ali Mubarak expressed the persistence of localized knowledge when he alluded to the Coptic craftsmen of Abnub (near Asyut.) He gave little information about this group of honey cultivators, aside from a cursory remark that they "know how to do it."<sup>16</sup>

If "Coptic history" has been ghettoized as "minority" history, this can be challenged through an interrogation of a world of exceptions, where specific villages or regions or groups of people could hold not only exceptional histories or even "exceptional" geographies – including 'alternative centers' and "peripheries" - but also exceptional knowledges. We can thus approach the specialized skills of Coptic scribes, arithmeticians or surveyors not as markers of "separation," but as channels of connectivity that contributed to the imbrication of Coptic Christians in virtually all aspects of "Egyptian" life. It is interesting here to note that while other "minority" communities attained positions of considerable power in the Ottoman province of *Misr* – most prominently the Greek Orthodox, Syrian Catholic and Jewish communities - these were largely confined to Cairo and to regions of Lower Egypt (particularly the port towns.)<sup>17</sup> In fact, the demarcation was so stark that one missionary travelling in the *Sa'id* in the early nineteenth century made the bold claim that there were no Greeks or Jews south of Cairo.<sup>18</sup> By

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<sup>15</sup> On the trade of carpenters at Girga, see 'Ali Mubarak, *Khitat al-Tawfiqiya al-Jadida li-Misr al-qahira wa-muduniha wa-biladiha al-qadima wa-l-shahira* (Cairo: Bulaq, 1888), 10:53. For the protected nature of the craft, see Salih Ahmad Haridi, *al-Sa'id fi al-'asr al-'uthmani 1517-1798* (A.R.E.: 'Ayn lil-Dirasat wa al-Buḥuth al-Insaniya wa al-Ijtima'iyā, 2006), 235.

<sup>16</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat*, 8:18.

<sup>17</sup> In the eighteenth century, nearly the entirety of the European trade was in the hands of Europe merchants, sections of the Jewish community in lower Egypt, and the increasingly important community of Syrian Christians whose ascendancy came at the expense of the Jews during the reign of 'Ali Bey al-Kabir. For a brief overview of the Syrian-Jewish rivalry, see John Livingston, "'Ali Bey al-Kabir and the Jews," in *Middle Eastern Studies* 7, no. 2 (May 1971): 221-228. As Egypt was flooded with European capital in the nineteenth century, the demographic configuration was substantially altered. This was especially true in the aftermath of the Treaty of Balta Liman (1838), which opened the Nile Valley to the penetration of European and Greek traders.

<sup>18</sup> William Jowett, *Christian Researches In the Mediterranean From 1815 to 1820 In Furtherance of the Objects of the Church Missionary Society* (London, 1824), 119.

contrast, the vast majority of Copts resided in the Middle and Upper country, and even in Cairo, Coptic residences tended to be dispersed across the various quarters, in contrast with the Jews whose places of employment and habitation were noticeably segregated.<sup>19</sup>

In the early seventeenth century, the recognized scholar of Coptic extraction Yusuf abu Dhiqn (Abudacnus) described for his European readers the state of the more educated Copts, noting that some were "accustomed to be secretaries to the principal Turks" and that they had "in their hands the whole Great Sultan's Revenue proceeding out of this country." Continuing, he observed that "others of them are arithmeticians, or Geometricians, to meet and measure out of the ground, and to cast up the money yearly going out of Aegypt."<sup>20</sup> This is an early text relative to the period of focus here, but it draws attention to the profound historical role that Copts served in the Ottoman context, critically situated as they were at two vital loci in the circuit of revenue extraction. At the "imperial" level, Copts served as secretaries to the powerful men of state who were linked with the imperial center. And at the most basic level, Coptic surveyors possessed an intimate knowledge of the land that was by necessity dynamic, and sensitive to the vagaries of the Nile flood. Particular knowledge could be heritable within in a village, or a family or a professional syndicate, and it often carried considerable cultural capital. In Abu Dhiqn's remarks on the local-imperial links, we are reminded that the existence of "localized" knowledge does not translate to a kind of "local isolation." Local knowledges and guarded practices could be

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<sup>19</sup> The twentieth century would witness a major population shift as Copts - as well as Muslims - migrated to Cairo and other cities from the countryside. Even so, by the last quarter of the century, 60% of Egypt's Copts still lived in Upper Egypt, most of whom were *fellahin*. See J. D. Pennington, "The Copts in Modern Egypt," in *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 1982): 159 and Peter Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation Among Christians and Muslims in Egypt*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 39. On the respective distribution of Coptic and Jewish populations in Cairo, see Raymond, *Artisans et Commerçants*, 2:174-175; For a demographic survey of the Coptic population during the Ottoman period, see Maurice Martin, "Note sur la communauté copte entre 1650 et 1850," *Annales Islamologique* 18 (1982): 193-215.

<sup>20</sup> Josephus Abudacnus, *The History of the Copths, Commonly Called the Jacobites, Under the Dominion of the Turk and Abyssin Emperor with Some Geographical Notes on Descriptions of the Several Places in Which They Live in Those Dominions* (London: R. Baldwin in Warwick-Lane, 1693), 30.

absorbed into wider networks, and become part of the complex substrata which connected village to village, or village to provincial center, provincial center to Cairo, Cairo to Istanbul. In his environmental history of Ottoman Egypt, Alan Mikhail deploys the term “coordinated localism” to describe the network of relationships which tied even the most remote villages to the imperial center, and he argues that the peasants’ intimate knowledge of the land even made it possible for these “ecological experts” to “pull the reins of power.”<sup>21</sup> It is within the framework of “coordinated localism” that the particularisms of “Coptic” expertise may be pursued.

Here, we turn to a series of observations about interstitial "Coptic" power, with attention to how it was enframed by observers as well as to a general historical trajectory whereby it would become a problem in need of remedy. In the course of his excursion to the Fayum in 1738, Pococke noted:

The Christian religion would be at a very low ebb if the people did not find it convenient to have Copti stewards of their estates, who are well acquainted with all affairs, are very dexterous in keeping accounts which they do in sort of Copti characters, and language, understood by no others ... these in every village are sort of lords and are protectors of the Christians in it.<sup>22</sup>

At the turn of the nineteenth century Jean Reynier, one of the generals who participated in the French campaign, wrote the following:

Undoubtedly it was politic to lay the burden of the duties heavy upon the rich Copts, who collected the taxes, oppressed the people, and would rather bury their wealth than put it in circulation ... General Menou wished also to change the mode of tax collection, and withdraw it from the hands of the Copts who ... regulating the accounts of the villages were the only persons that had a correct knowledge of their produce and therefore with facility defrauded their employers.<sup>23</sup>

These writings are separated by approximately 60 years, but the gulf is more than a temporal one. Pococke made his observation decades before the province became a zone of

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<sup>21</sup> Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Pococke, Letters, ff. 53.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Louis Ebenezer Reynier, *State of Egypt After the Battle of Heliopolis* (London, 1802), 157, 221.

contest and potential conquest for competing European actors, while Reynier's comments came in the immediate context of the three-year French occupation of Egypt that ended in 1801. Gone from the picture is the Copt who has endured onerous circumstances by dint of his dexterity, and he is replaced with one who oppresses his underlings and defrauds his superiors. The oppressed Christian has become the oppressive Copt. Both accounts agree on one point, namely that the Copts are possessors of exclusive knowledge. But while Pococke observes the benefits that thus redound to his coreligionists, the eyes of Reynier's French are directed elsewhere - they would wish to crack the code.

The indifference and even hostility which French sources exhibit toward the indigenous Christian population is noteworthy. It corresponds with a more general antipathy of revolutionary France toward Christianity and is perhaps also indicative of a growing ambivalence about the place of Christianity in the self-identification of "Europe."<sup>24</sup> Napoleon's famous pronouncement to the "peoples of Egypt" that the French are "believing Muslims" might be viewed as corroboration of the point - assuming that it was anything more than a cynical ploy. While the French invasion was driven, among other things, by political and commercial factors, popular traveler accounts of the late eighteenth century certainly helped to lay the groundwork for the undertaking. No work of this kind circulated more widely than Constantine-François de Volney's *Travels Through Egypt and Syria in 1783, 1784 and 1785*, and Napoleon later recollected that he himself had been influenced by the work as he prepared for the invasion.<sup>25</sup> So perhaps it should come as little surprise that de Volney does not cast the Coptic scribes in a very

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of this and modern discourses of religion more broadly, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (University of Chicago Press: London, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Darrell Dykstra, "The French Occupation of Egypt" in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M.W. Daly, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:117. Robert Tignor, *Egypt, A Short History* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2010), 198.

favorable light. He describes them as “depositories of the registers of the land,” and “intendants, secretaries, and collectors ... whom the Turks despise and the peasants hate and oppress.”<sup>26</sup>

Yet, when the French later occupied Egypt, they recognized that the cooperation of the Copts was necessary to the success of the undertaking, given their role in the collection of taxes. Early on, they requisitioned the Mamluks' urban properties and agricultural lands, but they did not yet attempt to alter the system of revenue collection or to replace the mainly Coptic staff that oversaw it.<sup>27</sup> In fact, during Napoleon's yearlong tenure in the country, the general was well aware of his reliance upon the Coptic tax officials, and he was keen that nothing should be done to estrange them.<sup>28</sup> This policy would begin to change after Napoleon had withdrawn from Egypt and the leadership of the expedition passed to Generals Kléber and Menou, respectively. Administrative adjustments were most notable under Menou, whose “colonialist” policy was aimed at establishing an indefinite occupation.<sup>29</sup> However, the shift was anticipated in an August 1799 dispatch that Napoleon sent to Kléber in which he tasked one Citizen Poussielgue with establishing a new system of taxation that would allow them to “do without the Copts.”<sup>30</sup>

In the meantime, the cadre of Enlightenment savants accompanying the expedition was engaged in an exhaustive “scientific” study of the length and width of the province. Citizen Girard set out for the upper country, inquiring into agricultural techniques, the means of measuring the land and the methods of revenue collection. Not surprisingly, he was

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<sup>26</sup> Constantine-François de Volney's *Travels Through Egypt and Syria in 1783, 1784 and 1785* (Perth: London, 1801), 53-54.

<sup>27</sup> Dykstra, “The French Occupation,” 123-24.

<sup>28</sup> Juan Cole elaborates on this theme in *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 102-105. Cole asserts that Bonaparte's policy implicitly supposed that the Coptic tax collectors “could provide a ready-made collaborating bureaucracy to the European occupiers.” This may have been the case, but the assessment is arguably incomplete without taking into consideration both the short-term tactical exigencies and their long-term designs.

<sup>29</sup> Dykstra, “The French Occupation of Egypt,” 129.

<sup>30</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte, *Correspondence of Napoléon*, publiée par ordre de l'empereur Napoléon III (Paris: Henry Plon, 1858-1870), 5:574-75.



underwhelmed by the prevailing system. The taxes were "not established on any fixed bases" and varied from province to province according to the caprice of the overlords. The Copts felt it was in their interest to provide exclusive service to the "custodians of absolute power" while closely guarding everything that could pass into the hands of others. Meanwhile the "characters of their ancient script" allowed them to make incorrect land surveys with impunity while assessing taxes more or less arbitrarily, with the connivance of village shaykhs. Along the way, Girard noticed that these corrupt officials took advantage of the ignorance of the *fellahs* in order to aggrandize their private wealth. For example, a bey's principal steward or the scribes of the *kashefs* would name a surveyor who would measure the land at some point between the planting and the harvest. On site, he would pronounce his findings orally before village onlookers who in their credulity saw the performance as safeguarding their interests. The results, Girard dispassionately reported, were then altered.<sup>31</sup>

Girard described in some detail the organization of this evidently disreputable class of officials as they existed in a hierarchical corporation, those of higher rank serving as stewards for the beys and *kashefs* and those of lower rank as surveyors and scribes. This latter grouping was to be found in every village, where the local surveys would be collected and passed to the principal scribes in each village, who in turn relayed it to the intendant bey. After estimating that three thousand people lived off of levying taxes in the province, Girard commented that the "discouragement of agriculture and depopulation of the country" owe more to the "fraudulent maneuvers" of this rank of officials than to the despotism of the beys. This is a far-reaching claim in light of the profound villainy of the beys in narratives of the expedition. Girard also

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<sup>31</sup> P.S. Girard, "Memoire sur l'agriculture et le commerce de l'Haute Egypte" in *Memoires sur l'Égypte*, (Paris: l'Imprimerie de P. Didot l'Ainé, 1799), 4:73-78. De Vonely prefigured this line of reasoning when he noticed that the Coptic *kuttab* (scribes) "frequently profit by ignorance of the peasants, in not carrying to account the partial payments, and by obliging them to discharge the debt a second time." See de Volney, *Travels*, 155.

observed the Copts' reluctance to provide information about the procedures, which they were wont to "wrap in obscurities." When he bid them to divulge their methods, they only voiced concerns about the nature of the questions themselves and when pressed further, they provided deceitful answers. Indeed, they were not unconscious of the long-term ramifications of the French project. Girard continued:

They soon perceived that the stay of the French in Egypt would put an end to the kind of exclusive privilege which they enjoyed until now, and that they would be reduced to uselessness.<sup>32</sup>

Although the failure of the French expedition and their evacuation in 1801 thwarted the kinds of comprehensive restructuring anticipated above, it would be difficult to overstate the significance of the period, not only materially but also discursively. Particularly after Menou's ascendancy, the French increasingly solicited the cooperation of the indigenous population. For example, they established a judicial *diwan*, which was mainly drawn from the ranks of leading '*ulema*'. They also created armed native auxiliary units.<sup>33</sup> This was the context in which a Coptic "general" could appear. One Ya'qub Hanna headed the Coptic Legion, which recruited and trained perhaps 800 young Copts. Beginning with al-Jabarti, and continuing until the present day, this figure has been employed in numerous histories, sometimes as a collaborationist traitor, sometimes as a nationalist or proto-nationalist hero.<sup>34</sup> In 1910, Ramzi Tadrus looked back on the period as an opportunity for Copts like Ya'qub Hanna to give "great services to the country" and

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<sup>32</sup> Girard, *Memoire*, 74, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Dykstra, "The French Occupation," 129.

<sup>34</sup> Anwar Louca, "General Ya'qub" in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 7:2349-2353. For more on these divergent appraisals, see Fakhri Andra'us, *al-Muslimun wa al-Aqbat fi Tarikh* (Cairo: Dar al-Thawafa al-Jadida), 164-79; Magdi Sami Zaki, *Histoire des coptes d'Égypte* (Versailles: Éditions de Paris, 2005), 751-755. Zaki's own assessment verges on the absurd: "Mu'allim Yacoub is to the Copts what Charles de Gaulle is to the French, a great patriot who embodied ... the aspirations of liberty and dignity of his people, a nationalist of the first decree, comparable for example to Ahmose who managed to drive away the Hyksos, those Asiatic nomads (ancestors of the Arabs?) ..." *Ibid.* 749.

to revive “the [national] brotherhood that had died under the oppression of ignorance and the yoke of slavery.”<sup>35</sup>

The official church account of the occupation framed the period much differently. It recalled the rule of General Menou as one of the agonies that the community suffered during the papacy of Murqus VIII. Menou, it relates:

Converted to the Islamic religion and called himself 'Abdallah ... and the Diwan of Cairo was composed in those days of Copts and Muslims. The former were discharged, and the diwans were left to the latter and collecting of the tax was commissioned to them when the French in Misr departed.<sup>36</sup>

These words are revealing. After all, it was Menou who enlisted native bureaucrats to produce a thorough study of the taxation structure and who eliminated the *iltizam* system in favor of a direct land tax.<sup>37</sup> Beyond the superficial pageantry of great - and not-so-great - men, a subtle threat was introduced which anticipated the obsolescence of the distinctive roles which were a hallmark of the embeddedness of [many] Coptic Christians in the life of the land, in the villages and provincial centers, at *Misr* and elsewhere. In a bit of superficial irony, it was as part of this very same process that it became possible for a Coptic general to emerge from the shadows of

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<sup>35</sup> Tadrus, *al-Aqbat*, 2:37-8, 41-2. This kind of rhetoric was not uncommon among elites who saw in the French campaign - for whatever its ills - the beginning of the "awakening" of a languid, degraded people. Shafiq Ghurbal, the prominent Egyptian historian of the 1920s and 1930s, would even write sympathetically about General Menou for his efforts to eradicate abuses, which included orders for "the heads of various departments to submit exact accounts;" Shafiq Ghurbal, *The Beginnings of the Egyptian Question and the Rise of Mehemet Ali: A Study in the Diplomacy of the Napoleonic Era Based on Researches in the British and French Archives* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1928), 120-1. Rufayla's 1898 description of Ya'qub was less flattering. He emphasized the divisions between Ya'qub and the heads of the community, particularly the patriarch who tried to convince him to turn away from his plans. See Rufayla, *Tarikh al-Umma*, 289-90.

Although the French campaign is often seen as a radical break in Coptic history, the personal story of Ya'qub tells something different. His experience in martial pursuits preceded the coming of the French. He was an accomplished horseman, and he had participated in the military battles of Ibrahim and Murad Bey. He is often presented as an exceptional case among "quiescent" Copts, but his story is suggestive of a "Coptic condition" that was much more complex than what has been purveyed in "awaking" narratives. Jacques Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt: An Historical Study of the Relations between Copts and Muslims from 640 to 1922*, trans. Ragai Makar (Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1998), 189-90.

<sup>36</sup> Antoine Khater and O.H.E. Khs-Burmester, eds. *Tarikh Batarika al-kanisa al-Misriya (History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church)*, Vol. III, Part III, *Cyril II-Cyril V (A.D. 1235-1895)* (Cairo: al-Ma'ahid al-'ilmi al-Faransawi, 1970), 171. From here, this will be cited as *HPEC* 3:3.

<sup>37</sup> Dykstra, "The French Occupation," 130.

(what retrospectively would become) a degraded condition. If a turn of the twentieth century bourgeois nationalist like Tadrus saw the occupation as an opportunity for eminent Copts to "spread freedom, justice and brotherhood," the writer of the official ecclesiastical chronicle found it appropriate to conclude his remarks on that interval with an ill-humored note about taxes.<sup>38</sup>

When the French evacuated, they left behind a province in disarray, and it was from a maelstrom of competing parties that Mehmet 'Ali would eventually emerge, gradually consolidating his rule over a period of years until he stood without rival. Whether or not Menou's plans contributed to Mehmet 'Ali's designs, there were many similarities, including the abolition of the complex assortment of tax categories in favor of a more standardized structure.<sup>39</sup> Like Menou, he also required the cooperation of Copts and others in the administration, even as he designed to curtail their privileges. In the spring of 1809, Mehmet 'Ali ordered the land tax registers to be drawn. The Coptic *mu'allimin* and the Muslim *effendiya* were both tasked with drafting the registers separately, the latter working in the home of one Ayub in Bulaq, while the Copts did so at a considerable distance in a monastery at Old Cairo. It would seem that the pasha was maneuvering to protect against fraud. Once compiled, the registers were assessed on a single tax of five riyals per *feddan*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Yusuf Manqariyus - a lay leader who worked in close cooperation with Patriarch Kirulus V - provided a less positive portrayal of the French period. He recalled the "large number" of people whom the French killed which "united all the Muslims and Christians"; Yusuf Manqariyus, *al-Qawl al-Yaqin fi'l Mas'alat al-Urthuduqsiyin* (Cairo: Al-Watan, 1893), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Rivlin, *Agricultural Policy*, 44-45; 54; 59. The "unification of taxes into one tax," in Rivlin's appraisal, "gave a modicum of order to the tax structure." It also "guaranteed that a greater proportion of the taxes flowed into the government treasury than into the pockets of the Copt scribes and the *shaikhs al-Balad*;" *Ibid.* 126. The elaborate taxation system in the late eighteenth century included as many as 24 different kinds of taxes on the *fellahin*; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137.

<sup>40</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-Athar fi 'l-Tarajim wa'l-Akhbar* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1997), 3:180.

The following year, the scribes who compiled the tax registers were no longer authorized to fix the rates. When Mehmet 'Ali designated Khalil *Effendi* as head of the *ruzname* and its scribes, he ordered that no transactions should be made without soliciting his own approval. The scribes were much chagrined at this directive, which was issued in response to an accusation that some scribes were embezzling a large part of the *miri* tax. Al-Jabarti remarked: "this was the initial intrigue against the *ruzname*, the beginning of its ignominy and the uncovering of its *secrets*." <sup>41</sup> The embezzlements were "discovered" thanks to tips provided by a group of disgruntled scribes of junior rank. All of this was consistent with Mehmet 'Ali's penetration of existing institutions as he consolidated his power. In the course of this, the agents of the state project would seek to eliminate the strata of "middlemen" (e.g. *multazims*, Mamluks, *'ulema*) standing between the centralizing regime and the sources of capital. With this gradual reordering, local forms of knowledge – which allowed for the diffusion of interstitial power - were also challenged. As a vertical bureaucratic apparatus was constituted which affirmed the "center" as the sole source of legitimate authority, legitimate knowledge would come to have a central provenance as well. From early in his rule, Mehmet 'Ali drew upon experts of various fields to bring to his territories the "benefits" of modern sciences and methods. <sup>42</sup> Many of these new "secrets" were introduced from abroad and accessible to those at the highest levels of rule. <sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 3:203-4. Italics added. The *Ruzname* was a treasury bureau which, from the seventeenth century, oversaw all of the other departments of the treasury in Ottoman *Misr*. Its director was called the *ruznamgi*. See Shaw, *Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1798* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 339-41. Its powers diminished across Mehmet 'Ali's tenure, so that by 1837, it was one of 19 agencies in the growing bureaucracy, and in the late 1840s it was taken over by the Finance Ministry; Rivlin, *Agricultural Policy*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> The pasha placed a premium on another area of knowledge, namely that of the European markets. This field was coming into prominence with the rise of cotton exports. To this end, he enrolled into service non-native Christians such as Armenians and the French who further undermined the standing of the Coptic notables. See Magdi Guirguis and Nelly Van Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Coptic Papacy* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2011), 3:66.

<sup>43</sup> On the redistribution of knowledge, see Mitchell, "The Character of Calculability," *Rule of Experts*.

This twin process can be observed in the accounts of an event that occurred 15 years into Mehmet 'Ali's rule. Returning to the official ecclesiastical chronicle, it is recorded that when “the Pasha wished to recompense the French (*al-Afrang*) and their scientists” who were serving the regime, one Frenchman suggested that he promote a union between the Copts [*an-Nasara Misr*] and the Roman Church. To this, the Coptic Synaxarium adds that the "French scientists and army leaders" offered to "organize the Egyptian government." The pasha thereby summoned *al-Mu'allim* Ghali, the superintendent of the Coptic scribes, and his son Basilius and ordered them to transfer allegiance to the Roman Church. They later brought a small group of their associates in *Misr* and Akhmim into the new communion.<sup>44</sup> In this formal account, the *wali* was agreeably disposed to the Frenchman's initiative thanks to the proficiency of the French in modern arts and sciences.

In the aftermath of these events, English traveler John Fuller passed through the province and later detailed his encounter with high-ranking Copts. After attending mass at the Patriarchal cathedral in Azbakiya, he was invited to the home of Hanna al-Tawil, at the time a prominent Coptic intendant for the *wali*, and there he met Patriarch Butrus VII. Though he offers no direct quotes, it seems that he gleaned the outline for his report from this audience. The Copts, he explains,

are divided into two parties; the Catholics ... and the schismatics [Orthodox] ... The wily Turk [by which he means Mehmet 'Ali] made use of the powerful engine of religious discord to excite jealousy between the two parties, and by alternatively favouring one and the other, succeeded at length in finding out their secrets, and in making himself independent of both.

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<sup>44</sup> *HPEC* 3.3, 174; "The departure of Pope Peter (Petros) VII, the One Hundred and Ninth Patriarch" (Baramhat 28) in *Coptic Synaxarium* (Chicago: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1995), 281-3. The event is also addressed in Iris Habib al-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisat al-Qibtia* (Cairo, 1986), 4:271. The Catholic Pope Leo XII, falsely believing that Mehmet 'Ali was committed to the union, consecrated an archbishop of Memphis and sent him to Alexandria. The *wali* immediately ordered him to leave the country. See Henry Salt, Letter, National Archives, UK Foreign Office (henceforward NA, UK FO) 78/135 (January 1, 1825).

Without transition, he records contemporary stories that highlight the lengths to which this scribal class would go to avoid divulging the "treasures" of their [Coptic] countrymen. He suggests implicitly - and not inaccurately - that vocational esoterica and material "treasures" were inseparably linked. His recounting of scribal resistances to the regime's designs includes tales resembling short hagiographies. One scribe in the *Sa'id* bore the "repeated tortures of the bastinado from sunrise to sunset before he disclosed his secret," eventually discerning with resignation that he had "suffered enough" for his nation. The text is suffused with the sense of communal peril, and the peril hinges on the forcible disclosure of secrets. Fuller - perhaps under the influence of his interlocutors here as well - made an apposite comparison with the erstwhile plans of the French occupation when he noted:

The French endeavoured in vain to dispense with [the Copts'] services, having never been able to collect the taxes without their assistance, and it remained for Mahomet Ali to break the fiscal chain.<sup>45</sup>

There is a sense of continuity, as successive regimes designed to throw light on the interstitial shadows of an imperiled order while its guardians if necessary used their very bodies to shield its secrets. Despite these efforts, it is revealed that the Copts "have much less influence than they formerly possessed" under the "indolent" Mamluks.<sup>46</sup>

The erosion of "specialized" skills was gradual, notwithstanding bold plans such as those put forward during the last phase of the French interlude. As part of a restructuring of the tax system, General Menou had established a cadastral commission in March of 1801, though its work was ultimately abortive. Only six months after it was established, the French evacuated the country. But in a sense, the unsuccessful program – which included close supervision, examinations for prospective surveyors, and standardization of measurements – was a foretaste

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<sup>45</sup> John Fuller, *Narrative of a Tour Through Some Parts of the Turkish Empire* (London: John Murray, 1830), 155-7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 155-6.

of what lay ahead.<sup>47</sup> In 1813 Mehmet 'Ali produced a cadaster which, among other things, was linked with the abolition of the *iltizams*. Despite this, Mitchell notes that as late as the final decade of the nineteenth century, local knowledge of the lands was still indispensable, particularly in the *Sa'id* where the Nile flood continued to irrigate the land. It was only with the new cadaster produced by H. G. Lyons during the British occupation that the role of local surveyors might finally be eliminated. For Lyons, this moment was the culmination of decades of unsuccessful attempts to introduce "more modern methods" in measuring the lands.<sup>48</sup> However, the effects of the decades-long pursuit of "standardization" and "modern methods" should not be discounted, even if in Lyons' estimation they were not successful. In the 1840s Hekekyan Bey, the Armenian engineer of long service to Mehmet 'Ali's regime, referred to some of these effects when he noted: "the rise of the Nile regulated the scale of the land tax to be paid for the year being. But in the time of [Mehmet 'Ali] the land tax has been made a fixed sum to be levied annually for each village."<sup>49</sup>

This kind of standardization was constitutive of the gradual foreclosure of spaces for local assessments and verdicts that were integral to the regime of "Coptic influence" we have described. It took Ibrahim Pasha, in concert with *al-Mu'allim* Ghali, nine years to complete the project. According to Hekekyan, "all the sheikhs of the *Sa'id*" traveled to lower Egypt in a party that included "expert land measurers," and they proceeded to inspect the soil of the respective lands, and assess the taxes that should be paid "hence forward." The shaykhs of Lower Egypt

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<sup>47</sup> For more details on the Cadastral Commission, see M. Chevalier, "La Politique Financière de l'expédition d'Égypte," *cahiers d'histoire Égyptienne* Série VIII (July 1956), 218-19. A standard measurement in the Upper and Lower country was only finally established by khedival decree in 1861, when the *qassaba* (measurement unit) was set at 3.55 meters. From this point in time, the *feddan* "became a definite unit of area equal to 333 1/3 square qassabas." See H.G. Lyons, *Cadastral Survey*, 39. However, the first efforts to standardize the *feddan* were made during the 1813-1814 cadastral survey; Rivlin, *Agricultural Policy*, 125.

<sup>48</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 91-2.

<sup>49</sup> Journals 1844-1850, Hekekyan Papers, BL, Add. Mss. 37,450 (1846), 3:169.



estimated the value of the lands of Upper Egypt in a similar way.<sup>50</sup> Lyons referenced the survey that *al-Mu'allim* Ghali carried out, while regretting that it did not obtain "more permanent results" due primarily to a "want of scientifically organized control and supervision so that inferior work was not detected."<sup>51</sup> Even so, it might be said that in this (and subsequent surveys conducted in the 1860s through the 1890s) native "land experts" were enlisted in operations that were aimed - directly or indirectly - at the obsolescence of their craft.<sup>52</sup> As for *Al-Mu'allim* Ghali, he eventually ran afoul of Mehmet 'Ali and/or Ibrahim Pasha not long after he had cooperated in this undertaking. There are conflicting reports about the nature of the dispute, but whatever its cause, there is no question about what happened next. Ibrahim "seized a pistol" and fired two shots at Ghali whose final words were "is this to be my end after my services?"<sup>53</sup>

As for that "culminating" moment in this long process, Mitchell shows how the Lyons Survey was part of a broader modern process that gave rise to an effect of separation "between the object world on one side of this divide, and the maps, images and numbers on the other." The local surveyor could at last be dispensed with, and "instead of measuring the land, tax officials would measure the map."<sup>54</sup> With this transference of residual "local knowledge," what had been a distinctive feature of the imbrication of Copts in the life of the land might finally be eliminated.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Hekekyan noted the pervasive judgment that there was significant corruption in the process "so that lands in most parts have either been undervalued or overvalued."

<sup>51</sup> Lyons, *Cadastral Survey*, 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot notes that Coptic administrators like *al-Mu'allim* Ghali "taught the *wali* all they knew about taxes and how to raise them," knowledge which he used to eliminate the diffuse system of the *ancien regime*. See *Egypt in the Reign*, 79.

<sup>53</sup> The *wali* may have suspected, according to Hekekyan, that Ghali was "ordered to repair to Constantinople" for the purpose of apprising the Porte on "the real state of things in Egypt." *Journals 1844-1850*, Hekekyan Papers, BL, Add. Mss. 37,450, (October 8, 1846), 3:162-63. Hekekyan also suggested that Ghali may have objected to Muhammad 'Ali's imposition of the new *firda* tax. Elsewhere, it is noted that Ibrahim Pasha perhaps felt threatened by Ghali's increasing power. See Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009), 33. In 1822, French consul Bernardino Drovetti conjectured that Ibrahim interpreted some of Ghali's initiatives as "a challenge to his authority." See Drovetti, (May 22, 1822) in Edouard Driault, *La Formation de L'Empire de Mohamed Aly de L'Arabie au Soudan 1814-1823* (Cairo: L'Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale du Caire, 1927), 246.

<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 91-3.

As we have established, his effort came on the heels of nearly a century of erosion, and this did not only affect techniques and measurements of land. We can point for example to Mehmet ‘Ali’s 1833 directive that the use of Coptic numerals in the scales of weights and measures be dispensed, and replaced with Arabic ones.<sup>55</sup> However, in his insistence on eliminating what he deemed to be the faulty techniques and methods of measurements of Coptic arithmetic notation, Lyons was in a sense also trying to eradicate accessories to a living Coptic inheritance.<sup>56</sup> By virtue of the modern map, knowledge of the terrain of Egypt as a bounded entity was now within the grasp of officials at Cairo. This too constituted the spoliation of the inheritance of Copts who, in the words of Hekekyan "preserved by tradition a perfect knowledge of the division of the lands, the number of the villages [and] their names."<sup>57</sup> And even the Coptic calendar, by which all inhabitants reckoned the seasons and the cycles of the Nile, was officially replaced by the Gregorian calendar in 1875. In time, this also would be relegated to the "pure perfect universe" of a cultural and religious heritage.<sup>58</sup> Simultaneously, the first modern census (1882) made it possible to enumerate the percentage of the "population" belonging to the Coptic confession – and thus, the "minority" could now be visualized. In turn, the cultural and religious heritage of the "minority" could also be imagined, which carried with it a corollary problem of how these distinctions might be negotiated into a common cultural inheritance of the "nation."

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<sup>55</sup> Amin Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil* (Cairo: Matba`at Dar al-Kutub al-Misriya, 1915-1936), 2:416.

<sup>56</sup> Although Coptic children had learned particular skills in the Coptic schools, many of the arithmetic skills were transmitted directly from their fathers in the workplace. In their effort to overhaul the bureaucracy, the British sought to prohibit children from joining their fathers at work; Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt*, 212-13.

<sup>57</sup> Journals 1844-1850, Hekekyan Papers, BL, Add. Mss. 37,450, (October 8, 1846), 3:162.

<sup>58</sup> The quote is from Bourdieu, cited above. The rhythms of the Nile were in turn linked with "religious" festivals, attended by Christians and Muslims alike. Although transformations in the modern period made it possible for these material practices to be re-conceptualized as "purely" cultural phenomena, it should be noted that across the centuries there had been intermittent efforts on the part of authorities to appropriate or curb some of these popular occasions; see Huda Lutfi, "Coptic Festivals of the Nile: Aberrations of the Past?" in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, eds. Thomass Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 245-282. On the rich history of "shared" festivals, see Qasim Abduh Qasim, *Ahl al-Dhimma fi Misr al-'Usur al-Wusta* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1977), 162-65.

### **“All the Preachings of Saint Mark”**

In the preceding section, a kind of order was explored that could admit differentiated roles and distinctive knowledges. We investigated a section of Copts that has been classified rather generically as a "scribal" class, with attention to how their "condition" has been variously framed, and to a process that would gradually lead to its undoing. This order was characterized by porous communal/spatial frontiers. Here, we look to how such an order was manifested geographically for the Alexandrian communion, with an eye to those geographies that breach familiar conceptual boundaries.

In the introduction to his important study of the life of the Coptic community in nineteenth century Egypt, Muhammad ‘Afifi makes it clear that he will not address the role of the Coptic Church in Ethiopia. He explains that although the topic was important to Ethiopian history, it had no effect on the Copts in Egypt.<sup>59</sup> In this judgment, he is hardly alone. There has been minimal attention to the “relationship” between the “Copts” of “Egypt” and “Ethiopia” in the scholarship, and references to the connection are usually cursory and focused on mechanical formalities. These most notably include the delegations that arrived at *Misr* to notify the Patriarch of the death of a former metropolitan archbishop (*abun*) and to petition him to elevate a new one. In an arrangement similar to the one in the Nubian Christian kingdoms, the episcopal seat of *al-Habash* was almost always occupied by a prelate who was obtained from "abroad."<sup>60</sup> This was said to have originated in the pseudo-canon of the Council of Nicaea, and later set down in the *Fetha Nagast* (the official Solomonic code of law), stipulating that the metropolitan of *al-Habash* would be "subject to the holder of the See of Alexandria, who is entitled to appoint over

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<sup>59</sup> Muhammad ‘Afifi, *al-Aqbat fi Misr fi'l 'asr al-'Uthmani* (Cairo: 1992), 15.

<sup>60</sup> William Y. Adams, “Nubian Church Organization,” (*Coptic Encyclopedia*): 6: 1813-14.

them a chief from his region and is under his jurisdiction." <sup>61</sup>

Aside from fleeting references to these delegations and other formalities, the historiographies of modern Egypt and Ethiopia usually have little to say about this ancient relationship. The “Egyptian,” according to a familiar telling, is carried off to a foreign land, leaving the obscurity of an “Egyptian” desert monastery (usually the Eastern Desert monastery of Saint Antonius) to take up his far-off seat of repute. When an archimandrite coming from Russia visited this monastery in 1850, he was shown the coffin of a bishop of *al-Habash*. This detail prompted a well-known twentieth century Coptologist to note that this bishop *alone* “came back from Ethiopia,” while all the others “had died and were buried there.” <sup>62</sup> The observation reveals a subtle orientation toward the “Ethiopia connection” that pervades modern assessments on the topic. There is no need for commentary should a bishop of Asyut or Girga be buried in his diocese; he need not *go back* because, in a sense, he is already there. By contrast, the transference to Ethiopia is an estrangement, a point so often reinforced in nationalist histories. From an Ethiopian nationalist perspective, Ephraim Isaac seems to affirm the estrangement in his claim that “once the *Abuna* entered Ethiopia, he was a captive and never left the country.” <sup>63</sup>

The distance that separates “Ethiopia” from “Egypt” is not simply a geographic one that can be translated into kilometers or measured according to other factors such as the ardors of the journey. It is the result of a series of mechanisms and processes in the modern period that

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<sup>61</sup> As quoted in Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), 112, f.n. 83. See also Bernard Velat, “Un grand dignitaire de l’Eglise éthiopienne,” *Les Cahiers Coptes* (1953), 4:14-15; and S.C. Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia and Alexandria: The Metropolitan Episcopacy of Ethiopia* (Warsaw: Zaspán, 1997), 34-6. The arrangement was arguably related to the peculiar episcopal protocols of the see of Alexandria. While elevation to the episcopate in the other sees could be discharged by any member of the episcopate, the patriarchs of Alexandria were insistent upon personally consecrating all bishops who belonged to their jurisdiction. See Mikhail, “Egypt from Late Antiquity,” 46. If the frame of modern territorial states is deployed anachronistically, this could give rise to an impression of ecclesiastical imperialism, particularly for more distant bishoprics such as those of the Nubian kingdoms or *al-Habash*.

<sup>62</sup> Otto Meinardus, *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1970), 180.

<sup>63</sup> Ephraim Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church* (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 2012), 202.

contributed to a spatial and temporal rupture.<sup>64</sup> When Yusuf abu Dhiqn wrote his history of the Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian communion in the late seventeenth century, he titled it *The History of the Cophts, Commonly Called the Jacobites, Under the Dominion of the Turks and Abyssin Emperor with Some Geographical Notes on Descriptions of the Several Places in Which They Live in Those Dominions*. The author uses the term “Cophts” to refer to all the Christians of those disparate lands in which the doctrine of Saint Mark was “dispersed.” Within the text of this brief treatise, the discernible divisions relate to the accidents of temporal sovereignty and not to the essential identities of those belonging to the Alexandrian see.<sup>65</sup> Regardless of how much we may extrapolate from this particular text, what is clear is that such a seamless portraiture of the communion was to become virtually inconceivable later. This process was long and complex, but in the 1850s Patriarch Kirulus IV (1854-1862) could still assert, “everyone in Abyssinia is Coptic Orthodox.”<sup>66</sup>

As we seek here to problematize the condition of fixed national “spaces” which pervade the vast bulk of the modern literature on the subject, we should keep in mind that it is not so simple a process as a “transnational” formation being dissected into multiple spatialities. The formation remains “transnational” even while its constituent parts are increasingly nationalized, which may be related to the location of “religion” in the modern order. Here, we simply note the adaptability of this formation to new contexts and the flexibility of communal imagining and re-imagining across time. This is strikingly illustrated in the mid-1960s when the official title of the Anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria was modified to include “Patriarch of All Africa,”

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<sup>64</sup> On the emergence of geographic distance as temporal distance, see Eve Troutt Powell’s treatment of Rafa’at Rafi’i al-Tahtawi’s writings in *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 50-58.

<sup>65</sup> Thus, those living in Aegypt, Nubia or Thebais were “compell’d to bear the tyranny of the Turks,” while those living in Aethiopia were not. Abudacnus, *The History of the Cophts*, 3-4. Throughout the text the author uses Jacobite and Copht interchangeably.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in ‘Ali Mubarak, 6:73.

which incidentally had been an informal title of the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Alexandria from the eighteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Originally “Africa” designated the Roman province of the North African littoral. During the period of decolonization, the purview of Saint Mark's "African preachings" was expanded to include the entirety of the continental land mass as the Anti-Chalcedonian see of Alexandria became involved in Sub-Saharan evangelization projects. This shift was cultivated both by Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir’s appeals to recently decolonized nations, and by the attraction of many African Christians to an indigenous, “African” Christian tradition.<sup>68</sup>

Historically, the formal and informal patriarchal titles have been sufficiently imprecise to suggest a certain territorial latitude, and they have been subject to subtle variations over time. In the 1880s, the formal title was “Most Holy Pope and Patriarch of the Great City of Alexandria and all Lands of *Misr*, of Jerusalem the Holy City, of Nubia, Abyssinia, Pentapolis and all the Preaching of Saint Mark.”<sup>69</sup> This is not substantially different from sixteenth century patriarch Yuannis XIII’s description of his authority, which included charge over “The See of Saint Mark in the Great City of Alexandria and the City of Jerusalem, *Misr*, the Provinces of *al-Habasha* and *Nuba*.”<sup>70</sup> In a letter sent to the Abyssinian king in 1808, Patriarch Murqus VIII began: “From Servant of God Murqus... called to the service of the seat of Mark in the great city of Alexandria, the city of Jerusalem, the *diyar* of *Misr*, the *aqalim* of *Habasha* and neighboring lands.”<sup>71</sup>

These introductions provide a range of important insights into ways of apprehending the communion and its cohesion that are not based upon modern, territorial-national conceptions of

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<sup>67</sup> During the first five decades of the twentieth century, the Greek Orthodox see of Alexandria had nine metropolitans, including Axum (Ethiopia), Nubia (Sudan), Carthage (Tunis) and conspicuously "Johannopolis" (Johannesburg, South Africa); Hardy, *Christian Egypt*, 198.

<sup>68</sup> See Jacques Masson, “La Mission Copte en Afrique Noire,” *Proche-Orient Chretien* (2005), 55:294 and Bishop Antonius Markos, *Come Across and Help Us: The Story of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Africa in our Present Time* (Cairo: The Bishopric of Africa Affairs, 1993-1994).

<sup>69</sup> Alfred Butler, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1970), 2:302. The place names are listed here as they appear in Butler's translation.

<sup>70</sup> Guirguis and Van Doorn-Harder, *Emergence*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> This letter is reproduced in Iskarius, *Nawabigh al-Aqbat*, 1:51.

space. The final description of “neighboring lands” is descriptive of those vague borderlands that can retract or expand according to variables such as the movement of peoples or shifts in temporal authority.<sup>72</sup> Murqus also refers to a number of cities that were under his care and that grounded his charge - to use a modern anachronism - in both "spiritual" and "temporal" terms. The city of Alexandria is indicative of his apostolic authority; Jerusalem establishes the link with the central point of the Christian mysteries (the epicenter of a Christian geography), while *Misr* and *Habash* are prominent centers of "temporal" authority. In other words, his authority is not over an “objective,” bounded spatial entity, but it inheres in an entwined world of distinctive and overlapping geographies.

Two phrases, *diyar Misr* (regions of *Misr*) and *aqalim Habash* (districts of *Habash*) draw attention more directly to the historiographical problem of national space. Mitchell notes an anachronistic if commonplace reading of *Misr* to refer to the modern territorial unit of Egypt. He reminds us that a governor was appointed for the *city* of *Misr* (Cairo) while terms such as *Bilad Misr* connoted the provincial capital and its hinterlands, those towns, villages and other territories that sustained it, and only later did the abbreviated usage signify both the city and the country. He adds that the previous phrases “did not picture a territorial object but referred to a place in terms of a relationship.”<sup>73</sup> *Diyar* and *aqalim* are used in the sense of a central location

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<sup>72</sup> At least during parts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was even an Anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian bishop in Cyprus. In the course of Catholic efforts to effect union with the Alexandrian see, the Alexandrian bishop of Cyprus was conspicuously hostile to their endeavors. See Khalil Samir, "Gabriel VII," *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 4:1133-1135, *Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire du Christianisme en orient*, ed. Antoine Rabbath (Paris, 1907), 1:274. One 1625 document in the Archives of the Propaganda Fide alludes to "400 non-Chalcedonian and Coptic Orthodox families;" see Vincenzo Poggi, "Christians in the Second Ottoman Era (17th Century)," *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, eds. Habib Badr et al. (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 655-673. Episcopal history reflects this fluidity, insofar as the number of bishoprics and the location of episcopal seats varied considerably over time. See Jacob Muyser, "Contribution à l'étude des listes épiscopales de l'église Copte," *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte* (1944), 10:115-176.

<sup>73</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 180-1. Di-Capua has suggested that the "Anglo-Egyptian condominium" was a watershed in this process, insofar as the southern border of Egypt was defined with precision - in the wider context of the scramble for Africa, during which "lines were drawn all over [Africa] and around Egypt." The 1899 Condominium (Article One) defined "the Sudan" as a geographic entity distinct from Egypt - a decision which

and those ill-defined regions that are dependent on it and upon which it depends.

This is a key point that has ramifications for apprehending an Alexandrian Orthodox communion which inhered in a multiplicity of *relationships*. As an interpretive tool, the concept of the relationship suggests a path away from the sterile debates that hinge on objectified conditions like that of the “minority community.” Just as *Misr* opened out to its “*diyar*” or “*bilad*” and *Habash* to its “*aqalim*,” it might be considered how the Alexandrian Orthodox communion “opened out” to its own metaphorical hinterlands. At least into the nineteenth century Coptic women at Luqsur and its surrounding villages had a practice of burning herbs and making the sign of the cross over the ashes while they recited prayers. Muslim women sought to obtain these ashes, believing that this ritual bestowed a special *baraka* (blessing).<sup>74</sup> Similarly, when Christian children were unable to walk, there was a practice in certain localities of taking them to the village mosque rather than the church, believing this to be the special recourse for this particular ailment.<sup>75</sup> Over time, such practices came to be conceived as expressions of “superstition,” “low culture” or “popular” religion.<sup>76</sup>

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infuriated many nationalists - and by 1905 "the once unbounded kingdom of Muhammad Ali took the familiar shape of Egypt without the Sudan." Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 50-1. However, it is interesting to note that during these years of transition, there was still ambiguity about the nature of the relationship between "Egypt" and its southern reaches among the colonial power's administrators and commentators. This is exemplified in the very title of a book about Egypt/the Sudan that was published in the immediate wake of the 1899 condominium; i.e.

Frederick Fuller's *Egypt and the Hinterland* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901).

<sup>74</sup> "Mrs. Belzoni's Trifling Account" in Giovanni Belzoni, *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries Within the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs and Excavations in Egypt and Nubia* (London: Murray, 1820), 450.

<sup>75</sup> Winifred S. Blackman, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), 223. There are many comparable examples of specialized "spiritual" faculties. In various localities, when Muslims sought to construct pigeon towers, they would sometimes visit a desert monastery and remit a gift to the monks, who in turn wrote a special blessing for them. If the sacred note was placed in the tower, it was believed that the enterprise would prosper; General Andréossy, "Mémoire sur la vallée des lacs de natron, et celle du fleuve-sans-eau, d'après la reconnaissance faite les 4, 5, 6, 7 et 8 pluviose, l'an 7 de la république," in *Mémoires sur l'égypte: publiés pendant les campagnes du Général Bonaparte, dans les années VI et VII* (Paris: P. Didot L'aine, 1800-03), 1:232-70.

<sup>76</sup> The most incisive analysis of the emergence of enlightenment discourses and practices related to the Coptic community is Paul Sedra's *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (London: I.B. Taurus and Co., 2011).



When the understanding of communion is reoriented in relational terms, it might be considered less as an objectified, bounded entity and more in terms of the range of formal and informal relationships, the networks of connectivity, the admixture of individuals and peoples that gave it tangible form. In turn, those metaphorical “hinterlands,” where differences could meet, might be approached more easily. Al-Jabarti tells of a rumor that circulated widely in Cairo and the surrounding villages in 1735 concerning the fast approaching Day of Judgment, which was to take place on 26 *Dhu al-Hijja*. Some people were overcome with fear and anguish while others repented of their sins. So profound was the conviction that the world would be ending that no words of refutation could calm the hysteria. Instead, many people would answer, “It is true. It was said by this Jew, or by that Copt, and they know signs and astrology and they do not lie in what they say.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed, in the metaphorical “hinterlands,” differences could meet and even work together.

Returning to the question of relational geography, we note that the patriarch's usages hardly exhaust the ways in which "space" was identified and apprehended. There are numerous references in the official chronicle of the Church to *al-Wajh al-Bahri* and *al-Wajh al-Qibli*, which literally mean "the side (or direction) of the sea" (Mediterranean) and "the side of the *Qibla*" (the Muslim directional orientation during prayer.) There are also references to *al-Sa'id* and *Asfal al-Ard*, which refer to the “Upper” and “Lower” regions of the land, respectively. We can mention three such instances to illustrate the point. At the installation of Yuannis XVI al-Tukhi as the 103rd patriarch (in the succession of St. Mark) in 1676, it is recorded that he “celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the churches of *Misr* ... and [then] toured *al-Sa'id* and *aqalim*

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<sup>77</sup> al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-Athar*, 1:156-7. The favor which Ali Bey al-Kabir accorded to one *Mu'allim* Rizq in the 1770s is reported to have been at least partially due to the latter's knowledge of astronomy. See the introduction to James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1804), 1:105.

al-Bahariya before returning to *Misr*.<sup>78</sup> The next citation comes from a description of the events surrounding the death of Patriarch Murqus VII in 1769. On that occasion, a number of metropolitan archbishops came to pay their respects, including Yusa (Yusab), the metropolitan of *al-Habash*, as well as “the metropolitan of *al-Wajh al-Qibli*.”<sup>79</sup> And in a late nineteenth century supplement to the chronicle, these terms are still in use. Describing the travels of Patriarch Kirulus V (elevated in 1874) the chronicle indicates that he visited *al-Wajh al-Bahri* twice and *al-Wajh al-Qibli* once.<sup>80</sup>

At the outset, we can note that these “locations” are based upon relationships. Both sets are situated in relation to an external referent; upper and lower in relation to each other, the flow of the river, perhaps *Misr* (Cairo); and *al-Wajh al-Bahri* and *al-Wajh al-Qibli* in relation to the sea and the *Qibla*, respectively. Where exactly these “locations” begin or end is no more distinct than the outer limits of *Misr*’s hinterlands. What these references clearly establish is the inadequacy of the national spatial object as a frame for analysis, as it is at once too narrow and too broad.<sup>81</sup> It presupposes an inherent congruence between *al-Wajh al-Bahri* and *al-Wajh al-Qibli* while other potential affinities, for example between *al-Sa’id/al-Wajh al-Qibli* and the regions of *al-Habasha* are largely preempted. When the chronicle mentions the metropolitans of *al-Habash* and *al-Wajh al-Qibli* together paying their respects to the deceased patriarch, one has a sense of a geographical silhouette that exists not so much against national space as beyond it.

A complex set of processes would contribute to an effect of distance between the

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<sup>78</sup> *HPEC* 3.3, 160.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>81</sup> Maged Mikhail has addressed some of the pitfalls of neglecting regional specificity in the study of late antique and early Islamic Egypt. On the linguistic transition from Coptic to Arabic, he argues that the discrepancies among scholars concerning the timeline for this process result from the tendency to analyze a limited selection of sources, and then to project their findings across “the whole of Egypt.” See “Egypt from Late Antiquity,” 130. Elsewhere, he has demonstrated the importance of locality in the socio-political dynamics of the communion. See for example his discussion of the dynamics involving three rival sites of socio-political power (Alexandria, *Misr* and Wadi al-Natrun) during the tenth century; see 283-86.

"Egyptian" and "Ethiopian" territories of this wider geography. These included a universalization of Eurocentric metanarratives that established the "West" as the nexus linking region to region. Until recent decades, the historiography of modern Ethiopia was overwhelmingly occupied with European relations.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, the "international" dimension of "Egypt" and "Ethiopia" became mediated by Europeans who were now not only uniquely equipped to penetrate uncharted territories and discover the "undiscovered," but also to make them intelligible. In this, Molefi Asante reads an anti-African impetus. The "Eurocentrists," he writes, in order to "isolate the ancient civilization from the rest of Africa" imagined that "impassable cataracts" prevented "the Egyptians from interacting with the rest of Africa ... [and that] the Sahara was so difficult to cross that almost no Africans crossed it."<sup>83</sup>

Whatever the merit of the specific cause he ascribes, the observation that the barriers have been most imposing in certain Eurocentric imaginations should not be controversial. It is interesting to note in this regard a striking moment of self-reflection on the part of Dominique Vivant Denon, among the savants traveling in the company of the French campaign. Through discussion with people of different places, he found that "remote distances seem to be contradicted; and ... the space to be passed over ceases to be immense." He goes on, "The Red Sea, Gidda, Mecca, seemed like neighbouring places to the town.... India itself was but a short way beyond them." Then he turns his astonished gaze toward "Africa":

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<sup>82</sup> Donald Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction," 432. On Eurocentrism in the study of Ethiopian history, see Sven Rubenson, ed. *Correspondence and Treaties, 1800-1854* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1987), ix.

<sup>83</sup> Molefi Asante, *From Imhotep to Akhenaten: An Introduction to Egyptian Philosophers* (African American Images, 2000), 20. Terence Walz gives a thoughtful commentary on this artificial rupture in the introduction to *Trade Between Egypt and Bilad al-Sudan, 1700-1820* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1978), xiii-xiv. His study of the long-distance "southern" trade linking "Egypt" with the interior of Africa remains one of the few studies on the topic. It would seem that very little progress has been made to correct what Walz observed nearly four decades ago, when he noted that the scholarship has "unwittingly sealed off [Egypt] from her southern neighbors." Recent trends in the studies of slavery are beginning to fill this lacuna. We will critically engage this topic in Chapter Three.

The oasis [sic] were actually no more than three days journey off us, and ceased to appear to our imagination as an undiscovered country. From oasis to oasis, by easy marches of one or two days, we arrive at Sennaar, one of the capitals of Nubia, which separates Egypt from Abyssinia and Darfur, the latter of which countries is in the road to, and trades with, Tombuctoo, whose inhabitants are still the chief object, in Africa, of European curiosity, and whose very existence was a short time ago problematical.<sup>84</sup>

Significantly, when he makes the “discovery” of a vast world of communication beyond the reach of Europeans, Denon is quartered in the entrepôt of Qena – a most important town of *al-Sa'id/al-Wajh al-Qibli*. This was a key stop for the pilgrimage and trade caravans coming from the interior of Africa, but also an encounter of east and west, a meeting point of travelers, pilgrims and traders whose points of origin spanned at least 5000 miles.<sup>85</sup> Peter Gran has noted that nearly all historians who have studied modern Egypt have done so “in terms of the idea of a center,” with Upper Egypt (*al-Sa'id*) cast in the role of unchanging society of more interest to traditional anthropology than history.<sup>86</sup> From this perspective, Cairo and “the West” have the shared task of drawing *al-Sa'id* out of its timelessness and into history. How might the “Upper Egyptian” locales of Qena, Esna or Luqsar be “thought” when considered in relation to *Bilad al-Sudan* and *Bilad al-Habasha* in contrast with *Misr*? The diverse population of Qena included a

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<sup>84</sup> Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt in Company with Several Divisions of the French Army, During the Campaigns of General Bonaparte in that Country* (London: 1803), 2:170.

<sup>85</sup> Here, it is useful to recall that long before “the West” became the inevitable “center” and mediator of “globalization,” there were patterns of exchange - of commodities and ideas - that might in some sense be called “global.” See Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>86</sup> Peter Gran, “Upper Egypt in Modern History: A “Southern Question?” in *Upper Egypt Identity and Change*, eds. Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 78-80. Gran has suggested here and elsewhere that the “Southern Question” problematic may be approached by way of comparative history. See also Gran, “Egypt and Italy, 1760-1850 Toward a Comparative History” in *Society and Economy in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean 1600-1900*, eds. Nelly Hanna and Raouf Abbas (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 11-40. One well known work which exemplifies the “timeless” depiction of Egyptian rural life is Henry Habib Ayrout's *The Egyptian Peasant*, trans. John Williams (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2005). In fact, the title of the first chapter is “Changelessness,” and this sets the tone for the rest of the book. Donald Donham's critique of the historiography of Ethiopia is very similar to Gran's observation about the divergent approaches to the north and south in the Egyptian scholarship. According to Donham, northern Ethiopia has been studied “mostly by historians, in terms of the structure of its imperial center, while the south is studied mostly by anthropologists.” See “Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: Themes in Social History” in *Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-48.

substantial number of Copts, many of whom were influential merchants, and closer attention to *al-Wajh al-Qibli/al-Sa'id* may open a field for reorienting the understanding of the “preachings of Saint Mark,” not to mention the “curiosity” of the “Ethiopian connection.”<sup>87</sup>

In her study of the production of the *Sa'id* as a subaltern space, Martina Rieker makes an important intervention in the historiography of modern Egypt, demonstrating the modernity of the *Sa'id*'s inscription on the national periphery. In doing so, she also makes overtures toward the economic and cultural factors that have given the region distinctive characteristics, and which were evident in the various “local” resistances to this process of national marginalization. These included early twentieth century histories of the *Sa'id*, which in her words “were written in the shadow of other, older histories, at the moment the *Sa'id* gave way to the post-colonial Sa'idi.” This historical moment did not last long and the *Sa'id* was finally incorporated on the margins of a hegemonic, Cairo-centered historiography.<sup>88</sup> Rieker's critical evaluation of national space is an important step toward the conceptualization of de-centered geographies. In complement to her approach, another kind of project has been undertaken which focuses on networks that have defied this kind of nationalization of space. A noteworthy example in this regard is the work pertaining to Sufi networks. In his studies of Idrisiya Sufism, one scholar has noted that much of the *tariqa*'s history developed in the context of a geographical triangle linking the Hejaz, the Sudan and Upper Egypt and largely *excluding Cairo*.<sup>89</sup>

Unlike the modern boundaries of “Egypt,” those of the *Sa'id* remain vague and contested, which is possibly related to its place in a still ongoing project of national becoming. The

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<sup>87</sup> Eyles Irwin was detained in Qena, and provided extensive information about the influence of Copts in these environs, especially 1:140-45, 1:190-95, 1:208-9 and 1:230-239. *A Series of Adventures in the Course of a Voyage up the Red Sea, on the Coasts of Arabia and Egypt; and of a route through the deserts of Thebais, in the year 1777* (London, 1787).

<sup>88</sup> Rieker, “Sa'id and the City,” 41.

<sup>89</sup> See Mark Sedgwick, “Upper Egypt's Regional Identity: The Role and Impact of Sufi Links” in *Upper Egypt Identity and Change*, eds. Nicholas S. Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 97-98.

ambivalence about the *Sa'id* in national literature is perhaps bound up with the ambivalence about "Africa" and the "south" more generally.<sup>90</sup> If the idea of the *Sa'id* can be read as a sign of the dynamic and as yet incomplete project of national becoming, it also speaks to an ambivalence about national space that is incorporated within the very boundaries of the nation-state. It evokes a legacy of different apprehensions of space, one of vaguely defined frontiers that could in fact "travel" according to changing times and contexts. For example, eighteenth century court documents use "*al-Wajh al-Qibli*" in reference not only to the southern regions of what would be included in modern Egypt, but occasionally in reference to territories within the kingdoms of Sennar and Darfur as well.<sup>91</sup> In other words, as relationships (here, legal) extended southward, the terminus of the directional referent could travel with them. In introducing his translation of two manuscripts produced by participants in the "Turco-Egyptian" occupation of *Bilad al-Sudan* (1822-1845), Richard Hill states that the authors "had no clear notion of the Sudan as a geographical unity or knew with confidence where Nubia ended and *Bilad al-Sudan* began."<sup>92</sup> We might rejoin that what is exceptional is not the absence of such a notion, but the emergence of an order in which it would come to be expected.

It is important to emphasize that isolating a part of a geography like a "southern dimension" should be done guardedly and without giving it too much of a literal significance.

For example, the "northern" site of Jerusalem would become a particularly important field on

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<sup>90</sup> In his analysis of the late nineteenth century Ottoman representations of the Arab periphery, Ussama Makdisi has observed that "in age of Western dominated modernity every nation creates its own orient." See "Ottoman Orientalism," in *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 769. This would seem to hold true in the case of Egypt, where *al-Sa'id*, *al-Sudan* and perhaps elsewhere – such as the Ethiopian borderlands – became "backward peripheries" and objects for civilizational interventions. See also Selim Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery": The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311-42.

<sup>91</sup> Walz, *Trade*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Hill, ed. *On the Frontiers of Islam: Two Manuscripts Concerning the Sudan Under Turco-Egyptian Rule, 1822-1845*, trans. Richard Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), xvi. Centuries earlier, in Fatimid era Arabic documents, these regions were denominated with the generic term "Maris," which also had a relational derivation; it came from the Coptic word for "south." Richard Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 464.

which ostensibly “southern” struggles were waged as the Alexandrian patrimony was drawn into the political conflicts of the nineteenth century.<sup>93</sup> All of this points again to the nature of a distinctive order that defied the ruptures of the modern map. It should also be noted that like those of the south, the northern reaches of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion were vague and accommodating, which is exemplified by the history of the Alexandrian archbishopric of Jerusalem. The rise to prominence of the Mamluk (*Bahri*) dynasty the thirteenth century occasioned an increase in the number of Christians following the Alexandrian see who were living in various parts of *Bilad al-Sham*. Although protocols specified that these territories belonged jurisdictionally to the Anti-Chalcedonian see of Antioch, Alexandrian Patriarch Kirulus III (1235-42) directed a pastoral letter to Damascus in which he assumed prerogatives over Coptic rite churches there, and appointed Basilius as the first Alexandrian archbishop of Jerusalem. Antiochian Patriarch Aghnatius II retaliated by appointing an Abyssinian monk then in residence at Jerusalem to be the metropolitan of *al-Habash*.<sup>94</sup>

The storm eventually passed, the newly founded archdiocese endured and it became a treasured feature of the communion’s ethos. Like all dioceses and archdioceses, its jurisdiction expanded and retracted according to demographic shifts and practical or administrative demands. But it is worth noting that through all of this, the archdiocese of Jerusalem was consistently

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<sup>93</sup> This would intensify with the “centralizing” efforts of competing regimes. At the same time, “Western” powers - and particularly the British - were intimately involved in the conflicts as the Great Powers, seeking to increase their political leverage in the empire, sought out local communities to “protect.”

<sup>94</sup> See Dimitri Rizq, *Qissat al-Aqbat fi'l 'Ard al-Muqadasa* (Al-Fajala: Dar al-Jil l-Iltaba’a, 1970), 25-6. Although accord to Rizq this particular archbishop never went to Ethiopia, several decades later Emperor Yigba-Siyon (of the newly “restored” Solomonic Dynasty) complained to Patriarch Yuannis VII (1262-8; 1271-93) of grave problems caused by the presence of Syrian metropolitans. Being “uniquely attached to the Patriarch of Alexandria,” he wrote, “we could not tolerate that these strangers exercise any longer the episcopal functions which they could enjoy until now.” Quoted by Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 69. There is also evidence that strained relations between the Mamluks and the emperors of *Bilad al-Habasha* were also a factor that opened the door for a Syrian *abun*. It is said that Sultan al-Zahir Baybars disallowed the Alexandrian patriarch from sending an *abun* in retaliation for the emperors’ apparent abuses of the Muslims living to the east of the Abyssinian highlands. See Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt and the Nile* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 41-42.

responsible for dioceses located in what is today "Lower Egypt." In the time of Basilius, these encompassed Daqahliya, and parts of Sharqiya, Gharbiya and Qalyubiya.<sup>95</sup> According to an early eighteenth century reference, its jurisdictions included Sharqiya, Gharbiya, Buhayra, as well as the towns of Mahal, Mansura, Dumyat, Rashid (Rosetta), Damanhur and Alexandria.<sup>96</sup> In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European powers and various movements scrambled to gain a foothold in the environs of Jerusalem and further afield. In the course of this and the colonial and anti-colonial struggles in Palestine, regional connections with the "Holy Places," including those of the Alexandrian see, were reduced to little more than footnotes in competing narrations. Obscured was an Ottoman-era order in which *al-Wajh al-Bahri* could extend naturally into the Holy City and beyond.

The life of Basilius encapsulates the reach of a network as it still operated in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While a monk at the eastern desert monastery of Antonius, Basilius increased and organized *waqf* holdings of Cairo as well as those at the *'izba* of Bush, the village to the north of Beni Suwayf that housed the subsidiary convent for the Eastern Desert monasteries of Antonius and Bulus. He was subsequently consecrated as the Archbishop of Jerusalem, in which position he came in contact with the consuls of a number of nations as well as officials at Istanbul. During his long tenure, he engaged in building and restoration activities in many places, including Jerusalem and throughout his bishoprics of *al-Wajh al-Bahri*.<sup>97</sup> He also collected donations from wealthy Copts of al-Mansura for the purpose of purchasing land at Jaffa on which he built a large church and hospice for the use of his flock during pilgrimages.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Iris Habib al-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanizat al-Qibtiya 1517-1870* (Alexandria: Maktabat Kanisat Mari Girgis, 1975), 4:351.

<sup>96</sup> Claude Sicard, *Description de l'Égypte* (Lyon: Librairie d'Éducation de Perisse frère, 1845), 107.

<sup>97</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:202. Leeder provides details of this prelate's significant building and restoration projects at the major pilgrimage site of Sit Dumyana. S.H. Leeder, *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs: A Study of the Manners and Customs of the Copts of Egypt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 143.

<sup>98</sup> al-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisa*, 4:353.



And finally, he helped to reduce the serious tensions that had existed between the Coptic and Abyssinian monks in Jerusalem.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the career of this ecclesiastic exhibits relationships linking the (eastern) desert and Cairo, Istanbul and *Bilad al-Sham*, *Bilad al-Sham* and *al-Wajh al-Bahri*, *al-Habasha* and *Misr*. And another apparent link can also be distinguished - the one between the clergy and the laity. This invites us to make a gradual turn away from “geography” and toward a correlated set of relationships.

### **“Saint Mark is Our Father, Alexandria Our Mother”**

In the preceding section, we have explored the innovation of the boundaried, territorial object, with an eye to earlier ways of conceptualizing and identifying space and place. Instead of precise geographic delineations, we found nebulous frontiers and mutable spaces. The territories of the Alexandrian communion were not "self-standing," and they did not exist apart from a complex of relationships. We now turn to the Alexandrian Orthodox communion as an idea and as a tangible reality. In doing so, we acknowledge that it has been constituted by sets of practices and has cohered at least in part in the imagination. We will hold in mind the formal and informal relationships, practices and institutions that gave life and form to the idea. The relevance of the communion in the lives of its “followers” varied from locale to locale and was affected by many factors. While a peasant in *Bilad al-Habasha*, a monk in Jerusalem, a notable in Cairo, and an Asyuti trader might all be “followers of Alexandrian Orthodoxy,” the import and meaning of this association would surely not have been the same for everyone. To piece together all the strands that constituted this formation in search of a “complete picture” is obviously not possible. The aim here is to follow some of the “strands,” to complicate what definitive pictures would be essayed by various endogenous and exogenous movements and groups which sought to

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<sup>99</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:203. The nature of these tensions will be considered in Chapter Four.

represent, appropriate, refashion or “win over” sections of this historical complex.

During the first decade of the eighteenth century, Lenoir du Roule, a French ambassador being sent to the Abyssinian court, succeeded in joining a caravan to *Bilad al-Habasha*. While on journey, he was notified that a number of agents were trying to frustrate his endeavors. One of these, so the report went, was the Patriarch of Alexandria who told the caravan leaders that the “Franks” were not traders as they had claimed, but were endeavoring to “cut the banks of the Nile.” Whatever set of factors were at play in the subsequent events, Du Roule was murdered as he passed through Sennar. The Emperor of *Bilad al-Habasha*, Tekle Haymanot, sent a strongly worded letter of protest to the pasha at Cairo claiming that the latter was obstructing the movement of embassies to and from his kingdom. The emperor began his letter with the usual introductions, during which he referred to himself as “protector of the boundaries of Alexandria.” He went on to issue the following words of warning:

It is in our power ... to revenge the insult offered by you to our messenger. The [Nile] might be made an instrument of our vengeance, God having placed in our hands its fountain.<sup>100</sup>

Here, the emperor invoked the long-established belief that the course of the river could be diverted or obstructed at its source. This myth was employed time and again in answer to real or perceived dangers, and occasionally in response to grievances voiced by Christians in the lower lands of the Nile.

The Du Roule affair unfolded during such a time. Certainly fresh in the historical memory of the patriarch was that tumultuous era of Jesuit interference in *Bilad al-Habasha*, when the emperor’s court transferred allegiance to Rome and accepted a Catholic *abun* in place of the one who was sent from *Misr*. The unhappy effects of that period were long lasting and the patriarch -

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<sup>100</sup> The complete text of Tecelehaymanot’s letter is printed in an addendum to Samuel Johnson’s translation of Jeronimo Lobo, *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, trans. Samuel Johnson (London, 1789), 183-84.

like his successors well into the nineteenth century - viewed with immense circumspection any sign that the Franks might be encroaching once again on Alexandria's jurisdiction. The respective positions of the patriarch and emperor call attention to a number of important themes. Both figures perceived a threat - though they were not agreed on what it was - and they both invoked the *river* to give material expression to the threat. If in this particular instance the emperor and patriarch were (apparently) working at cross-purposes, they also held in common an idea of a patrimony over which each had a special custodianship. What is more, it was something to be guarded - as is implicit in the patriarch's stratagem, and explicit in the emperor's description of his responsibility for protecting the "boundaries of Alexandria." From two different locales, patriarch and emperor perceived a threat, and each invoked the river to speak of it. In these two sets of parallels, we find a shared communion and a shared river; the first an idea inhering in relationships that gave it substance; the other a "natural" body that was also an idea and at the center of the most fundamental and "long-enduring" of all relationships.

We mention this episode because it illustrates the connection between the relationships inherent to a "shared" landscape and a shared communion. It also calls into question the artificial division between the "natural" world and the "human story."<sup>101</sup> The river is more than an ecological phenomenon in a world of nature, incidental to the lives of the people.<sup>102</sup> It is a shared experience, an inextricable part of the complex of relationships of the Nile riparian zone; "places" like *al-Sa'id* have even been "thought" in relation to its movement. It is a "local" reality and a "regional" reality, eminently "material" and at the same time enshrined in a world of myth

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<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of the fragmented discourse of the "human ecology" of the Nile, see Haggai Erlich, "Introduction" in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures Myths*, eds. Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 1-14.

<sup>102</sup> And it is certainly more than a line on a map, demarcating one "homogenous" unit from the next, as can be attested in the catastrophic effects of colonial cartography. Rivers, as Robert Collins succinctly put it, "do not make good frontiers." Collins, *The Nile*, 75.

and mystery. From the eighteenth century a cast of Europeans set out on obsessive quests to discover the “objective” source of the great river. Even if medieval Arab geographers speculated and theorized about the river’s source, it could still be described as a notion that, like the “geographical” reaches of the “preachings of Saint Mark,” remained indeterminate.<sup>103</sup> By the nineteenth century, scientific projects would be introduced – which Mehmet ‘Ali and his successors joined with vigor - that would not only seek to discover the source of the Nile but, with the help of modern science, to master it. The obsessive schemes and stratagems for cutting through the *sudd* (the Nilotic swamplands in the southern Sudan) and making the White Nile navigable to its source are emblematic of this fixation.<sup>104</sup>

Across confessions and vast territories, the life of the Nile has been a shared one. In the lands of *Misr*, in *al-Wajh al-Bahri* and *al-Wajh al-Qibli*, the vagaries of the Nile flood are a dominant - even central - theme in the chronicles. When the river failed to rise on schedule, a diverse assortment of “religious” leaders would sometimes gather to importune divine assistance. Al-Jabarti records such an instance in 1809, when Sayyid ‘Umar, the shaykhs and others assembled at the mosque of ‘Amr ibn al-‘As in Old Cairo. Shaykh Muhammad al-Isnawi rose to the pulpit to preach and lead prayers for water. There were people, he reports, who “suggested that the Christians should come” - and they did. In fact, *al-Mu’allim* Ghali and the “Coptic scribes” could be seen reclining together and smoking in one area of the mosque. That very night, the water rose, leading some Christians to say, “it would not have risen had we not come.”

<sup>105</sup> Addressing this specific episode, the official ecclesiastical chronicle *Patriarchs of Alexandria* explained that the “Muslims were the first to assemble for prayer, then the Jews, then al-Rum”

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<sup>103</sup> Nehemia Levtzion discusses some of these speculations in “Arab Geographers, The Nile, and the History of bilad al-Sudan,” in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures Myths*, eds. Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 71-6.

<sup>104</sup> See Robert Collins, *The Waters of the Nile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 68-74.

<sup>105</sup> al-Jabarti, *‘Aja’ib al-Athar*, 3:167-8.

followed by the Syrians and the “Franks,” to no effect. Finally, the chronicle announces triumphantly, Coptic Patriarch Butrus celebrated the Eucharist by the Nile and the river rose.<sup>106</sup>

The suggestion that the “Christians should come” calls to mind some of the cases we have already encountered - of Copts’ unique knowledge of astrology or the special *baraka* available to Muslims according to the Coptic women’s ritual use of ashes. Within this wide and variegated fabric, the prayers of the followers of assorted confessions could be efficacious - and even *uniquely* efficacious according to the situation at hand.

A living idea was embedded in this "shared world," and its roots ramified far and wide. The idea of an Alexandrian communion has persisted, it was given material and institutional expression, and its patrimony was something to be *guarded*. We read many examples of *abuns* of *al-Habash* stirring popular fervor against Catholics and others who were deemed to be a threat to the communion. One such incident occurred in the mid-seventeenth century when *Abuna* Murqus received two Capuchin priests. Believing that they sought the destruction of the Church of Alexandria, it is recorded that he “so enraged the people against them that they were stoned on the spot.”<sup>107</sup> This speaks not only to the vigilant watch of the *abun* over his patrimony, but also to the readiness of anonymous throngs to take up the cause of Alexandria. It is evocative of a scene, not so many years before, when Emperor Fasiladas restored his realm to Alexandrian Orthodoxy. The "universal joy" that this edict provoked was, according to one eyewitness, "almost impossible to be believ'd." At the defeat of the Catholic party, many people went about dancing and destroying Catholic religious articles. The seventeenth century English translator rendered one of their chants as follows:

At length the Sheep of Ethiopia free'd  
from the Bold Lyons of the West,

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<sup>106</sup> *HPEC* 3.3, 173. “Al-Rum” refers to the Greek Orthodox communion.

<sup>107</sup> Lobo, *A Voyage*, 161.

Securely in their pastures feed.  
Saint Mark and Cyril's Doctrine have o'ecome  
The Folly's of the Church of Rome.  
Rejoyce, rejoyce, Sing Hallelujahs all,  
No more the Western Wolves  
Our Ethiopia Shall enthrall.<sup>108</sup>

A variation on the theme can be found in the early eighteenth century as French Catholic priest Claude Sicard traveled to *al-Sa'id* for the purpose of preaching and ministering to the “schismatics.” Two anonymous Copts coming from Derr witnessed his activities and brought to “Arab prince” Hamad the startling news that there were Franks recently arrived at Abu Tig (to the south of Asyut) with the intention of “nailing the banks of the Nile with magic nails in order to prevent the inundation.” A soldier from Cairo soon intervened, assuring Hamad that the story was a fabrication, and the matter passed. Sicard attributed the tale to what he had heard about the people of *al-Sa'id* while in Cairo - the widespread belief among them that the “Franks” were “alchemists and treasure hunters.”<sup>109</sup> No further details about the calumniators are given and we can only guess at their motivation, but it is striking that no comparable concerns are reported among the non-Christians. The apparently fantastical fears evince a very sensible concern for the potential risk that the “Franks” posed to the Alexandrian communion.

The reception of Sicard and the Catholic missionaries who preceded and followed him was not entirely hostile. In fact, some Copts demonstrated enthusiasm about Sicard's visit, and a modest number of conversions occurred, particularly from the early 1720s. Coptic patriarch Yuannis XVI (d. 1716) even expressed some goodwill toward Rome. However, in his study on the relations between the Copts and the West, Alastair Hamilton notes that although “individual

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<sup>108</sup> Job Adolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia, Being a Full and Accurate Description of the Kingdom of Abessinia. Vulgarly, Though Erroneously Called, The Empire of Prester John*, trans. J.P. Gent (London, 1684), 356-57.

<sup>109</sup> Sicard, *Description*, 74. While the identity of this Shaykh Hamid is not entirely clear, it was likely Shaykh Hamid Muhammad Humam al-Hawari, the grandfather of Shaykh Yusuf Humam, who was to control large tracts of territory in the *Sa'id* during the eighteenth century. For a very helpful survey of the earlier (mostly Catholic) missionary efforts among the Copts, see Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West: The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

patriarchs might be attracted by the idea of union," the vast majority of Copts never had such an inclination. And even this idea of union was understood within an Orthodox jurisdictional framework, an orientation that was expressed by sixteenth century patriarch Ghubriyal VII when he said that the pope of Rome has no jurisdiction in the see of Alexandria.<sup>110</sup> De Maillet, the longtime French consul at Cairo, noted numerous times in his 1737 volume that while Copts invited the Catholic missionaries into their homes (because of the free medical care that they provided) they "hardly converted anyone." The "opinions of their bishops and their priests," he continued, "are the only rules that they want to follow." When pressed on the subject of conversion, they answered rhetorically, "Are we more knowledgeable than our fathers?" In fact, de Maillet emphasized the hostility of most "Egyptian" and "Abyssinian" Copts toward the Catholic faith, lamenting that their aversion "is so violent that when they want to profoundly insult a man, they call him a Frank (*Ferenji*)."<sup>111</sup>

On his tours of the *Sa'id*, Sicard found some of the more influential Copts to be singularly unhelpful and even belligerent. As the Catholic prepared a catechetical lesson in the town of Abnub, a party of Coptic scribes descended with a barrage of questions. They touched on everything from his (presumably) unusual clothing to the differences of his creed from their own. Their thoughts then traveled northward to Jerusalem, which became a metaphorical site for their rhetorical engagement. They accused the "Latins" of disbelieving in the Holy Saturday miracle of the Holy Fire at the Church of the Resurrection, which was a central motif in the pilgrimage

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<sup>110</sup> Hamilton, *The Copts and the West*, 72. For the relations of Patriarch Yuannis XVI with the Catholic missionaries, see Jean-Pierre Trossen, *Les Relations du Patriarche Copte Jean XVI Avec Rome (1676-1718)* (Luxembourg: Montée de la Pétrusse, 1948). This patriarch was usually sympathetic to the missionaries, perhaps because conversions to the Catholic faith were very few during his pontificate. As the conversions became more numerous during the reign of his successor (Butrus VI), the missionaries began to complain of persecution at the hands of the Copts. Details of these troubled encounters are covered in Angelo Colombo, *La Nascita della Chiesa Cattolica Nella Prima Meta del 1700* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1996), especially 54-8.

<sup>111</sup> Benoît de Maillet, *Description de L'Egypte. Contenant plusieurs remarques curieuses sur la geographie ancienne et modern de ce pais, sur ses monumens anciens, sur les moeurs, les coutumes, & la religion des habitans, sur le gouvernement & le commerce, sur les animaux, les arbres, les plantes, &c.* (Le Hague, 1740), 2:65, 67-68.

traditions of particular Eastern churches.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, Sicard faced more subtle opposition from certain ecclesiastical authorities, including the bishop of Negada who refused to grant him permission to continue visiting towns in his diocese. He provided a litany of reasons, including the inundation of the Nile and the danger of “Arab thieves,” although others assured Sicard that the bishop had fabricated these impediments.<sup>113</sup> Here we find an intricate relationship in which a common fund of elements is available for the defense of the communion and its interests. This transcends the religious-secular divisions that characterize modern discourses of the secular. We notice “laity” using the language of faith and creed and sacred traditions while a bishop employs the practical perils of the environment - in a common effort to forestall a potential menace.<sup>114</sup>

An *idea* is implicit in all of this - something that generations of emperors and patriarchs, scribes and peasants could behold and strive to defend. John Henry Newman argued that the idea "which represents an object or supposed object is commensurate with the sum total of its possible aspects, however they may vary in the separate consciousness of individuals."<sup>115</sup> In making the case, he was specifically concerned with the question of continuity in the untidy history of doctrinal development. In the case at hand, we would argue that the continuity and

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<sup>112</sup> Sicard, *Description*, 87.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 97.

<sup>114</sup> When, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Catholics made significant inroads in the *Sa'id*, it was the high-ranking scribes who initiated legal action before the *shari'a* court. Among their accusations were that the Catholic priests were "infringing upon the rights of the patriarch." Mansi Yuhanna, *Kitab Tarikh al-Kanisat al-Qibtiya* (Cairo: al-Yaqadha, 1924), 624-25. Here Yuhanna included the text of the court writ.

Thomas Phillippp has noted the potential for political interests to be “clothed” in the language of religious doctrine. He makes this point while discussing the emergence of a schism in the Greek Orthodox Church (1724) in which a section of its followers at Damascus converted to Catholicism. In the course of events, “local” Arab interests became associated with Catholicism while the Orthodox party was associated with “centralist interest.” See Thomas Phillippp, *The Syrians in Egypt 1725-1975* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985), 13-19. It might be asked whether it is appropriate to speak of the political being “clothed” in the “religious.” Talal Asad cautions: “The separation of religion from power is a modern Western norm, the product of a unique post-Reformation history.” Universalizing this norm to all places and times thus encourages inquirers to “take up an a priori position in which religious discourse in the political arena is seen as a disguise for political power.” See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 28-29.

<sup>115</sup> John H. Newman, *An Essay on the development of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Cosimo, 2009), 34.



coherence of an Alexandrian Orthodox communion is easily overlooked in a historiography that has “Egypt” and “Ethiopia” barely communicating, as well as in a history characterized by institutional fractures and doctrinal divisions.

This last point is of particular relevance to the lands of al-Habasha where numerous doctrinal “schools” emerged that were accompanied by conflicts and divisions in the church.<sup>116</sup> Often, the strongholds for these schools had a regional character, which has been cited as one of the centrifugal factors operating on the old territorial empire. In light of these two sets of fragmentations - historical and historiographical - one scholar’s observation on Ethiopian Christian literature is pertinent. According to Stephen Kaplan, the works that were translated from Arabic to Ge’ez between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries are so numerous that they have yet to be compiled comprehensively. In the course of this literary vitality, “theological issues were redefined and the Alexandrian position articulated with ever-greater clarity.”<sup>117</sup> In other words, across these long centuries, not only did a “cultural/theological” communication carry on, but amid the fierce doctrinal divisions (what Newman calls the “agitation of thought” that follows the “idea”) there was a tendency toward an articulation of “ever greater clarity.”<sup>118</sup>

Our interest here is not a specific doctrinal controversy. Rather, we are concerned with a living and guarded idea - with all the facets that it entailed - which endured through the fog of centuries, and made this lurching pursuit of the “*Alexandrian position*” possible. Here, Donald Crummey offers a critical intervention in the course of his commentary on the *abun's* importance in Ethiopian history. Despite the long periods during which these episcopal representatives were

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<sup>116</sup> These controversies were complicated by the presence of Jesuits in the seventeenth century, and dealt principally with aspects of the hypostatic union. Occasionally church councils were called in an effort to resolve these differences, including several in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The divergent doctrinal views were only “settled” at the Council of Boro Meda in 1878, during the reign of Yohannes IV. For a discussion of the theological controversies within a wider “political” context, see Crummey, *Priests and Politicians*, 15-27.

<sup>117</sup> Stephen Kaplan, “Found in Translation: The Egyptian Impact on Ethiopian Christian Literature,” in *Narrating the Nile: Politics, Identities, Cultures*, eds. Israel Gershoni and Meir Hatina (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 32.

<sup>118</sup> Newman, *An Essay*, 37.

sometimes isolated, and amidst the upheavals and the virtual disintegration of the central ecclesiastical structure, something remained:

However rancorous the Ethiopian controversies were ... there is no evidence that they ever left the ostensible framework of Alexandrine teaching ... to explicitly reject the authority of Alexandria. The touchstone of the Ethiopian faith remained 'St. Mark is our father, Alexandria our mother.'<sup>119</sup>

Even if the church as a cohesive structure was fractured during periods in the history - most notably across the *Zemene Mesafint*, which lasted from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries - an *idea* of communion persisted.<sup>120</sup> This point is germane not simply to the state of affairs in "Ethiopia." As we shall see, standard accounts of the "Egyptian" church also describe a breakdown of authority during roughly the same period. Here we preliminarily suggest that rather than looking to "institutions" in decay, our emphasis might be shifted away from "formal" or "ideal" ecclesiastical structures and toward those variable *relationships* - of people, places, things, ideas - that gave life to an idea and that constituted a communion.

These relationships, it is worth repeating, existed beyond our modern territorial-national frames of reference. In bringing Crummey's insights to bear on broader questions of belonging, we contribute to the important task of visualizing a formation that antedated these objects. One need only to review the Alexandrian ecclesiastical chronicle to notice hints of this expansive weave of communion. The elevation of the metropolitan for *al-Habash* was consistently included

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<sup>119</sup> Crummey does concede an exception to the general "rule" he identified - namely those individuals or groups who came under the sway of Protestants or Catholics. When missionaries arrived to the regions of *Misr* and particularly *al-Habasha*, it may seem as though they were merely adding new "voices" to a din of competing ideas and factions. But they represented something more. They arrived with new claims of authority, whether these centered on the Petrine office at Rome or in the case of the Protestants, on the Sacred Scriptures. Therefore, the potential threat that they posed was of an order altogether different from those of indigenous provenance. This provides an important point of reference for considering the danger that Sicard had represented in an earlier period, and if an anachronistic schema might be employed, it was a threat of potentially "political" and "religious" significance. Donald Crummey, "Doctrine and Authority," 2:567-78 at 568-69.

<sup>120</sup> From the eighteenth century, the question of the number of births of Christ became a divisive point of doctrinal speculation. The support for *Hulet Lidet* (two births) was prevalent in Gojjam while the followers of *Sost Lidet* (three births) were associated with the Shoan monastery of Debra Libanos. However, both schools claimed to represent the proper understanding of Alexandrian doctrine. See Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 96.

among the crowning moments in the careers of succeeding patriarchs at *Misr*. And even during a period as unsettled as the *Zemene Mesafint* when the church in *Bilad al-Habasha* was in a state of apparent disarray, the patriarchal letters that arrived in the kingdom manifested a profound interest in the developments in those lands.<sup>121</sup> In what follows, we pursue a story of continuity, while exploring some of the assumptions in modern narratives that have concealed centuries-old threads and obscured, distorted or dissected the manifold relationships that enlivened communion and gave it form. We will pay close attention to institutional and other changes in the life of communion at *Bilad Misr*, while seeking to preserve a sense of a wider geographic sweep. Therefore we begin at a junction so to speak, with the selection of a metropolitan for *al-Habash* and what followed.

In 1718, Emperor Dawit III (1716-1721) sent an embassy to Patriarch Butrus VI with the purpose of securing a successor for the deceased *Abuna* Murqus X. Curiously, neither the patriarch nor any ordained or consecrated church officials made the selection of the metropolitan directly. Rather, a high-ranking lay notable by the name of *al-Mu'allim* Lutfallah abu Yusuf was given the task of nominating a candidate.<sup>122</sup> The patriarch consecrated the *mu'allim's* selection, a monk of the monastery of Saint Antonius, who soon began his journey to Gondar, via Suez, Jedda and Masawa.<sup>123</sup> It would seem that the chosen monk was a man of rare ability. During his 15-year reign as metropolitan, Krestodolos III was noted for the skill with which he negotiated the doctrinal labyrinth, and it was largely to his credit that a provisional settlement was reached

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<sup>121</sup> These connections have been neglected or relegated to the footnotes of "Coptic" history. Murad Kamil published a number of these correspondences in "Letters To Ethiopia from the Coptic Patriarchs, Yo'annas XVIII 1770-1796 and Morqos VIII 1796-1809," in *Société d'archéologie copte* (1942), 8:97-109.

<sup>122</sup> Magdi Guirguis, "Athar al-'Arakhina 'ala 'Awda' al-qibt fi al-qarn al-thamin 'ashr," *Annales Islamologiques* 34 (2000): 30.

<sup>123</sup> *HPEC* 3.3, 164.

among the conflicting parties.<sup>124</sup>

He was also a motivated bulwark against Catholic encroachment. In one episode, rebels came to *Abuna* Krestodolos and the *echage* with the news that King Iyasu II and Queen Mentewab may have been “partisans of the Franks” because, so they said, two “Franks” (Demetrius and Giyorgis) had been discovered in their household. The *abun* pronounced an anathema against the king and queen as well as others in their retinue. The royals then called for *Abuna* Krestodolos and asked him why he had declared the anathema without interrogating them. At this point, Demetrius and Giyorgis were brought before the *abun* and *echage*. The characters in question were subjected to an interrogation about doctrine followed by a physical examination to determine whether they had been circumcised. This two-fold examination proved that “their faith was the Creed of Alexandria.” While the *abun* acknowledged the error and the matter passed, the episode certainly highlights the vigor with which Krestodolos executed his guardianship.<sup>125</sup> In the course of his active career, he is said to have gained a certain linguistic expertise as well. Bruce relates that he learned the local language so thoroughly that he was able to “harangue in Ge’ez” and give “a long defense of his religious sentiments” in that language.<sup>126</sup> He used this aptitude to make translations from Ge’ez into Arabic, and it was possibly by his hand that a significant translation of the Synaxarium was made in 1734. Many of the icons and other such artifacts that effloresced in the lands of *Misr* in the eighteenth century were inspired

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<sup>124</sup> Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Borderlands: Essays in Regional History from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997), 387.

<sup>125</sup> Ignatius Guidi, trans. and ed. *Annales Regum Iyasu II et 'Iyo'as* (Paris, 1910), 80. This was an unsettled period in the history of the empire, and the rebels may have coerced the excommunication. See Sevir Chernetsov, “Krestodolu III” in *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003-11), 2:442-43. Even if this was the case, the rebels’ employment of this detail to incite the *abun* and *echage* reveals the potency of the claim.

<sup>126</sup> James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Year 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773* (Edinburgh: Alexander Murray, 1813), 4:89.

by the materials in this translation.<sup>127</sup>

Krestodolos' career reveals a number of things. He was bold in his defense of Alexandrian Orthodoxy, going so far as to excommunicate the king and queen on an apparently tenuous claim that they were transacting with "Franks." The details of his career also underscore the fact that the dynamic "cultural" production during eighteenth century "Coptic Egypt" was not a self-contained "Egyptian" phenomenon, but at least to some extent involved the communion's "southern reaches." And perhaps most importantly, they speak to the life of a shared *idea* as it persisted across space and time. Krestodolos could gain widespread esteem in a country riven by competing doctrinal factions because of his skilled diplomacy, but only insofar as his diplomacy was grounded in the authority he held by virtue of his office. In other words, despite apparent ecclesiastical ruptures, something remained about which disparate parties could coalesce.

Here, a subtle link can be made between the environment Krestodolos found in his new archdiocese and the one he "left behind" when he was handpicked by *al-Mu'allim* Lutfallah. As we have noted, in "both sets" of lands, the ecclesiastical structure was subjected to what some have considered a breakdown. We have cited one evidence of this as a layman, *al-Mu'allim* Lutfallah, was charged with the decidedly "clerical" task of nominating a metropolitan for *al-Habash*. His esteem derived from his "secular" position as head of the body of lay notables, which he attained while in the employ of Muhammad Katkhada Muhstahfazan.<sup>128</sup> Before going into greater depth about the problematic nature of modern narratives of "institutional breakdown" and "restoration," we provide a brief sketch of some aspects of the church in the

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<sup>127</sup> al-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisa*, 110; Tania Tribe, "Icon and Narration in Eighteenth Century Egyptian Christianity" in *Art History* 27, no. 1 (February 2004): 86-87. The Synaxarium is the record of saints' lives and important events in the life of the Church which is read during liturgy. It was originally translated from Arabic into Ge'ez in the thirteenth century. But as a "living" document, it was subject to accretions over time, and details not included in the original translation were incorporated into the text. Kaplan provides a good synopsis of literary interactions along the Nile. See "Found in Translation," 29-39.

<sup>128</sup> Magdi Guirguis, "Athar al-'arakhina," 27.

eighteenth century, situating these within a broader context of governance in *Bilad Misr*.

During the period we have been discussing, imperial power had become more diffuse and there arose in the provinces a proliferation of “households” with a more tenuous link with the Ottoman center. This form of “household politics” was highly mutable and open to alliances, co-optation and other strategies aimed at augmenting political leverage. These households were not necessarily based on kinship, but rather organized around patron-client relationships.<sup>129</sup> The household order was not only apparent in the upper echelons of power, but it was reproduced on a smaller scale and was foundational in the rise of the local notables (*'ayan*) in the eighteenth century. The governing role of the Ottoman pasha was increasingly circumscribed, while the *ujajs* and Mamluk *amirs* gained ascendancy. The scholarship remains unsettled on a variety of basic points, including whether the developments in the province of *Misr* are unique or part of a wider phenomenon of household formation across the Ottoman Empire. Jane Hathaway has argued that the “household,” which some scholars have attributed to the “reemergence” of the late Mamluk (sometimes called “neo-Mamluk”) sultanate in Egypt, can be viewed more helpfully as a “unit of social organization” rather than as an essentialized Mamluk phenomenon.<sup>130</sup> She argues that this approach provides a degree of latitude sufficient to accommodate the “disparate elements” that were involved in household formation - “officers and beys, slaves and free born, Anatolian Muslims, merchants and artisans, *'ulama* and *ashraf*.”<sup>131</sup>

These “disparate elements” that constituted the household once again call our attention to

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<sup>129</sup> Jane Hathaway, “Egypt in the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:42.

<sup>130</sup> By contrast, Leslie Peirce has argued that household formation was more prominent in the Ottoman province of *Misr* than elsewhere, and suggests that Hathaway might overstate the parallels with other parts of the empire. She notes that the Nilotic location of *Misr* may have lent it a certain distinctiveness. In terms of statecraft, it is interesting to note that the well-told “Mamluk tradition” in which the rule of “Egypt” was divided among 24 *beys* has a parallel in Solomonic Ethiopia. According to tradition, King Amda-Siyon arranged the royal court into 15 “houses,” each of which was headed by a chief and an assistant chief. See Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, 104.

<sup>131</sup> Jane Hathaway, “The Military Household in Ottoman Egypt” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 1 (February 1995): 41.

the “problem” of the Coptic scribe. Difference, far from signifying segregation, was a constitutive feature of the very mechanisms of governance, which proceeded not according to strict or idealized institutional form but within a flexible matrix of relationships, which could be broken, rearranged and re-formed. The condition of the Alexandrian communion may be situated in this context. In his analysis of the institutional changes to the church and communion during the period in question, Magdi Guirguis has observed that from the middle part of the seventeenth century, the patriarch’s powers were gradually reduced vis-à-vis the class of lay notables, termed collectively the *arakhina*.<sup>132</sup> Their influence increased substantially by virtue of their positions in finance and administration in the households of *amirs* and military *ujaqs*.<sup>133</sup> By convention, this class of notables would choose one among their ranks to be the leader of the community in the eyes of the authorities, which was done on the pattern of the Mamluk *amirs* who followed a similar procedure in the selection of the *shaykh al-balad*.<sup>134</sup> Guirguis observes that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ottoman Egypt witnessed a “change in the concept of the institution” which was “transformed into an empty form with no real substance.” In like way, the patriarchs “retained their power in name only” while the Coptic community “increasingly relied on the patronage of influential persons and not necessarily on the canonically established clerical hierarchy.” Some of these *arakhina* were able to attain to the rank of bishop, which had previously been open to monks alone. It was only during the regime of Mehmet ‘Ali, so the narrative goes, that the clergy again resumed their charge over church matters and “the traditional lines of authority within the Coptic community” were restored.<sup>135</sup>

Guirguis’ insights bring clarity to the general atmosphere in which a lay figure like *al-*

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<sup>132</sup> This is the plural form for *arkhon*, a term which is of Greek derivation (arkhōn).

<sup>133</sup> Guirguis and Van Doorn Harder, *Emergence*, 32.

<sup>134</sup> Magdi Guirguis, "Athar al-arakhina," 27.

<sup>135</sup> Guirguis and Van Doorn Harder, *Emergence*, 32, 49-51.

*Mu'allim* Lutfallah was able to nominate a metropolitan for *al-Habash*. However the premise that the "traditional lines of authority" were "restored" in the nineteenth century gives reason for pause, particularly in light of the critiques that have been made of an earlier scholarship of the *millet* system. Braude has noted that until the nineteenth century the term "*millet*" was primarily used in reference to Muslims, as well as to Christians in non-Ottoman lands. In the *Tanzimat* period during the nineteenth century, the usage came to refer specifically to Ottoman Christian communities. This model was projected into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, giving rise to a perception that it was "traditional" for the Ottoman authorities to deal with the non-Muslim subject "communities" corporately rather than individually.<sup>136</sup> It is hardly a speculative leap to suggest that the processes which cultivated closely regulated "*millets*" in the nineteenth century also made it possible to imagine a Coptic community that once upon a time was tightly organized under the aegis of its "traditional" ecclesiastical authorities. To accept the claims of "restoration" uncritically, and to overlook the structural and conceptual novelties of the modern period is to foreclose any hope of "retrieving" earlier expressions of communion. It is, in other words, to keep the lines which have been engraved on the imagination - between "Coptic" and "Ethiopian" churches, clergy and laity, the "inside" and "outside" of the "community" - firmly in place.<sup>137</sup>

Returning to the figure of *al-Mu'allim* Lutfallah, the chronicle reports the following:

Upon the death of [Patriarch] Yuannis, none among the *arakhina* went to the

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<sup>136</sup> See Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths," 1:69-88. Although the earlier *millet* scholarship did not assess the situation of the "Copts" in the same way that it did the Jews or Armenians, the critique would seem to apply here. For a brief description of the divergence between the traditional *millet* scholarship and the status of the Coptic communion, see Muhammad 'Afifi, "State and the Church," 275-76.

<sup>137</sup> The point here is not an absence of clerical/lay rivalries, which are a recurring theme in various periods. Rather, we wish to sound a cautionary note about the dangers of postulating an "ideal" ecclesiastical/communal structure against which to measure shifting arrangements across time. We also seek to point out the problematic nature of the clerical/lay binary. In addressing the period during which the power of the *arakhina* was increasing, Armanios contends that power did not simply "flow from archons to patriarchs," but rather the arrangement was marked by "competition and interdependency," and the "lines between the groups were frequently blurred." See Armanios, *Coptic Christians*, 34-5. The constitution of the communion inhered in relationships, which were fluid and shifting. The reified, clerical/lay binary can obscure this dynamic.



monasteries and no search took place, but the decree of God Almighty led them to [Butrus]. In this al-Ma'alim Lutfallah, one of the arakhina, was diligent.

He thus chose the patriarch-elect in the very same way that he would later choose *Abuna* Krestodolos III. Ritual protocols are readily apparent in the selection of this new patriarch, which included not only the *arkhon* whom God Almighty had led to Anba Butrus, but also the temporal authorities. The *qa'immaqam* promptly arrived to the village of Bush, where he seized the monk and escorted him in chains to *Misr*.<sup>138</sup> This custom stemmed from the ancient conviction that suitable candidates for the episcopate should want nothing to do with ecclesiastical elevation. Descriptions of these kinds of forcible seizures appear again and again in the sources. Bruce relates that when a candidate was chosen in 1745 to succeed Krestodolos III as metropolitan of *al-Habash*, the pasha of *Misr* issued a writ, and a "party of Turks" led the chained monk to *Misr*. There he was imprisoned and kept under guard, where he remained until he was forced into a boat to begin the voyage to his archdiocese.<sup>139</sup> A missionary writing a few years after his elevation also described the maneuvers:

Nobody is eager to accept the offered preferment, until by some trick of the Coptic patriarch, the Turkish power lays hold on one or other, whom the patriarch orders to be brought in chains before his council, where he is decorated with a more venerable and more beautiful beard and appointed primate of Abyssinia. The same Turkish power transports him to Ethiopia.<sup>140</sup>

The involvement of temporal authorities shows that these were more than isolated "communal" activities as non-Christian officials were incorporated into the very rituals that secured the candidates. And in the case of the new patriarch, a "ceremony notice" was sent out to all the inhabitants of *Misr* so that the Christian and Muslim multitudes and "the principal Turks" would

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<sup>138</sup> *HPEC*, 3.3, 165.

<sup>139</sup> Bruce, *Travels* (1813), 4:133. Bruce deduced from this that monks were so loathe to the assignment that they had to be taken away in chains. Over many generations, writers would echo his faulty conclusion.

<sup>140</sup> Rumedius Prutky, *Prutky's Travels in Ethiopia and Other Countries*, trans. and ed. J.H. Arrowsmith-Brown (London: The Haykluyt Society, 1991), 257-8.

be able to witness the rare spectacle.<sup>141</sup> The life of the church was certainly a far cry from a “private” affair.

As for the "intrusion" of laity into clerical affairs, the premise itself is arguably based upon modern institutional and conceptual constructs that erect - and project back in time - clearly delineated and idealized clerical/lay lines in place of the mutable frontiers of organic relationships. It is not to deny that significant changes occurred during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to suggest that the institutional integrity of an earlier epoch may have attained a degree of its purity retrospectively. The existence of a relationship between the *arakhina* and the church hierarchy predated the period of the reputed institutional "breakdown." Guirguis emphasizes that the *arakhina* had previously served more of an assisting role to the patriarch, and only later did their position eclipse the "traditional" hierarchy.<sup>142</sup> However, we may note that this transition he identifies was characterized by a degree of continuity insofar as the same relationship persisted, notwithstanding shifting responsibilities and configurations of power.

Although the influence of the patriarch was perhaps diminished, the position remained vital to the life of communion. Maged Mikhail has pointed out that amid the twists and turns of time, other offices and positions of influence "came and went," but "the one constant was the office of patriarch."<sup>143</sup> A comparable institutional anchor also existed in the lands of *al-Habasha*, where in the words of Crummey “the bishops alone embodied the institutional unity” of the Church.<sup>144</sup> In *Bilad al-Habasha* and Ottoman *Bilad Misr*, the significance of the episcopal office persisted,

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<sup>141</sup> Abudacnus, *The History of the Cophts*, 6.

<sup>142</sup> Guirguis and Van Doorn Harder, *Emergence*, 32. Indeed, during earlier centuries there were even cases of laity (mostly notables), deacons and other non-monastics assuming the rank of patriarch; Mikhail, "Egypt in Late Antiquity," 325.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>144</sup> Crummey, "Doctrine and Authority," 568.

even during periods of apparent institutional weakness. Guirguis is accurate in his assessment that the episcopate was “infiltrated by individuals who did not hold the usual monastic pedigree.”

<sup>145</sup> But the phenomenon can perhaps be described thusly: “individuals who did not hold the usual monastic pedigree deemed the episcopacy worth infiltrating.”

Alongside this institutional continuity, a constituted "idea" also endured.<sup>146</sup> As Coptic notables vied with one another for ascendancy, their “social capital” inhered in advancing the communion's patrimony - in restoring churches and monasteries, patronizing clerics, renewing the *mayrun* (holy oils) and in sponsoring manuscript copyists. In fact, Guirguis provides the astonishing statistic that 50 percent of the church's extant Arabic language manuscripts were copied during the eighteenth century.<sup>147</sup> In the midst of apparent institutional degradation, the competition among the *arakhina* and the shifting matrix of household politics, one finds not only the persistence of a constituted *idea*, but even its profound elaboration.

As we have noted, narratives of "restoration" have obscured threads that had endured the test of time. It would be more constructive to approach the ecclesiastical institution that was established in the nineteenth century as a distinctly “modern” construction. The operative ambiguities of an earlier period were gradually replaced with sharply defined distinctions even as they were invested in the garb of tradition. Reified boundaries were imagined around the communion and within it. To be sure, it was not only the "trespasses" of powerful *arakhina* that

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>146</sup> The position of lay notables was at least partially contingent upon their relationship with the clerics, even if the *formal* power of the latter was diminished. While it is not clear precisely what bearing his conjugal ties had on his material circumstances, the fact that Lutfallah himself was married to the niece of Patriarch Yuannis would seem to suggest that the office retained considerable social capital. At the time of his death, it was said that Lutfallah's fortune so immense that “nobody matched him in wealth.” *HPEC*, 3.3 164-5.

As late as the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the patriarch told Vansleb that his situation was unlike that of “all the patriarchs of the other sects” who were at liberty to circulate freely through the town without incident. He himself was so closely watched by the authorities that he “could not so much as go out of his house” without arousing fears that he was “plotting against the state.” These are certainly unusual words from one holding an office that was being divested of its influence. Johann Michael Wansleben (Vansleb), *The Present State of Egypt, or a New Relation of a Late Voyage in that Kingdom* (London, 1678), 174.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

were redressed in this period. The ritual involvements of "extra-communal" characters like the chain wielding "Turks" also seem to have faded from view. And by the final decades of the nineteenth century, the organic relationship that had long linked clerics and laity gave way to something much different. An adversarial relationship was slowly institutionalized between a "communal council" representing "enlightened" lay elites and a church apparatus filled with "benighted" clerics who clung tenaciously to their "traditional" privileges.

### **The Case of the Coptic *Amir***

In the preceding sections, we have addressed an "order" of differentiated roles and knowledges, while pursuing questions of spatiality and communion beyond "boundaried" (communal, territorial and institutional) constructs. We have also suggested some of the ways in which the "order" was threatened and guarded, and variously represented. The careers and milieu of *al-Mu'allim* Ibrahim al-Gawhari and his brother *al-Mu'allim* Girgis al-Gawhari encapsulate a number of the themes that have been addressed, and here we turn to them by way of a conclusion.

As we have seen, the *arakhina* nominated one among their members to serve as the "first among equals" before the authorities, the role which *al-Mu'allim* Lutfallah once filled. The identities and positions of his predecessors and successors are well documented, and the sequence continued into the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most powerful of these was Ibrahim al-Gawhari, who was the leading *arkhon* until his death on the eve of the French occupation. His is a case of remarkable social mobility, which was only possible due to his acquisition of specialized scribal skills. He was born into a family of modest means in the Banha province, where his father was a weaver by trade. Early in his career, he worked as a copyist of

manuscripts before entering into the service of a Mamluk *amir*, although for an unspecified reason, he was later released.<sup>148</sup> By some means, his situation was brought to the attention of the patriarch who agreed to intercede for him with *al-Mu'allim* Nayruz Rizq, the head of the Coptic scribes who had reached a rank that “no other Copt is known to have achieved” in his position as secretary for *Shaykh al-Balad* ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir.<sup>149</sup> When efforts to win favor with the *arkhon* failed, the patriarch admitted al-Gawhari as his private scribe. After a period of time in this assignment, he was enlisted into the service of ‘Ali Bey, who was shortly thereafter murdered by his Mamluk, Muhammad Abu al-Dhahab.<sup>150</sup> *Al-Mu'allim* Rizq was not only ‘Ali Bey’s advisor but was himself a merchant, and his fortunes were linked with those of his patron. He strongly encouraged his patron’s military adventures, enticed as he most likely was by the prospects for material gain. Rizq’s career was so tethered to that of his patron that when Abu al-Dhahab eliminated ‘Ali Bey, Rizq was dispatched as well.<sup>151</sup>

However Ibrahim al-Gawhari was retained and he was now positioned to take over as head of the scribes. If *al-Mu'allim* Rizq had attained a singular degree of influence, his achievements were exceeded by those of al-Gawhari who gained “vast fame and prestige” during a tenure in Cairo which was of unprecedented duration.<sup>152</sup> He outlasted Abu al-Dhahab’s short rule, and subsequently entered into the service of Ibrahim Bey, who eventually became *shaykh al-balad* during a period in which three Mamluks (Ibrahim, Murad and Isma’il) contended for ascendancy.<sup>153</sup> In the coming years, al-Gawhari became so powerful that the *Patriarchs of*

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<sup>148</sup> al-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisa*, 233.

<sup>149</sup> al-Jabarti, *‘Aja’ib al-Athar*, 1:300.

<sup>150</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 236-37.

<sup>151</sup> See Daniel Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt: A Study of the Regimes of ‘ali Bey al-Kabir and Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dhahab, 1760-1775* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1981), 66-72.

<sup>152</sup> al-Jabarti, *‘Aja’ib al-Athar*, 1:300.

<sup>153</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 1-238.

*Alexandria* would refer to him as “The *Amir*.”<sup>154</sup> Under Ibrahim Bey, this informally denominated “*amir*” was “charged with all responsibilities.” Al-Jabarti described his extensive influence, noting that “all matters to the smallest details” were referred to him:

the records of the *ruzname*, the *miri* lands, the totality of revenues and expenses, and all the secretaries and clerks (*sarrafs*) were under his superintendence and direction. He was among the significant personalities of the world.<sup>155</sup>

Al-Gawhari’s story is remarkable not merely for the scope of authority he was able to achieve. It is also noteworthy for those incidental details that speak directly to the complex that enabled his meteoric rise. By virtue of his acquisition of a set of distinctive skills, this son of an artisan was able to become one of the most influential figures of his place and age. His case draws attention to a particular path of social mobility in which the attainment of an entry-level position as a manuscript copyist could set one on course to reach the highest levels of ministerial influence. The “cultural” efflorescence did not belong to a pure realm of the arts, but was linked organically with the more “terrestrial” aspects of existence. So too, the lay-clerical dyad that would take such striking form in the nineteenth century was not so stark in the eighteenth. If the patriarch’s role was not as a “classical” model might have it, it is conspicuous that the favor he showed to a low ranking scribe was pivotal in advancing a career that would become so consequential. The inadequacy of hidebound models for describing this period does not mean that the relationships - of people, places, things, ideas - were without form. The challenge is how to consider a set of relationships without reference to their deviation from a “classical” structure.

The patriarchal office is a primary example of this challenge. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Moravian Church made fledgling efforts to introduce Protestant missionaries into the region (including *Bilad al-Habasha*.) To this purpose, Dr. Frederick Hocker

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<sup>154</sup> *HPEC*, 3.3, 171.

<sup>155</sup> al-Jabarti, *‘Aja’ib al-Athar*, 2:121.

sought several audiences with Patriarch Murqus VII. On one occasion, he waited in an antechamber that was crowded with individuals, all “with some complaint to bring before him, or some dispute which they wished him to compromise.” The patriarch transacted these sundry matters in turn. Amidst the throng was a Muslim "hajji" who “treated the patriarch with as much respect as those of his own communion,” kissing the prelate’s hand upon entering as well as after the case had been settled. Hocker asked the patriarch if he was always so busy, to which he replied that the pool of applicants was often “ten times as great.”<sup>156</sup> In one instance, we find a patriarch pleading the cause of an idle scribe who would go on to gain informal recognition as the communion’s “*amir*.” In another, we glimpse a patriarch settling the case of a Muslim "hajji." This is a fascinating (if possibly exceptional) converse of the commonplace recourse of “*dhimmis*” to Muslim courts which has attracted scholarly interest in recent years.<sup>157</sup> The patriarch may not have possessed the formal authority that his predecessors are said to have held, but to reduce his status to that of “figurehead” would not seem to be an adequate assessment of the adaptations to his office.

These glimpses suggest a story of formal and informal relationships that remain largely concealed in the interstices, and one that cumbersome dichotomies hardly bring to light. Despite the volatility of the years after ‘Ali Bey’s departure, al-Gawhari’s tenure lasted until his own death in 1795. During that time, he not only employed copyists and sponsored translations from the Greek and possibly the Ge’ez languages, but this “layman” deemed himself competent to

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<sup>156</sup> Frederick Hocker, “Narrative of the Several Attempts Made Between 1752-9 to Open Religious Intercourse with the Coptic and Abyssinian Churches,” (translated from the German), in *Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren Established Among the Heathen* XII. (London, 1831): 104.

<sup>157</sup> See for example Najwa al-Qattan, “Dhimmi in the Muslim Court.” For a sampling of Islamic court records involving *dhimmis* in Ottoman *Misr*, see Salwa 'Ali Milad, *Watha'iq Ahl al-Dhimma fi al-'Asr al-'Uthmani wa ahamiyatuha al-Tarikiya* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa lil-Nashr al-Tawzi'a, 1983).

write his own commentary on the prophets.<sup>158</sup> His standing was embedded in a world of relationships, involving the living idea of the communion, the ecclesiastical hierarchs, the communion's poor. He established substantial church *waqfs* and funded the repair and construction of many churches and monasteries. And his relationships also went well beyond the "confines" of the communion. He regularly exchanged gifts with the disparate Mamluk households and he was noted for his participation in gifting rituals during Ramadan, providing candles, rice, sugar and clothing to persons of eminence.<sup>159</sup>

These kinds of relationships were indispensable in his ability to procure the permission to build and repair churches and monasteries. And they could extend all the way to the imperial center, as is conveyed in his storied role in the foundation of a new patriarchal cathedral in al-Azbakiya. Al-Gawhari arranged the pilgrimage journey (to Mecca) for one of the sultan's wives and gave her costly gifts during her sojourn in *Bilad Misr*. It is said that she sought to reward him for his compliments and for his acclaimed services of state. He took advantage of this goodwill, requesting that she assist him in obtaining a firman from Sultan Selim III authorizing the cathedral. This firman was forthcoming, although the project would only be completed during the tenure of his brother and self-appointed successor, Girgis.<sup>160</sup>

The careers of the al-Gawhari brothers also recall attention to those vague geographic "reaches" that have been addressed in the second section. Iskarius published 17 pages of deeds that belonged to Ibrahim, revealing a considerable number of properties to the north, notably a

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<sup>158</sup> A. Wadi, "Muqadama fi al-adab al-'araby al-Masihi lil-Aqbat" in *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea, Studia Documenta* 29-30 (1996): 442-492. Guirguis and Van Doorn Harder, *Emergence*, 47. Samiha 'Abd al-Shaheed 'Abd al-Nour provides an overview of some of the main "houses" that were prominent in this production of manuscripts, including the House of al-Gawhari in "Copyists and Sponsors," *Actes du Huitieme Congres International d'etudes Coptes*, eds. N. Bosson and A. Boud'hors (Paris, June 28-July 3, 2004); (Paris: Leuven, 2007), 1: 10.

<sup>159</sup> al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-Athar*, 2:121.

<sup>160</sup> *HPEC* 3.3, 171-2.



soap factory in Ramallah and many *waqf* properties in Jerusalem.<sup>161</sup> His manifold relationships undoubtedly made such acquisitions possible. A story tells that he sheltered one Na'um al-Suryani al-Halabi, a Syriac Christian who arrived at *Bilad Misr* in flight from "Catholic oppression." Al-Gawhari secured employment for his co-religionist from the sister see of Antioch until he was able to return to Halab.<sup>162</sup> This tells not only of relationships that existed on the geographic "reaches," but of a certain strategic significance that they enabled.

The theme evokes a well-told feature of another "direction," that of the *Sa'id*. Just as al-Halabi was able to flee to *Misr*, so too al-Gawhari or other *arakhina* could take flight in times of trial - and usually to the south. Standard historical accounts are peppered with tales of Mamluk *amirs* setting off for the *Sa'id* (including what is today northern Sudan) during periods of conflict or trouble. In the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for *amirs* to seek to obtain contiguous *awqaf* villages that would not only provide sites of provincial authority but places of refuge during times of difficulty.<sup>163</sup> There was a long-established practice of seeking refuge in "semi-autonomous" territories that were outside of the immediate control of Cairo. This pattern is manifest in 1786 as Hassan Pasha led an Ottoman expedition to the province with the aim of restoring the Porte's suzerainty. Some of the *amirs* hastened to the *Sa'id*, but they did not decamp alone. They were accompanied by Coptic intendants, as al-Jabarti reveals incidentally in reporting that the pasha levied a tax of 75,000 riyals on the houses of those Christians who had

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<sup>161</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, I-311-327. For brief details on the trade networks linking Misr with the interior of Palestine, see Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 68-72.

<sup>162</sup> See Muhammad 'Afifi, *al-Aqbat*, 142-3.

<sup>163</sup> Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 131. There was in fact a long history of this kind of southward flight, which appeared as a trope in many literary sources which identified the *Sa'id* as a place of retreat, sanctuary and protection. For example, in the thirteenth century Coptic martyrology of John of Phanijoit, the subject recanted his conversion to Islam and took flight to a village of the *Sa'id* that was known to shelter such individuals. Tamer al-Leithy notes that John's thirteenth century martyrologist recognized that the *Sa'id* was a "stronghold" of Coptic culture, and as Cairo became linked metaphorically with the "false Muslim temptations," the *Sa'id* (or more specifically, the particular village therein) became a "locus of sincere Coptic faith;" Tamer el-Leithy, "Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo, 1293-1524 A.D.," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2005).

fled.<sup>164</sup> Iterations of the theme would continue into the early nineteenth century as *amirs* and their confederates sought to elude the advances of the French, and then as Mehmet ‘Ali set about consolidating his regime. On at least one occasion, Girgis al-Gawhari himself took refuge in the *Sa’id* when it became clear that he was falling into the *wali*’s disfavor.<sup>165</sup>

The story of al-Halaby points again to the guarded nature of the patrimony. The threats that Catholics represented to the Anti-Chalcedonian communions in *Bilad al-Sham* and *al-Wajh al-Bahri* also existed in the *Sa’id*.<sup>166</sup> The Franciscans were working actively for several decades to establish and maintain convents in several towns including Girga, Farshut and Akhmim. In fact, their efforts began in the late seventeenth century, and by the 1720s Claude Sicard was credited with winning one of their most celebrated converts, the future Coptic Catholic bishop Rufa’il al-Tukhi.<sup>167</sup> Their continuing efforts were cause for no small alarm on the part of Patriarch Yuannis XVIII (al-Gawhari’s contemporary.) During the very year that this patriarch was elected, Bruce passed through Farshut on his way to Abyssinia and observed that Franciscans were using their medical services to gain the esteem of many people. Yuannis was assertive in countering these missionary endeavors, and produced sermons warning his flock of the errors and corruptions of the Catholics. This was the context in which he would eventually consecrate a talented Alexandrian apologist by the name of Yusab (al-Abbah) as metropolitan of Girga and Akhmim. Archbishop Yusab would go on to produce a number of sermons cautioning the flock about the errors of the Catholics, and he is remembered for his forceful and erudite defenses of

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<sup>164</sup> al-Jabarti, *‘Aja’ib al-Athar*, 1:438.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, *‘Aja’ib al-Athar*, 3:62, 3:223.

<sup>166</sup> This was later to become even more acute as Muhammad ‘Ali sought to use Catholics as leverage against the Coptic Orthodox. On the role of Catholics from Syria, see Phillip, *The Syrians*.

<sup>167</sup> Hamilton, *The Copts*, 95.

the faith.<sup>168</sup> But the particular menace of the Franciscan presence in the *Sa'id* was by no means confined to the immediate vicinity. In fact, the Franciscans did not conceal their objective that the convents should serve as a way station for travelers passing to and from Abyssinia.<sup>169</sup> It comes as no surprise then that the corpus of literature produced by these two prominent hierarchs not only contained polemical sermons against Catholics, but also materials (sermons and letters) relative to Abyssinia, including its doctrinal disputes.<sup>170</sup>

Taken together, the events that transpired during the careers of the al-Gawhari brothers cover three tumultuous decades that witnessed the maneuvers of competing political households, an intensely waged expedition from the Porte, the three turbulent years of the French expedition and its chaotic aftermath, and finally the initial period of Mehmet 'Ali's rule as he set about consolidating his power. The brothers' ascendancy was made possible by that order addressed in the first section, in which specialized skills could remain guarded and "localized" within a wider interstitial fabric. When the expedition from the Porte arrived in 1786, Hassan Pasha sought to uncover sources of revenue that would aid in subsidizing his undertaking. The knowledge of existing wealth - both of its sources and the sites where it was reserved - was indeed guarded. The means of obtaining access to that wealth were necessarily adapted to the concealed nature of this two-fold knowledge. As a matter of course, those "hidden" (what might now be called "private") spaces like households would be violated. Neighborhood and alley guards were taken into custody, and compelled to conduct Hassan Pasha's forces to the houses where the money was kept.<sup>171</sup> And indeed the bodies of individuals would also be violated as they contained

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<sup>168</sup> More than 30 of his sermons are extant. Febe Armanios provides a helpful analysis of some of these, and the challenges presented by the Catholic missionary efforts. See "Defining Orthodoxy Through Sermons," *Coptic Christians in Ottoman Egypt*, 117-146.

<sup>169</sup> See Bruce, *Travels* (1804) 2:8, 22.

<sup>170</sup> For example, Yusab produced a sermon entitled "Against the Abyssinians who Claim that the Holy Spirit Anointed Christ." A copy of this is held at the Bib. Nat. Paris MS. Arabe 4711.

<sup>171</sup> Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:250.

perhaps the most hidden of all locations, the recesses of the human brain.

The distinctive situation of Coptic *mu'allimin* in the administrative structures made them a target of particular interest. One such figure was *al-Mu'allim* Wasif who knew with precision and by memory every detail about the *ruzname*. He was incarcerated, beaten and ultimately directed to turn over a specified sum of money. In similar fashion, a woman from the House of al-Gawhari was taken into custody and forced to divulge the existence of stores of gold and silver articles and other valuables, which were subsequently seized.<sup>172</sup> The residences of numerous Christians of influence were breached and their many slaves were led to Hassan Pasha, who proceeded to auction them.<sup>173</sup> Other details of the expedition are indicative of the complex nature of the relationships that existed in the shadowy structure. At least one monk was detained and compelled to forfeit a coffer containing deposits belonging to Christians, highlighting the interpenetration of the monastic and the mundane.<sup>174</sup>

If Hassan Pasha's methods were apparently violative, they were also fairly unremarkable insofar as they would not effect a fundamental reordering. By design, they extracted some of the existing wealth on an established pattern. This *modus operandi* was still in use after the French withdrew from the country in 1801. At that time the Copt Antun abu Taqiya was captured and held prisoner at the Citadel, and later forced to relinquish moneys that he owed on a number of villages. Eventually he and two other Copts of prominence during the French occupation were executed, their homes cordoned, and their possessions – which included female slaves from the lands of *al-Sudan* and *al-Habasha* - seized and auctioned.<sup>175</sup> But others like Girgis al-Gawhari managed to survive the disruptions. Some time later he appeared alongside Sayyid Ahmad al-

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<sup>172</sup> al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-Athar*, 1:440.

<sup>173</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *Al-Jabarti's History of Egypt*, eds. T. Philipp and M. Perlmann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 2:196.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:200.

<sup>175</sup> *al-Jabarti, Aja'ib al-Athar*, 2:323; 2:369.

Mahruqi before the pasha ‘Ali Gaza’irli, and he was authorized as head of the scribes while the latter was affirmed as overseer at the mint.<sup>176</sup> On another occasion when the military required funds, sources of wealth were isolated, and sums were assessed on “the Copts,” as well as al-Mahruqi, the wealthy merchants of spices and other articles, and the *multazimin*. This was followed by the customary rituals, as leading shaykhs and officers were invested in honorary robes. *Al-Mu’allim* al-Gawhari was received as well, ahead of 22 Coptic scribes who were also presented with robes of honor.<sup>177</sup>

But the first years of Mehmet ‘Ali’s tenure were inauspicious for Girgis al-Gawhari. He and his confidantes were placed under arrest in 1805, and he was ordered to turn over all financial records for the preceding five years. Though he retained his office, subsequent developments made it clear that Mehmet ‘Ali’s favor was turning toward *al-Mu’allim* Ghali, who had been *Amir* Alfi’s intendant. These circumstances prompted al-Gawhari’s flight to the *Sa’id*, which only increased the Pasha’s displeasure. He sent the patriarch strong remonstrations about the disappearance, and the affair was only resolved upon payment of a sum of cash. An inventory of al-Gawhari’s tax farms was drafted, and his holdings were auctioned.<sup>178</sup> Meanwhile, *al-Mu’allim* Ghali was emerging to fill the void, but something was changing. During these years, Mehmet ‘Ali was setting out to overhaul the reigning order; the spaces for the “middlemen” of that order - *multazimin*, *‘ulema*, scribes, Mamluks - were increasingly circumscribed or eliminated. *Al-Mu’allim* Ghali was ascendant because he was, in al-Jabarti’s cryptic working, “in perfect harmony with the pasha and his goals.”<sup>179</sup> Recalling Fuller’s assessment, the French “endeavoured in vain to dispense with [the Copts’] services ... and it remained for Mehmet Ali to

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:457.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:457; 3:9.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:64.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:223.

break the fiscal chain.”<sup>180</sup> By the time these words were written, Girgis al-Gawhari was a distant memory. His material circumstances had continued to deteriorate along with his health, and in a bit of bitter irony, this successor to the colloquially designated “Coptic *amir*” died during the very year that Mehmet ‘Ali massacred the Mamluks.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> see footnote 46.

<sup>181</sup> al-Jabarti, *‘Aja’ib al-Athar*, 3:222-23.

## Chapter Two

### “The Deserts and Beyond”

Chapter two serves as an elaboration upon some of the themes that have been explored in the first chapter, but with a more concentrated examination of “peripheral” sites and relationships. We begin with a contemplation of “intermediate” regions – namely the vast deserts that have represented cognitive barriers to the contemplation of regional history. In doing so, we engage some of the tropes attached to two specific groupings that have been associated with the desert - monks and bedouin - considering how these have obscured not only the wide range of relationships in which followers of Alexandria were implicated, but also the very mechanisms that made intercourse over long distances possible. To further engage the question of "intermediate" regions and relationships, we will then explore the role that Copts played in a unique political formation - that of the Hawara confederation - in the eighteenth century *Sa'id*. This will invite an assessment of some of the ways in which geographic neglects (especially of the *Sa'id* and the south) have contributed to the "Copt" as a parochial object in the historiography. Finally, to challenge this representation, we will direct attention to particular historical patterns that have had "followers of Alexandria" traversing literal and metaphorical deserts. This will invite closer attention to varieties of intercourse involving - but by no means limited to - traders and prelates from *Bilad Misr* and *al-Sa'id* journeying southward, and the northward movement of traders, monks and others from *Bilad al-Habasha*. Throughout, we will give attention to what intuitive and counterintuitive relationships – of people, places, things, ideas – might be discerned along an extensive geography, where one region faded into the next.

## Infested Deserts

When the French naturalist Sonnini de Manoncourt visited Wadi al-Natrun in 1778, he described the monasteries as “sinks of idleness and vice,” where “barbarism and stupid ignorance likewise took up their abode.” They followed in the footsteps of the early anchorites who, supposing their lives to be useless “retired in the prime of life, to bury themselves from society in these remote solitudes.”<sup>1</sup> Similar criticisms would be leveled in other Western travel accounts, as well as in the assessment of some of the “enlightened” Coptic lay elites by the turn of the twentieth century, among them Ramzi Tadrus. In his commentary on the monasteries, Tadrus gave them a purely functional role - they served as retreats during periods of oppression. Over time, this original *raison d'être* was forgotten, and it gave way to ossified customs and beliefs, among them that “the occupation of the monks and their students required complete seclusion from the people.” In their remote abodes, these desert idlers “wasted their time in fruitless activities, cultivating self-love until the [Coptic] nation (*umma*) began groaning beneath their power and control.”<sup>2</sup>

In the nineteenth century, new administrative systems, in addition to new technologies - methods of transport and surveillance and the like - would make it possible for centralizing authorities to extend their dominance - or to advance their "sovereign capabilities" - deeper into the “desert peripheries.”<sup>3</sup> During this same period, some within the Alexandrian Church hierarchy – as well as prominent laity – would begin to speak of the need to put the affairs of the

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<sup>1</sup> Sonnini de Manoncourt, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, trans. Henry Hunter (London: J. Stockdale, 1807), 2:160.

<sup>2</sup> Tadrus, *al-Aqbat*, 1:122.

<sup>3</sup> Reuven Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin: Tribes and State in the Egypt of Mehmet Ali, 1805-1848* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 3. “Sovereign capabilities” is Louisa Lombard's expression, via Ellis, “Between Empire and Nation,” 29. Ellis argues that state-centered approaches can overlook the complex and fluid process of contestation involved in the efforts of competing states to extend sovereignty into regions where “institutional capacities” were uneven. In her view, local actors at these “interstitial sites” (like borderlands) were involved in this process of contestation; “Between Empire and Nation,” 27-32.



monasteries in order. Gradually, bureaucratic systematization and other modern forms undermined the complex and multilayered order within which monks and monasteries were embedded. These earlier arrangements faded from view, while their memory was recast within teleological communal and national "awakening" narratives, confirming retroactively the bleak conditions that had prevailed at least until the mid-nineteenth century. According to the now canonical view, it was only with the nineteenth century reforms that the monasteries were resuscitated, and the stifling effects of isolation, ignorance and inertia were at last remedied.

Within this narrative structure, there is some correspondence between the treatment of the desert monk and the bedouin, insofar as the existence of both have been marked by a kind of staged isolation. The pastoralist tribes are a looming presence beyond the peripheries of settled lands, and when their isolation is interrupted, it is often only by virtue of their unseemly habits of raiding settled lands and threatening travelers with plunder.<sup>4</sup> Even when the positive attributes of the bedouin have been acknowledged, there has been a tendency to frame these in terms of a tally sheet of merits and demerits. This is apparent in ‘Abd al-Rahim ‘Abd al-Rahman's study of Ottoman Egypt in which he acknowledged that one could make of these bedouin (*urban*) anything he wanted for the “positive and negative went hand in hand.” His analysis is also

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<sup>4</sup> For a helpful précis of the historiographical “problem” of the bedouin in an eighteenth century Ottoman Palestine context, see Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 201-5. He deals with some of the tropes that will be familiar to us, while showing the integration of the bedouin within the economic life, and within the framework of alliance systems that were “continually reproduced and negotiated;” *ibid.*, 203.

Maged Mikhail argues that the nature of the sources has had at least some role to play in the negative depictions of pastoral bedouin. They did not record their own history, and were seldom mentioned in the narratives, except during those “brief instances in which they revolted or rioted;” Mikhail, “Egypt from Late Antiquity,” 239. Mikhail offers a very good assessment of the symbiotic relationship between the monastic communities and the bedouin for the medieval period; see 237-43. In the course of his discussion, he cites an episode during the reign of the infamous al-Hakim b. Amr Allah, whose eleventh century persecution of the Copts is recalled as one of the darkest moments in the history of the communion. Many churches were demolished during the period, but the desert monasteries were untouched because the soldiers who were given the task of destroying them were “afraid of the bedouin [*urban*];” 242-43.

marked by the familiar propensity to exclude the bedouin from the movement of history, which ultimately unfolds at, and is diffused from the centers of political power.<sup>5</sup>

More recently - and more helpfully - the generic term of *'arab/urban* has been described as referring to those "autonomous political communities" which existed "beyond the immediate reach of Cairo" – neither existing "outside nor completely within" its jurisdiction.<sup>6</sup> Territories of such "autonomous" or semi-autonomous communities could reach well beyond the lands of *Misr*, including southward toward *Bilad al-Sudan* and to the foothills of *Bilad al-Habasha*.<sup>7</sup> The cases of 'Ababda and Bisharin bedouin illustrate the point. In the time of Burckhardt, these large bedouin groupings still possessed contiguous swaths of territory covering the lands between Qusayr to the north and Suakin to the south. Some of the 'Ababda were also settled in the villages which lined the Nile from the eastern bend of the river at Qift to Aswan.<sup>8</sup> It is no small irony that those belonging to a state of existence that made communication and transport across even the most "forbidding" territories possible would become history's consummate "outsiders." It might even be said that there was a cosmopolitan quality to a liminal existence that could link settled areas as diverse as Red Sea ports, Nilotic villages of the *Sa'id*, and the borderland tributaries of Sennar and Gondar. In recent years, scholars have discredited some of the gross

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<sup>5</sup> 'Abd al-Rahim 'Abd al-Rahman, *al-rif al-Misri 'Uthmaniya* (Cairo: Dar al-ma'arif, 1984), 167. The Official government documents in the Ottoman period tended to address the bedouin generically, and usually as outlaws and rogues. Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society Under Ottoman Rule, 1517-1798* (London: Routledge, 1992), 91. But the authorities relied on the bedouin, as they relied on the Mamluks, to administer the countryside. In one official source, these lands were referred to as the *aqalim* of the (*'arab*) shaykhs. From the perspective of the "center," the specific details of the "peripheral" order of the bedouin were immaterial. *Ibid.*, 92. This was a characteristic of a particular kind of governance in the *ancien regime*, and does not gainsay the immense importance of the bedouin to the imperial system.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 63. In his study of the emergence of the border between Libya and Egypt, Matthew Ellis has explored contestations over sovereignty in "borderland" regions, and the interplay of multiple claims to sovereignty. In doing so, he contributes substantially to the study of bedouin. For a summary of his approach to the fluid contest over sovereignty, see "Between Empire and Nation," 27-32.

<sup>7</sup> The relationship of the bedouin with Cairo might be likened to the relationship of tribute which linked semi-autonomous communities to political centers of Abyssinia and Sennar and elsewhere. The various tribes paid tribute to governors or other political representatives, and these ties existed in a state of flux. Thus a single tribal entity could transfer tribute from Abyssinia to Sennar from one year to the next.

<sup>8</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia* (London: John Murray, 1819), 148.

oversimplifications of the 'urban/bedouin, including their categorization along distinct and mutually exclusive “nomadic, semi-nomadic and permanent settler” lines. Instead, a picture has emerged of organic relationships, developed over centuries and indeed millennia, which linked nomads with villagers and which transcends the cold tally sheets and sterile classifications of an earlier literature.<sup>9</sup>

It is profitable to bring this sense of the symbiotic to the appraisal of the relationships between desert monastic communities and the bedouin. Not unlike the peasants and wayfarers, desert monks have often been portrayed as living in perpetual fear of bedouin plunder. An early nineteenth century visitor to Wadi al-Natrun offered a typical assessment of these perceived dynamics:

The timid Copt, in somber garb ... steals along to visit his fellow exiles [and] the wild Arab with independent step still leads his camel to the convent-gate, and demands a tribute from the frightened monks.<sup>10</sup>

This is not to deny that there have been moments in history during which the monasteries faced grave dangers from the bedouin.<sup>11</sup> Yet, such portrayals conceal a complex set of relationships that connected monks with diverse and variable tribal confederations. Sonnini touched upon this - albeit indirectly - during his late eighteenth century visit to the monasteries of Wadi al-Natrun:

It was not sufficient for the monks of the desert to form useless societies, they must likewise become dangerous and hurtful. Without the succours which [the Arabs] find in [the monasteries], the Bedouins could not have subsisted long in the environs, and infested the country bordering on this desert with their continual devastations.

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<sup>9</sup> Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 6, 12. Aharon provides a helpful assessment of the pitfalls of the earlier scholarship.

<sup>10</sup> Miss Platt, *Journal of a Tour Through Egypt, the Peninsula of Sinia and the Holy Land, in 1838, 1839* (London, 1841), 1:277.

<sup>11</sup> Qasim 'Abdu Qasim, *Ahl al-Dhimma*, 133, 136. Patriarch Ghubra'il VII (1525-1568) rebuilt *Dayr* Antonius in the Eastern Desert after it had been "destroyed by the Bedouins." During his pontificate, bedouin also destroyed *Dayr* Bulus. See Khalil Samir, "Gabriel VII," *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 4:1133-35.

The Frenchman's words then took an ominous turn: "Under a government that has any idea of a good police, such retreats, the allurements and rendezvous of robbers, would not long exist."<sup>12</sup> In the course of a criticism that he leveled at monks and "Arabs," Sonnini touched on something very important, namely the complex relationships that implicated these sons of the Alexandrian see within autonomous or semi-autonomous "desert" communities. He also correctly forecasted that the efforts to impose a "new order" would meet the resistance of those - including monks and Bedouin - whose interests inhered on those peripheries. He then attested that the "monks' hatred of Europeans"

is more atrocious and profound than that of the Mahometans, and their houses in the desert will be the grand support of the excursions of the Bedouin, their magazines of provision, and the places in which they will assemble to deliberate on the measures ... of their expeditions.<sup>13</sup>

These words not only manifested emerging attitudes among colonial-minded Europeans toward Oriental Christians, but also foreshadowed a kind of orientation toward peripheral sites of "power" that was to prevail during the French expedition, and indeed across most of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

The monasteries can help us to contemplate dynamics on the "peripheries," and the ways in which they would be framed within the context of Eurocentric and Cairo-centric narratives. In purveying an impression of monastic isolation, these renditions concealed political, commercial, cultural and other aspects of connectivity. When eighteenth century Algerian traveler al-Warhilani was on pilgrimage to Mecca he stopped at Wadi al-Natrun. Describing his successive marches, he noted:

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<sup>12</sup> Sonnini de Manoncourt, *Travels*, 167.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>14</sup> Among Mehmet 'Ali's innovations was the institution of a specific department dealing with "Bedouin affairs," which was aimed at their incorporation within a centralized, hierarchical bureaucratic system. Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 4. Somewhat later, the institutional church undertook a comparable program of "centralization," which included the "rationalization" of monastic records.

From al-Mudar to al-Shamamsa is four days, and from there to Wadi al-Ruhban (the Valley of the Monks) three days; and thence to the *aryaf* (countrysides) of Misr, I stopped at Kafr al-Hamam, and thence to Bulaq.

He provided a brief – if not exactly accurate - description of the Monks who inhabited the monasteries, noting that these “Christians seclude themselves for the worship of idols [*asnam*].”

<sup>15</sup> On his return from Mecca he again passed the monasteries, where the monks greeted his party and then initiated conversation, inquiring about the conditions of *Misr* and its residents. They went on to lodge the guests in a vacant structure on the extremities of their settlements where the travelers passed an "outstanding night.” <sup>16</sup>

Here, the monasteries were a “natural” stop along the extensive journey connecting Algeria with Mecca, optimally situated as they were on the route which traversed that section of desert. <sup>17</sup> This concourse also involved various trades, including the transport of natron and dates, which were carried by the Jawabis bedouin who inhabited the neighboring regions. <sup>18</sup> When viewed in this context, the monasteries cease to appear as segregated and remote preserves. In the case at hand, they come into view as nodes along specific pilgrimage and trade routes. It is noteworthy that not only did al-Warhilani demonstrate a modest interest in the lives of the monks, but they also relied on him for information about the conditions at *Misr*.

The support that monks provided for “Arabs” or pilgrims and other passersby has often been read as a sign of coercion. This reading has in turn frustrated serious consideration of the kinds of reciprocities that were involved in these "peripheral" relationships. Even in the later nineteenth century, Butler noted that tribes plying a trade in bulrushes (for the weaving of mats

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Husayn b. Muhammad al-Warhilani, *Nuzhat al-anzar fi fadl 'ilm al-tarikh wa al-akhbar* (Algeria: Matba'a Bir Futana al-Sharfiya, 1908), 242-43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 606.

<sup>17</sup> Gardner Wilkinson, *Handbook for Travellers to Egypt* (London: John Murray, 1847), 247. According to Wilkinson's description, the Cairo-Siwa route began at Terana (a village to the east of the monasteries which was often administered by a Coptic headman). The monastic settlements of Wadi al-Natrun were the next stop on the journey, followed by Maghra (Wadi al-Sumar), al-Libba, al-Gara and finally Siwa.

<sup>18</sup> Andréossy, “Mémoire sur la vallée,” 257.

that were bound for the Delta) relied on the monasteries to “replenish their scanty stock of food and water.” They were “wise enough,” he continued, “to remain on friendly terms with the monks.” The monks clearly possessed an important commodity that gave them a considerable degree of leverage.<sup>19</sup> In turn, the tribes assisted the monks and the see of Alexandria in multiple, and even intimate ways. They sometimes arrived at the monasteries with news from the “outside world,” and were also known to participate in the ritual procurement of monks for episcopal assignment in a manner similar to the “chain-wielding Turks” we encountered in Chapter One. In the introduction, likewise, we discussed a resident monk of *Dayr Antonius* who was selected as metropolitan for *al-Habash* in 1816. Here, it was a band of bedouin that was responsible for presenting the nomination letter to the monastery. They arrived with the instructions that “if he is not happy,” they should “take him by force.” They were even told that if the nominated monk should be hidden from their view, they were to search for the reticent religious and upon finding him announce, “this is the day the Lord has made.”<sup>20</sup>

The bedouin also provided protection for the monks, and contributed to the deliverance of provisions. The monasteries relied upon the cooperation of the confederations that “governed” the environs, which varied over the course of time. When Burton visited the Eastern Desert in the early 1820s, the patriarch was giving an annual remittance to the ‘Ababda and Beni Wasil bedouin to prevent attacks on the caravans. The Beni Wasil had long been recognized as guardians of the monasteries of Saint Antonius and Saint Bulus, although when their influence weakened sometime before 1830, the Ma’azi began to refer to the vicinities of the monasteries as their own possession.<sup>21</sup> These dynamics were far from simply “peripheral affairs.” One need

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<sup>19</sup> Alfred Butler, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1884), 1:296.

<sup>20</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 1:67.

<sup>21</sup> Diary of James Burton (1822-23), Burton Papers, BL Add. Mss. 25,624, (November 14, 1822), f. 119; Burton Papers (1830), BL Add. Mss. 25,625, (n.d.), f. 6.

only recall the importance of the monasteries to the life of the wider Alexandrian communion to recognize the significance of the bonds that existed. As addressed in the first chapter, the monasteries were not only responsible for supplying the ecclesiastical hierarchs, but lay notables acquired a significant degree of social capital through their patronage of the monasteries. Among Ibrahim al-Gawhari's most celebrated achievements in fact was his sponsorship of restorations at the monasteries of the Eastern Desert.<sup>22</sup>

In his excellent study of irrigation in Ottoman Egypt, Alan Mikhail contends that the necessity of cooperation in the intricacies of irrigation created local "communities of water" that connected even the remotest villages with the imperial Ottoman capital in a process he calls "coordinated localism." In this schema, he presented the bedouin as an example of "irrigation's other." The peasants and Ottoman administrators alike had an interest in the maintenance of the irrigation system because they "served collective rather than individual welfare." By way of contrast, he argues that the bedouin largely stood outside of these arrangements, for they endeavored to benefit from the resources of the "communities of water" without "entering into the cooperative formations that maintained those communities."<sup>23</sup>

It might be asked to what extent this "Bedouin other" underplays the role that they played in these operations of exchange. It is a crucial question – and one to which we can only allude – whether alongside the subtle linkages connecting the "remotest villages" of "Egypt" and the centers of empire there also existed linkages between the deserts and the villages. It is reasonable to presume that like the delicate balance existing among these "communities of water," some kind of balance extended into the vast deserts as well. The movement of commodities required

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<sup>22</sup> 'Abd al-Shaheed, "Copyists," 10. The monasteries also served "practical" functions. For example, during a particularly severe cholera outbreak, the patriarch absented himself at an Eastern Desert monastery until it passed. Diary of James Burton, Burton Papers (1831), BL Add. Mss. 25, 627 (August 26, 1831), f. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Mikhail, *Nature and Empire*, 38-39, 78.

techniques for crossing these sweeping territories. Those who were so specialized were not merely an “other” standing ready for quick plunder, but were themselves integral to the functioning of regional trade and all kinds of vital movements – which could include the produce of those very “communities of water.” It seems inconceivable that the delicate complex would not include the stretches of territory which separated the irrigation systems of the Nile valley from more distant coordinates in the imperial system.

The relationships between the monks and the bedouin suggest one dimension to the complex of desert relationships. It is interesting to note that when the power of the Beni Wasil had weakened, it was their own shaykh who invited the Ma’azi bedouin to facilitate the movement of caravans that provisioned the monasteries. These caravans, which on average involved more than 60 dromedaries, set out from a spot near Beni Suwayf, and usually carried a range of foodstuffs including beans, flour and coffee, in addition to tobacco, gunpowder and sums of money. As the arrangement between the Beni Wasil and the Ma’azi shows, in this delicate world of relationships, mechanisms were in place that were finely attuned not only to the vagaries of the environment, but to other factors such as conflicts or shifts in power among the tribes.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, when Burton asked the monks how they managed while the Arabs were warring, they answered simply that they were never without food. They noted that during the conflicts between the Ma’azi and the 'Ababda, the latter visited the monastery occasionally and “always behaved well.” They only solicited bread, and upon withdrawal would kiss the rope that had let down the rations. For their part, the Ma’azi also respected the integrity of the monastery – though they were slightly more demanding, requiring pipes and tobacco from the inmates.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Diary of James Burton, Burton Papers, BL Add. Mss. 25,625, (n.d.), f. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Diary of James Burton, Burton Papers 1830, BL Add. Mss. 25,624, (March 17, 1830), f. 16.



Even during a serious cholera outbreak and the subsequent shortage of food supplies, the Arabs “did not press their demands” – and while Burton suggested that this was evidence that their rights were “weakly founded,” it would seem at least as likely that this was based upon established protocols. And it should be added that when the epidemic struck, it did not differentiate between the peoples along the Nile and those in the desert. If the desert environment was rather shielded from the spread of the contagion, it is obvious that the effects of food shortages would not take long to impact those inhabiting the deserts.<sup>26</sup>

Describing the availability of food supplies during the 'Ababda-Ma'azi conflicts, the monks framed their condition in pious terms, asserting that their “bowls were supplied every morning by their patron saint.”<sup>27</sup> The identification of spiritual “actors” calls attention to another aspect to the relationships involved in monastic life. This “spiritual”/“cultural” dimension linked the monasteries in a variety of ways not only with the followers of the communion across vast reaches – but also with the bedouin themselves. The monks explained to Hekekyan that the bedouin “stood in awe of their power,” believing that if they pilfered even the least measure of the monks’ properties, “camels and children will perish through supernatural divine wrath.”<sup>28</sup>

Burton was also witness to this dynamic and the grave respect that the bedouin paid to the institution. The monks regularly lent the latter various items, including the vessels in which they placed the provisions. These items might have been subject to theft were it not for the bedouin's apparent fear. One of the monks gave an account of the “misery and death for seven or eight generations upon an Ababdy ['Ababda] family who stole [a great copper vessel.]” The curse was only finally broken when “they determined at last to bring it back to the convent.” Burton attributed these kinds of stories to the trickery wrought by the monks “as a means of protecting

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<sup>26</sup> Diary of James Burton, Burton Papers 1831-1, BL. Add. Mss. 25,626, (January 1, 1831), f. 36.

<sup>27</sup> Diary of James Burton, Burton Papers 1830, BL Add. Mss. 25,624, (March 17, 1830), f. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Journals 1841-1844, Hekekyan Papers, BL Add. Mss. 37449, (March 29, 1844), 2: f.304

them and their property.” Their efforts were successful because the bedouin were “superstitious enough to still be kept in terror” by such tales.<sup>29</sup> Burton was not the first or the last to dismiss this particular kind of oral tradition with a wave of the hand, as though it was nothing more than superstition and trickery. Sedra has observed a certain “domestication” of faith that came with the transfer of knowledge – from the oral to the written - in the course of the nineteenth century. In so doing, "faith" was rendered "predictable” and therefore controllable in a way that it could not be “as long as [it] was a matter of superstition.”<sup>30</sup> These stories point to a kind of cultural interaction between bedouin and monks, and evoke a world of shared oral traditions. These were not simply aimless traditions. Together, they were a constitutive part of a "desert order" which was governed by rules, and regulated by mechanisms that are easily overlooked insofar as they were not of a formal legal and textual nature.

In noting that the monks were “just as superstitious” as the "Arabs," Burton communicated (perhaps inadvertently) a common field upon which monks and bedouin moved together.<sup>31</sup> Within the fabric we have described, "spiritual forces" and "actors" were admitted into the social relationships, although modernizers and Occidentals alike would be inclined to dismiss them as ghosts of "superstition." In the town of Bibeh, located approximately ten miles to the south of the Red Sea monasteries' subsidiary convent, there was a Coptic church dedicated to Saint George. Bedouin frequented this site, and sometimes lit votive candles to secure the patron's assistance on their journey. Foreign narrators told stories of scheming monks who

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<sup>29</sup> Diary of James Burton, Burton Papers 1831, BL Add. Mss. 25,626, (January 1, 1831), f. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Sedra, “Textbook Maneuvers,” 22.

<sup>31</sup> Diary of James Burton, Burton Papers 1831, BL Add. Mss. 25,626 (January 1, 1831), f. 36.

contrived “pious fraud[s]” for their credulous neighbors; in this case, the monks had concocted a Muslim saint out of the traditions associated with Saint George.<sup>32</sup>

Foreclosed here again was the very possibility that relationships could exist, “mediated” by commonly recognized spiritual actors, which linked bedouin/Muslims and monks/Copts. When Lucy Duff Gordon visited Bibeh, she discovered a Muslim mason repairing the compound of the convent as Copts looked on. On three consecutive nights, the “shaykh” who was buried in the church had appeared to the mason and “ordered him to leave his work and go to Bibeh and mend his church.” He left Cairo for Bibeh where he offered his services gratis, asking the Copts only to furnish the materials. The Coptic head of the (incidentally, majority Muslim) village said that for years he had tried unsuccessfully to initiate this project. Gordon was struck by the peculiarity of “a dead saint” contriving “to be equally agreeable to Christians and Muslims.”<sup>33</sup> The common acknowledgement of an ethereal actor's involvement in the social relations allowed a task to be accomplished that embodied actors had been unable to accomplish alone.<sup>34</sup>

This involvement of incorporeal agents in the daily life of the land is reproduced in many ways, perhaps most notably in the intimate bonds which linked villages and guilds with their own particular patron saints. These actors were involved in the protection of order, and would sometimes ally themselves with the peasants against the predations of a *multazim*.<sup>35</sup> In the late

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<sup>32</sup> William Furniss, *Waraga, or Charms of the Nile* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), 84; John Gardner Wilkinson, *A Handbook for Travellers in Lower and Upper Egypt; Including Descriptions of the Course of the Nile Through Egypt and Nubia, Alexandria, Cairo, the Pyramids, Thebes, the Suez Canal, the Peninsula of Mount Sinai, the Oases, the Fayoom & c.* (London: John Murray, 1880), 399.

<sup>33</sup> Lucy Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1902), 28-30.

<sup>34</sup> Instances of this connected world of spirits are abundant in the sources. One local Muslim official related to Duff Gordon that Pachomius (Bakhum), the Christian saint, had once come to the assistance of his father. When he was lost in the desert, the saint appeared to him in a vision and guided him safely home. There was also a very old oral tradition in which this same figure appeared to a descendant of the Muslim Saint Abu al-Hajjaj. This in turn gave rise to a local practice at Luxor in which Copts would present two fowls to the family of Abu al-Hajjaj in honor of the saint. See *Letters*, 283. Another recorded instance occurs in the ecclesiastical chronicles, in which three wounded bedouin receiving a vision of the saintly Patriarch Matta on the fortieth day of his death. They promptly visited his tomb to pay their respects and to receive his blessing. *HPEC* 3:3, 157.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Berques, *Imperialism and Revolution*, trans. Jean Stewart (New York: Praeger, 1972), 135.

nineteenth century, Leeder complained of the "wonder-world" of superstition, "a world in which every man has his guardian angel, and is familiar with the ways of the whole race of fairy and *ginn*." <sup>36</sup> Many enlightened native elites would have shared his scorn, and one might say that the solution to the "problem" involved the disenfranchisement of these specters of social cohesion, or the expulsion of the very actors that were imbued with the faculty of wandering so effortlessly across confessional lines.

The view from the "center" can easily force into eclipse the kinds of connectedness that existed apart from direct mediation at *Misr*. The cases we have described involving the monastic communities represent only one kind of relationship linking the followers of the Alexandrian communion with the bedouin. 'Ali Mubarak detailed a local practice in one village that points to other kinds of bonds - in fact, he added that the practice was pervasive across the *Sa'id*. In the village of Um Duma, located to the north of Suhag, the Copt would refer to the 'arab as "my bedouin" while the bedouin in like fashion would use the possessive to refer to the Copt. This arrangement involved a reciprocity of benefits and obligations. If a Copt in this alliance became destitute, "his" bedouin were obliged to assist him, and for their part the bedouin "would defend the Christians as if they were their own." This kind of relationship involved numerous customs, including matrimonial ones. The Christian was expected to provide a specific monetary offering to the bedouin when the Christian's daughter married, and the bedouin would also provide something for the Christian at the nuptials of his own daughter. In a practice reminiscent of the ritual procurements of monks for the episcopate, the Christian would enter the residence of the bedouin, shackle his daughter in iron chains and hold her captive. She was only released after he had received a sum of money from her family – according to the financial means of her husband.

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<sup>36</sup> Leeder, *Modern Sons*, 83.

The same procedure was followed when a Christian married, except that the bedouin was said to have exacted a somewhat larger sum.

Mubarak then described the condition at a village in the neighborhood of Um Duma called Kum Gharib where many affluent Copts lived. An influential bedouin, known as "Abu Duma," claimed ownership of the village and extracted money from its inhabitants. Mubarak commented that this kind of "old custom among the Hawara and the bedouin" was finally discontinued during the reign of Mehmet 'Ali, which was "eminent for its cultivation of freedom."<sup>37</sup> It is not to argue that the peripheral bonds were entirely free from coercive practices to suggest that this kind of intrusion was not necessarily as emancipatory as it might have been framed at that center – where Mubarak was well situated. While the language and practices of "ownership" may at first glance appear to be forms of servitude, they can also be understood as expressions of profound social bonds that existed.

The relationships we have touched upon, both those linking monks/Copts and bedouin and those linking deserts and cultivated lands, call into question many of the characterizations of the "peripheries" which would be expressed in state-centered narratives. We do well to recall Aharon's evaluation that "permanent settlers and tribes were mutually dependent for their livelihood." As the bedouin protected and provisioned the monasteries, they were also absolutely indispensable in protecting villages and provisioning towns with water. They had control over many trades and played a crucial role in all areas of commerce.<sup>38</sup> Their contribution to animal husbandry was also vital, both to village life and to all forms of transit.<sup>39</sup> At least for a short

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<sup>37</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat*, 8:82. See also Burckardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 531 n. 80.

<sup>38</sup> Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 25; 98; 101-102; 147.

<sup>39</sup> A good illustration of this is the animal husbandry of the 'Ababda and Bishara bedouin. Their camels were known to have been the most excellent breed, and the camel market at Esna was the largest in northeast Africa and "famous all over Egypt" because these tribes frequented it. As for horses, the Hawara were recognized across the region for raising the best stock. Early in the reign of Mehmet 'Ali, their role in this field was greatly reduced due to the severe treatment they met at the hands of Ibrahim Pasha. See Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 1-2; 533, n. 80.

period in the late 1770s, some tribes were impelled to retire a considerable distance from settled lands. Sonnini witnessed the vexation of the settled population during this period of bedouin withdrawal. Instead of "applauding these measures for the protection of property," they "murmured at the scarcity of camels, sheep, and other animals." It was indeed on account of the bedouin that they had been accustomed to the abundant supply of these critical commodities.

Sonnini himself conceded their indispensability to desert navigation:

The prosperity of Egypt is connected with the preservation of the Bedouin. In fact, they alone can traverse with facility immense sandy and uninhabited districts, keep up prompt and habitual communications through them, even take up their abode in them and repair to cultivated parts.<sup>40</sup>

It is noteworthy that the same observer who earlier had lamented the dangers of the Arab-infested deserts now offered these concessions. His orientation toward the bedouin, as simultaneously necessary and problematic, would live on in the scholarship in stale analyses that weigh their respective "advantages" and "disadvantages." All of this has obscured the place of these pastoralists who were not perched on the sidelines of history, but were integral to broader economic and ecological systems.

As we have noted, there are some proximate parallels between the ways that the "monks" and the "bedouin" have been exteriorized from wider historical dynamics. It is noteworthy that the desert peripheries served as important loci of power for these two "groups," and each of them came under intense scrutiny on many fronts – from Western observers and actors, from agents within a centralizing state apparatus, from reformist Copts. When Hekekyan was stationed near the Eastern Desert monasteries on a mineralogical expedition, he noticed with evident disapproval that the "ignorant" monks lived "without surveillance of any description" – a

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<sup>40</sup> Sonnini de Manoncourt, *Travels*, 220.

criticism which corresponded precisely to those leveled against the bedouin.<sup>41</sup> Before long, a “reforming” patriarch (Kirulus IV) would set out to “organize” the monasteries along rational lines, and champion projects to civilize the monks. By the time of Patriarch Kirulus V (elevated in 1874) schools were established at the monasteries of the Eastern and Western Deserts, while the patriarch was assiduous in “encouraging the monks to study.”<sup>42</sup> A school would also be established at the monastery of al-Muharraq (located near al-Qusiya in the *Sa'id*). The local bishop noticed that the monks were so occupied with the cultivation of their farmlands that they had no time to cultivate their minds. He prohibited them from carrying out these traditional tasks, and hired a large number of workers and servants to tend to the “oppressive work” so that the monks would be free to worship and study.<sup>43</sup>

And if bedouin were on the ready to burst from their wild habitations, here too parallels with the monks are to be found. The monks of one monastery closer to the Nile at Gabal Tayr (also called the Monastery of the Chain) were known to swim out to the passing boats and solicit money. In the course of his description, Denon added that these monks would sometimes “practice piracy when it [could] be done to profit, and without danger.” He continued: “from long habit they seem to have acquired all the agility in the water, of amphibious animals, advancing against the full force of the stream like fishes.” Some years later, an English traveler passed the same monastery and noted three monks “running down the cliff like so many naked monkeys,” before plunging into the water and swimming toward his boat. Indeed, wild animals were now taken as appropriate metaphors for these undomesticated cenobites. In Denon’s telling, the disagreeable condition of the monks had a natural explanation – it was caused by their exposure to three of the four elements, and their severance from a fourth:

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<sup>41</sup> Journals 1844-1850, Hekekyan Papers, BL Add. Mss. 37,450, (March 29, 1844), 2:304.

<sup>42</sup> *HPEC* 3:3, 179.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Anba Ghrihoriyus, *al-Dayr al-Muharraq: tarikuh, wa wasfuh wa kull mushtamalatuh* (Cairo, 1968), 206.

An immense desert cuts them off from all cultivation, and the blast that has swept across it, loaded with disease, howls around their desolate retreat: they are burnt up by the rays of the vertical sun, unremittingly darted on their dry and barren rocks.<sup>44</sup>

Absence of surveillance, ignorance, piracy, disease. If the monks and bedouin were to enter history, it would be through a project of redemption emanating from the center(s). In the process, what order might have existed and what laws might have governed the disparate relationships on civilization's peripheries would be effaced as these "marginal" actors were recast as stock characters in a modern plot.

### **"Most of the Lands are Possessed by Independent Arabs"** <sup>45</sup>

In exploring the possibilities - and cognitive barriers - to the contemplation of "regional history," we have tried to emphasize the importance of peripheral/peripheralized zones in its pursuit. This shift to the "margins" brought attention to the deserts, which prompted consideration of Alexandrian monks as well as the generic, cumbersome and problematic category of the "bedouin." Now, we turn toward the "southern" peripheries, focusing on one particular grouping of "bedouin," the Hawara, and the involvement of Copts within a particular confederation that came to prominence in the eighteenth century Sa'id under the Hawara's aegis.

The Hawara were said to have arrived from North Africa in the fourteenth century, and one of their branches settled in the *Sa'id* in 1380. They were among the more powerful of the numerous tribes dispersed across the region, although their influence diminished somewhat

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<sup>44</sup> Denon, *Travels*, 2:265; Robert Richardson, *Travels Around the Mediterranean and Parts Adjacent in Company with the Earl of Belmore, during the years 1816-17-18* (London, 1822), 2:136. About 20 years later, another traveler recorded the monks' reputation for encircling boats and making their demands. Sometimes, he continued, "when [travelers] give them enough to excite their rapacity, they take the rest by force." Édouard de Montulé, *Voyage en Amérique, en Italie, en Sicile et en Égypte, pendant les années 1816, 1817, 1818 et 1819* (Paris, 1821), 2:290.

<sup>45</sup> Claude Savary, *Letters on Egypt* (London, 1787), 2:10. This came as part of Savary's observations of the *Sa'id*, particularly to the south of Girga.



during the early Ottoman period.<sup>46</sup> But this began to change in the late seventeenth century as a number of processes were set in motion that eventually gave rise to a powerful confederation during the next century. In the 1690s, notable figures among the Hawara, including one Shaykh Hamid Muhammad Humam, began to accumulate *iltizam* holdings which collectively comprised large swaths of territory along the Nile to the south of al-Minya. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, a sizable coalition had emerged that was perhaps without precedent in the *Sa'id*, both in terms of its reach and power.<sup>47</sup> During the four-decade ascendancy of Shaykh Hamid's grandson Shaykh Humam b. Yusuf al-Hawari (1730-69) the Hawara controlled regions between Asyut to the north and the Nubian town of Mahas in the south.<sup>48</sup>

If this sociopolitical arrangement was unique in the history of the *Sa'id*, it appears to have been an outgrowth of more pervasive trends which were apparent across the Ottoman Empire, as well as in the contemporary cases of the Solomonic and Funj kingdoms of *Bilad al-Habasha* and *Bilad al-Sudan*, respectively. The prevailing order, which linked political centers with their peripheries, broke down at approximately the same time in all three polities. In the Ottoman case, the provincial governors were gradually divested of most of their authority until they were little more than figureheads, while effective influence devolved to regional grandees such as the Mamluk *amirs*, or to Shaykh Humam of the Hawara confederation in the *Sa'id*. Meanwhile, the emperors at Gondar were increasingly beholden to competing regional grandees during a period

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<sup>46</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman, *al-rif al-Misri*, 153-54.

<sup>47</sup> Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 26. For a monograph on the *Sa'id* in the era of the Hawaran ascendancy, see Layla 'Abd al-Latif Ahmad, *al-Sa'id fi 'ahd Shaykh al-'Arab Humam* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriya al-'Aama lil-Kitab, 1987). See also Chapter Two ("The Republic of Upper Egypt: Under the Ottoman Empire, 1700s") in Abul-Magd, *Empire and its Discontents*, 65-105.

<sup>48</sup> Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 135. Burckhardt recorded that Shaykh Humam personally travelled as far as "Wady Mahas" (near the third cataract) several times during his long tenure.

known as the *Zemene Mesafint* (the "Era of the Princes"), while at Sennar, the power that had been wielded by the Funj sultans gradually devolved to “warlords” during the Hamaj regency.<sup>49</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, the Coptic historian Ya’qub Rufayla discussed the alliance between the Copts of the *Sa’id* and the Hawara during this general period. In his narration of the devastations wrought by the “corrupt” Mamluks during the early 1730s, the Hawara were especially exploited, while the *jizya* was becoming particularly onerous for the Copts.<sup>50</sup> This provided the impetus for the Copts to ally themselves with the Hawara and “enter into their protection.”<sup>51</sup> These details not only present the Copts as autonomous agents on the “political” topography of the period – which was dominated by alliance-building in what Hathaway calls “Household politics” – but also underscore the importance of Copts to the broad alliance that the Hawara assembled. This should not in itself be surprising, particularly given the fact that Akhmim, which according to Rufayla was a “majority Christian town,” also served as one of the centers of power for the Hawara. He claimed that it was during this period - the 1730s - in which the Copts and the Hawara began to refer to one another in the possessive.

However, this surely emerged from a reservoir of existing relationships that were accommodated to the new circumstances in which the Hawara confederation emerged as a dominant political formation. In its description of the local power struggles in and around Girga at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Damurdashi Chronicle provides a trace of these earlier relations. The writer explains that at the turn of the eighteenth century, a faction of the

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<sup>49</sup> For the case of the Funj Sultanate, see Jay Spaulding, *Heroic Age in Sennar* (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 2007). Also relevant to the regional transformations is R. S. O’Fahey, *The Darfur Sultanate: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). A standard overview of the political history of Ethiopia during the period is Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes: The Challenge of Islam and the Reunification of the Christian Empire, 1769-1855* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1968).

<sup>50</sup> Ya’qub Rufayla, *Kitab tarikh al-umma al-Qibtiya* (1898; reprint, Cairo: Matba’at Mitrubul, 2000), 261-3. The increase in the *jizya* was recorded in the ecclesiastical chronicle, which noted that a remittance was even expected from ordinarily exempted groups such as the poor and the clergy. *HPEC* 3.3, 166.

<sup>51</sup> Rufayla, *Kitab tarikh al-umma*, 263.

Hawara applied for a firman authorizing the execution of a particular Hawaran shaykh at Akhmim to avenge his treachery. The targeted Shaykh Hassan became aware of the plot and was able to seek refuge at *Misir* by virtue of the intelligence he received "through the Copts."<sup>52</sup> It would appear then that the Copts and the Hawara shared a common "political" field 30 years before shared grievances were said to have pushed them into an alliance.

Although such references "Copts" often occur only incidentally in the chronicles, this by no means suggests that they were merely ancillary characters to the social and political life. It is instead an effect of the priorities of a particular chronicle writer. Richard Pankhurst has noted a comparable phenomenon in the case of the Ethiopian Royal Chronicles. Muslim activities in the highlands were crucially important, both culturally and commercially, yet the Muslim settlements and market towns occasioned only fleeting reference. The chronicles were written by ecclesiastics who, in Pankhurst's words, "inevitably focused on the Christian towns and camps."<sup>53</sup> In narrative sources such as that of al-Damurdashi, the phenomenon exists in reverse. But significantly, when Coptic actors do surface to foil a plot against Shaykh Hassan, it is a casual and almost off-handed side-note, as though the reader will find nothing out of the ordinary about the involvement of Copts in the politics of intrigue.

By way of contrast, the "Copts" do appear elsewhere in this chronicle as a primary subject of narration. At some point between 1746 and 1748, Patriarch Murqus VII planned to travel to Jerusalem for *Sabt a-Nur* (Easter). After the initial arrangements were made, which included the Coptic notables approaching the bedouin to orchestrate the transit, the affair became quite elaborate. The wives of the notables wanted to accompany the patriarch on pilgrimage, and

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<sup>52</sup> Ahmad Katkhuda 'Azaban, *Al-Damurdashi's Chronicle of Egypt, 1688-1737*, ed. and trans. 'Abd al-Wahhab Bakr and Daniel Crecelius, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 128-29.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Pankhurst, "Muslim Commercial Towns, Villages and Markets of Christian Ethiopia Prior to the Rise of Tewodros," in *Collectanea Aethiopica*, eds. Siegbert Uhlig and Bairu Tafla (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1988), 110-11.

so additional camels were secured and outfitted with wood carriers and embellishments. Servants conducted the camels, with the patriarch and *al-Mu'allim* 'Abd al-Malak (the scribe for the imperial granary) in train. As the grand procession passed through several districts of *Misr*, the *'ulema* became angry about the spectacle and obtained a firman from the *qa'immaqam* to prevent the pilgrimage, and the chronicle writer concluded his remarks with the terse remark that this was "an ill-omened year for the Christian Copts."<sup>54</sup> The accusation leveled against the organizers was that their conduct was "*bida'a*" (an innovation.) However, when Abu Dhiqn discussed the conventions of the Lenten pilgrimage some 60 years earlier, the scene he described did not differ significantly from the one that al-Damurdashi sketched. To ensure their safety, Abu Dhiqn noted, the pilgrims would gather together in one place in the metropolis (*Misr*) and begin the journey in numbers that "sometimes exceed[ed] fifty thousand men."<sup>55</sup> E. P. Thompson has recognized a difficulty in recovering the deeply embedded aspects of culture that are seldom articulated, and suggested that the "untypical episode" can shed light on the unspoken norms of tranquil years by illuminating the habits that have been transgressed.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps what is most noteworthy in the events related in the al-Damurdashi chronicle - and the only reason for their inclusion in text at all - is some subtle, and barely discernible departure from established norms. During previous years, there may have been pomp and spectacle. But for whatever reason, al-Damurdashi called this an "ill-omened" year for the Copts, which is precisely why it has not been relegated to historical silence.

Thus, it is not unreasonable to suggest that ostensible insignificance in narrative sources can be misleading. The fragmentary evidence available to us suggests continuity between an

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 368-9.

<sup>55</sup> Abudacnus, *The History of the Cophts*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> E. P. Thompson, "History and Anthropology" in *Making History: Writings on History and Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 205.

earlier period and the Coptic involvement with the Hawara confederation during the latter's political apogee. In 1687, a traveler to Girga noticed approximately 200 residences belonging to Copts, some of which were "very comfortable," particularly those belonging to the grandees' scribes.<sup>57</sup> At the time, Girga was not only considered to be the "capital of the *Sa'id*," but it was also a stronghold for the Hawara. As lands of the *Sa'id* began to be transferred in *iltizam* during the seventeenth century, the Hawara were well situated.<sup>58</sup> De Maillet, the French Consul at *Misr* at the turn of the eighteenth century, noted that there "is not a single lord (*seigneur*)" in the expanse of the country "who does not have a Coptic scribe in his house, with a detailed register ... of all the lands which he possesses."<sup>59</sup> It is logical then that as Hawara accumulated *iltizams* for their vast land holdings, they had under their charge numerous Coptic scribes, in addition to the *mu'allimin* who were in control of such tasks as tax collection and the forwarding of revenues to Cairo. These *mu'allimin* often appeared at Cairo in Shaykh Humam's stead when new *iltizams* were ceded. One prominent figure in this regard was *Mu'allim* Bulus b. Manqariyus, whose name can be found on many of the *iltizam* documents for the Hawara's properties.<sup>60</sup>

Although the Hawara confederation was involved in the Mamluk/Ottoman politics of the day, Peter Gran has argued that the phenomenon of their confederation demonstrates that a "political culture existed in Upper Egypt" that was distinct from Lower Egypt.<sup>61</sup> The region was situated on the extremities of empire, and this can help to explain a certain degree of autonomy that it enjoyed. In a sense, it was a dual existence where, in Aharon's words, an "independent tribal framework" was preserved, and the cooperation with the authorities went only as far as

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<sup>57</sup> Serge Sauneron, *Villes et légendes d'Égypte* (Cairo: Institut Français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1983), 146.

<sup>58</sup> 'Abd al-Latif Ahmad, *al-Sa'id*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> de Maillet, *Description*, 2:64.

<sup>60</sup> 'Abd al-Latif Ahmad, *al-Sa'id*, 113, 129.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt 1760-1840* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), xxviii.

was necessary.<sup>62</sup> Thus, from the late seventeenth century, factions of the Hawara would sometimes withhold the tributes in cash and grains that were owed to *Misir*.<sup>63</sup> This kind of coexistence of dual structures was not unusual. To take just one comparable example, a historian of the Shendi region of *Bilad al-Sudan* noted that the Shendi "kingdom" was from one perspective a tribal chieftainship, while from another it was a northern, tribute-paying province of the Funj sultanate.<sup>64</sup> Politically, such a condition was frequently expressed in the oscillation between submission and rebellion, as is apparent in the case of the Hawara. As for the "Copts," they traveled in a world of such parallel structures. A simple, regionally-inflected analysis does not begin to approach the social and political scope of the Alexandrian communion. In a sense, we might say that it extended horizontally, to the extremities of the Ottoman Empire and beyond. But the extension was vertical as well, touching multiple overlapping temporal orders. And as we have seen, the vertical layers even rose above temporal, to a realm where embodied and disembodied actors could meet and interact.

The Hawaran ascendancy was part of a profound shift in the equilibrium that gave the *Sa'id* perhaps unprecedented political cohesion. Cezzar Pasha estimated that Shaykh Humam had 4,000 standing troops, and that he dispatched a score of governors annually to the areas under his charge.<sup>65</sup> In his necrology of the shaykh, al-Jabarti praised this leader whose array of virtues was "not found in a single man aside from him." Caravans and travelers passing through his territories were "given appropriate lodging and furnished with all they needed," and the shaykh's "beneficence and goodwill extended far and near." However, this state of affairs would change in

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<sup>62</sup> Aharaon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 25-6.

<sup>63</sup> 'Abd al-Latif Ahmad, *al-Sa'id*, 103.

<sup>64</sup> Anders Bjorkelo, *Prelude to the Mahdiyya: Peasants and Traders in the Shendi Region, 1821-1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4-5.

<sup>65</sup> Cezzar Ahmed Pasha, *Nizamname-i Misir, Ottoman Egypt in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Standford Shaw (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 44.

the second half of the century as *Misr* increased in power vis-à-vis the *Sa'id* and its "capital" of Girga.<sup>66</sup> The *Sa'id* was critical to 'Ali Bey al-Kabir's ambitions of conquest and control, and a series of skirmishes ensued between his followers and the Hawara. 'Ali Bey successfully sowed discord within the ranks of the Hawara, and was able to deal a serious defeat to Shaykh Humam in 1769 that ended his rule. The defeated leader fled to Esna and died in December of that year. In the words of al-Jabarti, with his end "the spirit of the Hawara chieftains was broken."<sup>67</sup>

We do not know how the profound blow that 'Ali Bey al-Kabir dealt the Hawara affected the large number of Copts who were in Shaykh Humam's employ. This corps of workers had served in his multiple bookkeeping offices, as well as in the familiar tasks of tax collection and accounting. Their relationship with the Hawaran ruler had evidently been quite close. Al-Jabarti noted that they worked "day and night," and that Shaykh Humam would "accompany them in an interior room for a portion of the night - sometimes until the early hours, reviewing the books, and dictating instructions and communications."<sup>68</sup> We do know, however, that 'Ali Bey's rise facilitated the ascendancy of two of most prominent Coptic *mu'allimin* of the century, Nayruz Rizq, who attained a position of power that until that time "no other Copt was known to have achieved," and Ibrahim al-Gawhari whose eventual influence surpassed even that of Nayruz Rizq.<sup>69</sup> This is an important reminder that however a "Coptic history" might be framed, the Coptic past was no less complex than the multiple "worlds" that they inhabited and navigated.

It is certainly possible that at least part of the cadre of Shaykh Humam's Coptic workers remained in service to the Hawara. The late 1760s has aptly been called the "beginning of the downfall of Upper Egypt," which expresses the *gradual* diminishment of the *Sa'id's* power rather

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<sup>66</sup> Gran, "Upper Egypt," 83.

<sup>67</sup> al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-Athar*, 1:344.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:343-44.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:300.

than an absolute rupture. The Hawaran power-base was not entirely destroyed, and Shaykh Humam's son succeeded him at Farshut. Other Hawaran chiefs maintained some influence as well, including Isma'il abu 'Ali who governed Qena and its environs.<sup>70</sup> Some of the prevailing dynamics during these later years can be gleaned from the unusual travel account of Eyles Irwin, a civil servant with the East India Company who in 1777 was detained in the *Sa'id* while en route to Cairo. That year, despite 'Ali Bey's invitation for East India agents to navigate north of Jidda, they declined the offer, fearing that expanded foreign access to the Red Sea might endanger the British monopoly in the India trade.<sup>71</sup> This is probably the reason for Irwin's disembarkation at the port of Qusayr, where he discovered a commerce that was almost entirely in the hands of the "Arabs." Several Copts were among the group of bedouin whom he encountered, although he was not initially aware of this because their "Arabian" dress made them indistinguishable from their companions. One of these Copts was of particular assistance to him, arranging his transport along the desert road that linked the port with the Nile entrepôt of Qena.<sup>72</sup> A long and trying ordeal began for Irwin almost as soon as he arrived at Qena, due to the unsettled state of the province. Isma'il Bey had recently supplanted Ibrahim Bey as the *shaykh al-balad* at *Misr* and the latter took flight to the upper country. Due to these political conditions, the river was temporarily impassable, and Irwin found himself stranded at Qena for an entire month. To make matters worse, his personal effects disappeared during his hapless stopover.<sup>73</sup>

His labors to navigate the arcane protocols of the country provide a window into existing political networks and relationships. For our purposes, the two most interesting elements in this

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society*, 103.

<sup>71</sup> Henry Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt: A Study of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 5.

<sup>72</sup> Eyles Irwin, *A Series of Adventures in the Course of a Voyage Up the Red Sea, the Coasts of Arabia and Egypt... in the Year 1777* (London, 1787), 122-24.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 243. Irwin learned that his poor treatment may have been due to a letter of recommendation that he carried for Ibrahim Bey, who by then had been ousted from power by his nemesis, Isma'il Bey.



social complex are the prominence of the above-mentioned Hawaran Shaykh Isma'il abu 'Ali, and the disparate roles played by the various "Copts" who are woven into his narrative. We are told that the city "abounded with [Coptic] merchants," while Coptic secretaries attended all persons of note. When eminent personalities appear in the text - the two successive *hakims* (governors) who presided over Qena, the *shaykh al-'Arab*, the traveling company of distinguished "Turks" - they invariably have Coptic auxiliaries at their side. As for the *shaykh al-'Arab*, he does not make an appearance until late in the narrative, yet he remains a looming figure even in absentia, as all parties must defer him. In order to recover the lost effects, Irwin required a letter from the shaykh, and several Coptic merchants assumed the responsibility of forwarding the request to him.<sup>74</sup> The *hakim* of the town later informed Irwin that his "master" (Isma'il abu 'Ali) had responded with the order that he take the molested traveler into his protection, and a private interrogation was also set in motion that involved the accused brigands, the *hakim* and a Coptic secretary.

At last, a shrill-voiced septuagenarian arrived in Qena, who proved to be none other than the "great sheikh of the Arabs." His arrival was a momentous affair, and many people came to greet him. His relationship with various sections of Copts is of particular note. Almost immediately after his arrival, he was met by a group of elite Coptic merchants who came from Dendera to salute him. Irwin found that Copts of "all ranks" sang the praises of this man who had been "their guardian for 40 years and upwards," and noted that all of the shaykh's primary domestics and secretaries were Copts who had the benefit of his "unlimited confidence." Even the jeweler who was called to estimate Irwin's losses was a Copt, and this technician was described as being too intimate with the shaykh "to be afraid of speaking the truth."<sup>75</sup> In Irwin's

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 190, 208, 233-34.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, 220, 264, 274-76.

case, the elderly shaykh had only to raise his voice and "a dozen Abyssinian slaves seized the culprit and hurried him out of the room."

These scenes reveal the not inconsiderable vestiges of Hawaran power. In fact, the very summer of Irwin's detention, Shaykh Isma'il was granted control over four additional districts of the *Sa'id* thanks to his amicable relationship with Isma'il Bey, the *shaykh al-balad* at the time.<sup>76</sup> But this state of affairs was not long to last. The duumvirate of Mamluk beys Ibrahim and Murad soon to rose to power, and Murad himself was responsible for the murder of Shaykh Isma'il in 1779, whose territories were subsequently divided among several *kashefs*.<sup>77</sup> The regional dominance of the eighteenth century was in eclipse, and the final blow to the independent tribal structure would follow early in the next century.

### **Constructed Parochialism?**

The present chapter began with a discussion of the desert as an "intermediate" or "peripheral" region, a punishing natural "barrier" that has been so difficult for imaginations to traverse. This in turn invited attention to the episodic and permanent dwellers of the intolerable habitat. We focused on monks and bedouin, two categories that are closely associated with the desert yet are seldom considered together, beyond some variation on the theme of the bedouin menace. We then turned our gaze southward, exploring evidences of the involvement of Copts within the Hawara confederation, which revealed another facet of the polyvalent social and political order within which Copts were embedded. Now, we focus on a number of localities of *Bilad Misr*, the *Sa'id* and along the Red Sea that gesture "outward" while considering how prevailing orientations and neglects have contributed to the construction of the "parochial Copt."

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 256, 265-66.

<sup>77</sup> Winter, *Egyptian Society*, 103.

When Consul de Maillet received an order from the king to send three Coptic children for education in France in 1699, he called on Catholic missionaries to serve as intermediaries with the population. Despite their considerable efforts, they were unable to convince a single family to volunteer a child for the voyage. In fact, the majority of fathers and mothers were said to be "living in fear" that their children would be carried off against their wishes. For De Maillet, this anecdote suggested a pervasive disposition among the countrymen toward their homeland. As he described it, "they have so little curiosity for foreign countries and are so attached to their own, that it is not possible to draw them out."<sup>78</sup> Any number of reasons could be suggested for why parents might not be eager to dump their children into the hands of strangers and into strange lands. De Maillet's conclusion is what interests us, for variations of the theme would become standard fare regarding the parochial character of the Copts. It is also an early expression of what would later become a common propensity to use the intercourse with agents of Europe as a barometer to measure the attainment of such vague virtues as liberality and cosmopolitanism.

To generalize most broadly, the Greeks, Syrian Catholics and to some extent Armenians were more heavily involved in "international" pursuits in the "north," which included but was not limited to trade. For the Copts, it was a different story. Looking mainly to the field of commerce, Walz has observed that the southern regions were by far the most favorable to "Egyptian" traders - both Copt and Muslim.<sup>79</sup> It is interesting to note that the points of departure and arrival along the desert routes of the *Sa'id* tended to include conspicuously sizeable or prominent populations of Copts. For instance, in his description of the town of Bayad, 'Ali Mubarak not only commented on its large Christian majority, but noted that this was the place where "the Hawara

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<sup>78</sup> de Maillet, *Description*, 2:134-35.

<sup>79</sup> Walz, *Trade*, 116.

used to travel east, for it was 12 hours from the Red Sea."<sup>80</sup> A similar state of affairs was apparent at the towns Qus and Qena, both located along the sharp eastward bend of the Nile. Qus is a locale of profound historical importance, having been the "capital" of the *Sa'id* with a link to the port of Aydhab during the Mamluk period and until it was eclipsed by Girga. Many pilgrims would travel to Qus, and from there to Aydhab and Mecca.<sup>81</sup> It was also an important center for caravans arriving from Arabia and al-Sudan, and merchants from Arabia, India and *al-Habash* were commonly found in its markets.<sup>82</sup> At the time of the French expedition, Denon described the striking spectacle of the town, with its immense gardens and melon plantations that serviced "thirsty travellers" arriving there after the journey across the desert from Qusayr. He noticed that here too the Copts were still the "most numerous inhabitants."<sup>83</sup>

As for Qena, some of its most prominent merchants, secretaries and other personalities were Copts, and in the time of Shaykh Humam, many of the village deputies who collected and stored the grains were Coptic bookkeepers.<sup>84</sup> And Asyut, which eventually supplanted Girga as the *Sa'id*'s "capital," was the most important terminus of the trade from Darfur that followed the *Darb al-'Arba'in*. ("Forty Days' Road.) This town contained a large minority of Copts, some of whom were intimately involved in the Darfur trade. When Browne traveled in a 500-camel caravan from Darfur to the *Sa'id* in the 1790s, he found that "five or six Coptic Christians" were

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<sup>80</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat*, 10:31.

<sup>81</sup> 'Abd al-Latif Ahmad, *al-Sa'id*, 62. The historical involvement of Coptic Christians in the Red Sea trade was significant enough that at least during the twelfth century the medieval port of 'Aydhab was the seat of a bishopric; see Muysier, "Listes épiscopales," 137.

<sup>82</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat*, 12:128. Later, after Mehmet 'Ali's conquest of *Bilad al-Sudan*, many of the Copts who settled there originated in Qus. Nabih Kamel, *Tarikh lil Masihiya wa al-Rahbana wa Atharhuma fi Abrushiyati Naqada wa Qus wa Esna wa al-Luqsur wa al-Armant* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Qidis Murqus l-darasat al-Tarikh al-Qibti, 2008), 219.

<sup>83</sup> Denon, *Travels*, 1:113.

<sup>84</sup> Abul-Magd, "Empire and Its Discontents," 61. The historiography of the *Sa'id* remains relatively underdeveloped, but there have been some departures in recent years to fill this gap, including Abul-Magd's study of the Qena region.

among the traders returning from Kobbei, the primary trading center of Darfur.<sup>85</sup> Burckhardt observed the same thing in 1813, noting that "many Christian merchants are at present in [the Kingdom of Darfur] and travel backwards and forwards from there to Siout (Asyut)."<sup>86</sup> And in fact one Asyuti Copt, *al-Mu'allim* Shenuda, later attained such prominence in the Darfur trade that he could be called the "greatest merchant trading with al-Sudan."<sup>87</sup>

The general historiographical neglect of "southern" fields of commercial and cultural exchange, together with the figments of foreboding desert barriers has arguably contributed to the impression of the "parochial" Copt. The towns we have mentioned represent locales that "gestures outward" - and in so doing, they act collectively as a frame of orientation for destabilizing tropes of provinciality. In fact, they can even point toward a history of economic and cultural cosmopolitanism within which followers of Alexandrian Orthodoxy were entwined.

<sup>88</sup> Qena is a good example in this regard. It was an important commercial center along the Indian Ocean and African circuits of trade, and it maintained several very large and crowded markets.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> William George Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt and Syria, 1792 to 1798* (London, 1799), 249.

<sup>86</sup> Burckhardt to Renour, (July 6, 1813), BL Add. Mss. 27,620, f. 25

<sup>87</sup> 'Uthman Fayd-Allah, *Tarikh Madinat Asyut* (Asyut: Matba'at al-Jihad, 1940), 185. It is interesting here to add that "General Ya'qub," the head of the Coptic Legion during the French occupation, once had important scribal duties at the Asyut customhouse. Here, he inspected and assessed taxes on the merchandise in the Darfur trade, and he likely also invested in this trade himself. Thus, even the ascendancy of this prominent figure in Egypt's so-called "national awakening" had a "transregional" component. See Louca, "General Ya'qub," 7:2350-51.

<sup>88</sup> Perhaps this cosmopolitanism has been overlooked due to the virtual absence of Europeans and European products along these trade circuits. This was observed in the 1790s by W.G. Browne, an adventurer mainly noted for his travels to Darfur. Describing the goods that were transported through Qusayr and across the *Sa'id*, he noted that articles of Europe "are rarely seen." Browne, 126. However, this situation would not last long into the nineteenth century. This historical turn was augured in Irwin's off-handed observation that the India Company might achieve a commercial treaty "with the princes of Upper Egypt, as with the bey at Cairo if [they] do not consider this trade as prejudicial to their interest." Irwin, *A Series*, 141.

<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the town's Red Sea port of Qusayr in the later eighteenth century experienced a boom as English traders attempted to circumvent Suez, which was closed to Europeans. Daniel Crecelius, "The Importance of Qusayr in Late Eighteenth Century Egypt," in *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 24 (1987): 53-54. Crecelius' article provides a brief examination of Qusayr in context of the regional and international politics of the period. Fred Lawson's work is also helpful in this regard. He has demonstrated the effect that the neglect of the *Sa'id* has had on the scholarship. For example, in reference to Andre Raymond's claim that the trade in coffee declined towards the end of the eighteenth century, Lawson notes that this claim derived from the sources that he used. Raymond only considered the port of Suez, and not Qusayr and other points of the *Sa'id* where shipments in fact increased. See

Within this lively transit town a diversity of traders - Indian, Turkish, Abyssinian, Maghrebi and others - regularly crossed paths.<sup>90</sup>

Qena was also an important node along one of the Muslim pilgrimage routes, maintaining a large Nile port that was capable of servicing prodigious numbers of pilgrims who usually spent several days in the town before setting out for Qusayr.<sup>91</sup> There has been some attention in the scholarship to the syncretism of Coptic and Muslim religious practices and conventions, including the similarities that the Coptic Jerusalem pilgrimage bore to the Islamic Hajj.<sup>92</sup> But the very large Coptic presence at Qena hints at the "inter-confessional" intersections which could occur in the course of distinctive pilgrimages. During the early nineteenth century, William Jowett of the Church Missionary Society toured the country selling small volumes of Christian scripture. Bulus, one of the town's *mu'allimin*, purchased several copies, explaining that in view of Qena's location on the pilgrimage route, Copts should be well informed about their sacred texts.<sup>93</sup> The implication is that they had occasion for disputation, or at least for an exchange of ideas, and in this sense they were part of the intellectual and cultural life of the Islamic pilgrimage.

But "Coptic" involvement in the Hajj was not limited to this kind of informal transaction. If Muslim "Turks" and "bedouin" could be enlisted in the service of ecclesiastical rituals such as the forcible seizure of monks chosen for the episcopate, it should come as no surprise that

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"Rural Revolt and Provincial Society in Egypt, 1820-1824" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 1981): 134-35.

<sup>90</sup> According to local estimates provided during the second decade of the nineteenth century, there were between five and six hundred Coptic households. The same source claimed that the figures had previously been closer to 2000 families, but were reduced significantly due to disease. See Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*, 153. 'Ali Mubarak provided accounts of the transit of peoples and goods through the town in *al-Khitat*, 12:121-25 and Platt, *Journal*, 1:135.

<sup>91</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat*, 12:121-25. He noted the profound number of Copts at Qena, many of whom were merchants, particularly in the commerce of jewelry and gold.

<sup>92</sup> For instance, one scholar has likened the role that lay elites played in organizing the Coptic pilgrimage to that of the *amir al-hajj*. See Armanios, *Coptic Christians*, 102.

<sup>93</sup> Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*, 153.

Christians could be of some positive service to the various procedures and conventions of the Islamic Hajj as well. This is perhaps no better illustrated than in the fabrication of the *kiswa*, the ornamental covering for the *Ka'aba* at Mecca that the provincial government of *Bilad Misr* was responsible for furnishing during the pilgrimage season. A traveler in the middle part of the eighteenth century discovered that the *kiswa* that had recently accompanied the caravan was made in the Cairo Citadel by "Coptites" who possessed a "certain number of rooms" therein.<sup>94</sup> 'Ali Mubarak made reference to another of these *kiswas* which Copts had produced at the town of Busayr, and although he did not provide a date for its manufacture, it was likely during a much later period.<sup>95</sup> Such duties were not necessarily limited to the simple fabrication of the covering, as is revealed in the career of Ghubriyal Shenuda, the eminent Asyuti Copt to whom we have already alluded. His relationship with the Sultan of Darfur was so close that he became the latter's deputy, and among his responsibilities was the annual preparation of a *mahmal* and *kiswa* that the sultan would send to Mecca by this time.<sup>96</sup>

All of this evokes a world of relationships within which Copts were embedded, and that linked them, directly and indirectly, with localities outside the confines of the Nile Valley. Here, the Hejazi town of Jedda is a compelling case. In the late eighteenth century, it was extremely important commercially, with almost half of the *Bilad Misr's* imports passing through its port.<sup>97</sup> But it was also a critical point along an Islamic sacred geography, servicing the heavy traffic of pilgrims and travelers on their way to Mecca and Medina. It is one of the most deeply anchored

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<sup>94</sup> Frederick Hasselquist, *Voyages and Travels in the Levant; in the Years 1749, 50, 51, 52*, trans. Charles Linnaeus (London, 1766), 81. This task would have been carried out in one of the two workshops within the compound at that time; Raymond, *Artisans*, 1:221. The mint was the other workshop – where incidentally Copts constituted nearly half of the staff. Shaw provides some details on the sources of revenue for the *kiswa*, although his information comes from the turn of the seventeenth century. At that time, *muqata'at* (urban tax farms) were alienated in *waqf* for this purpose. See Shaw, *Financial*, 177.

<sup>95</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat*, 10:49.

<sup>96</sup> This detail is recounted in al-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisa* (1975), 4:151.

<sup>97</sup> Raymond, *Artisans*, 1:149. *Bilad Misr's* export through Jedda was somewhat more modest, constituting approximately 25% of the total figure during the same period.

canards that the hallowed lands of the Hejaz were forbidding territories for non-Muslims. In 1752, a Catholic missionary explained that permanent residency at Jedda "is granted to no Christian, Jew or idolater because the land is sacred to Mahometans."<sup>98</sup> The Red Sea was indeed heavily guarded against Europeans, and many Western sources projected specifically European experiences too broadly. A claim was sometimes made about the interdiction on "Christian" commerce to the north of Jedda, without drawing a distinction between foreign and native Christians, the latter of whom shared with their Muslim counterparts this same guardedness against foreign encroachment of various kinds. When the missionary quoted above arrived at Suez from *al-Habash* and discovered that some merchants "were beginning to murmur" against him and his companions, all of the vexed merchants were Copts. The missionary and his companions were anxious to depart, fearing that they would be seized and taken before the Coptic patriarch.<sup>99</sup> Seven decades later, the same dynamic was observed by an English consul at *Misir* who complained about an "association of Turks, Armenians and Copts" which had "sworn the destruction of European commerce in Egypt."<sup>100</sup>

We can also suggest that whatever normative strictures existed did not always correspond with realities on the ground. At Jedda, three gates opened out to separate trade routes, one of which led to Mecca and Medina and was ostensibly reserved for Muslims. In 1696, a traveler learned that "no Christian must pass thro' it without forfeiture of his religion." But then he added, "except he be a man of wealth," in which case "his soul is not so valuable as his money."<sup>101</sup> At the time in which Niebuhr was undertaking his travels, he was aided at Jedda by none other than

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<sup>98</sup> Prutky, *Travels*, 24.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-6, 310. The Turkish authorities ultimately came to the missionaries' assistance at Suez. Indeed, the missionaries had already been expelled from *Bilad al-Habasha* due in part to a letter that this same patriarch sent to the emperor, threatening him with excommunication if he failed to drive out these Franks.

<sup>100</sup> Driault, *La Formation*, 47-8. These sentiments were offered by Consul Henry Salt, and quoted in the course of a French consular report from Roussel to Duc de Richelieu (February 24, 1817.)

<sup>101</sup> John Ovington, *Voyage to Suratt in the year 1689* (London, 1696), 471-72.



the Greek Orthodox goldsmith for the *sharif* of Mecca who was held in great esteem by all of the principals of the city.<sup>102</sup> And at the beginning of the nineteenth century, George Viscount Valentia found that while Christians were not allowed to pass through the Mecca gate, both Banyans and Jews were permitted.<sup>103</sup> Then again, during the Arabian campaign of Tusun Pasha, Burckhardt could speak of Greek Christians in the employ of the army "encamping within gunshot of Medina."<sup>104</sup> These variable deviations from one of the most apparently inviolable conventions underscore the unpredictable nature of our geographic hinterlands, even as they remind us that scholars can sometimes be among the most zealous border guards and executors of the rules.

Taken together, these transit routes are part of a story of connectivity, linking the lands of *al-Habasha*, *Misr*, the *Sa'id*, *al-Sudan* and elsewhere. Attention to key nexus points can assist us in conceptualizing an "Alexandrian geography" as well as in appreciating its unique dimensions and apertures. But as we have tried to emphasize, such a geography cannot be approached in isolation. Even the simple activity of Coptic traders moving back and forth between Kobbei and Asyut was only possible because of complex sets of relationships that followed their own peculiar "geographies." Indeed, a branch of the Hawara itself had a role in the founding the great commercial center in Darfur, and it was not unknown that Muslim traders from the *Sa'id* would marry natives of Darfur and become "naturalized subjects of the sultan," as Browne discovered

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<sup>102</sup> M. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia, and Other Countries in the East Performed by M. Niebuhr*, trans. Robert Heron (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), 1:228. At the time of Niebuhr's visit, this Orthodox jeweler owned a home at Jedda.

<sup>103</sup> George Viscount Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, The Red Sea, and Egypt in the Years 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806* (London, 1811), 340.

<sup>104</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia, Comprehending an Account of Those Territories in Hedjaz which the Mohammedans Regard as Sacred* (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), 2:221.

in his travels.<sup>105</sup> In what follows, we "cut across" literal and metaphorical deserts as we "travel" south to regions of *al-Sudan*, and then to lands of *al-Habasha* and points along the Red Sea.

### **Beyond the Deserts, Part One**

As we have seen, specialized skills could enable the insinuation of Copts into sensitive administrative, accounting and other positions in the polyvalent order of *Bilad Misr*. Just as certain bedouin tribes were necessary for navigating the punishing terrains that "extended out" in all directions, Copts too, because of their own specialized skills, were sometimes necessary for enterprises which "crossed the deserts." For instance, many illiterate, large-scale traders were able to run expansive ventures by virtue of the scribes in their service.<sup>106</sup> And although the issue of long-distance Coptic traders has scarcely been studied in any depth, there is evidence that their peculiar skills gave them some advantage. When Cailliaud made his voyage to the *Sa'id* and Sennar in the company of Mehmet 'Ali's expedition to *al-Sudan*, he noticed the prominence of Coptic traders in the country, and he credited this to their aptitude for "the basics of arithmetic" which gave them "all of their influence."<sup>107</sup> Likewise, the specialized administrative skills that some Copts attained were not only applied in *Bilad Misr*. In fact, al-Maqrizi recorded that Fakhr al-Dawla, a Coptic émigré from Mamluk *Bilad Misr*, had been responsible for introducing an "Egyptian"-style tax and fiscal system to the Solomonic Kingdom of *al-Habash* during the fifteenth century.<sup>108</sup> And even after the virtual disappearance of Nubian Christianity in the

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<sup>105</sup> Browne, *Travels*, 241. On the founding of Kobbei, see O'Fahey, *Darfur Sultanate*, 252.

<sup>106</sup> Hanna, *In Praise*, 63. Hanna refers to this while discussing the link between literacy and trade. She argues that literacy was more important for owners of modest business ventures because they would be less equipped to hire assistants.

<sup>107</sup> Ceresole, "Extrait des observations du Citoyen Ceresole médecin ordinaire de l'armée, dans un voyage, sur la rive occidentale du Nil, du Caire à Siout," *Mémoires sur l'Égypte publiés pendant les campagnes du Général Bonaparte dans les années VI et VII* (Paris, 1799), 149.

<sup>108</sup> See Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Maqrizi, *Kitab al-Ilmam bi-Akhbar man bi-Ard al-Habasha min Muluk al-Islam* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Ta'lif, 1895), 4-5.

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was scarcely a time during which Copts were not present as traders, or as scribes and secretaries in the royal courts.<sup>109</sup>

Until further research is completed, we are heavily reliant on what may be gleaned from narrative sources. One valuable account is that of Theodoro Krump, a German Franciscan priest who made his way to Sennar at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Even after Emperor Fasiladas' expulsion of the Jesuits from the Ethiopian lands in the seventeenth century, the kingdom remained an object of interest for Catholic missionaries. In 1671, the Holy See established its mission of "Upper Egypt-Fungi-Ethiopia," and over the years a number of attempts were made to enter the kingdom by way of Sennar.<sup>110</sup> We encountered one example of this in the first chapter when du Roule, the French ambassador, was murdered at Sennar while he was engaged in an embassy to *al-Habash*. Only a few years prior to this episode, Krump himself participated in a similar undertaking, disembarking from Asyut in 1700 in company with a number of Franciscans, including one Father Carlo da Cilento of the Akhmim mission. He described the vast diversity of peoples to be found in Sennar:

caravans are continually arriving from Cairo, Dongola, Nubia, from across the Red Sea, from India, Ethiopia, [Dar] Fur, Borno, the Fezzan, and other kingdoms, and men of any nationality or faith may live ... without a single hindrance.<sup>111</sup>

Although a number of the Franciscans – and Jesuits who later joined the journey – eventually made their way into the lands of *al-Habasha*, Krump was constrained to remain behind in Sennar, serving as a court physician. Soon thereafter, one of his companions succumbed to an

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<sup>109</sup> Giovanni Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Bologna: EMI Publishers, 1981), 233. At the time of the French Expedition, Jollois and Devilliers studied Esna and its environs and estimated that there were 300 Coptic families in the town. They noted the brisk trade that was carried on with *al-Sudan*, and emphasized the singular contribution that these Copts made to the field of commerce; Jollois and Devilliers, "Description d'Esné et de ses environs" in *Description de l'Égypte, Antiquités*, ed. Edme- François Jomard (Paris: Imprimerie imperial, 1806), 1:2.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>111</sup> Theodoro Krump, *Account from Sinnar Between 1700-1702*, trans. and ed. Jay Spaulding. Spaulding has translated large portions of Krump's original *Hohen Und Fruchtbare Palm-Baum Des Heiligen Evangelij* (Augsburg: 1710), which are available at <http://www.kean.edu/~jspauldi/krump2one.html>, accessed 2011. The present citation can be found under the heading "Description of What Befell the Missionaries in Sinnar."

illness, and he was left to deal with funerary arrangements in this unfamiliar environment. He made his way to the marketplace to purchase a burial cloth for the deceased Jesuit, and there he approached a Coptic Christian who was able to assist him in acquiring and preparing a gravesite where “Egyptian Christians ... usually bury their dead.” He then invited the resident Christians to participate in the funeral, all 15 of whom were Copts.

While the identities of these Copts are not given, they were clearly at home within the brimming cosmopolitanism of Sennar. If the Coptic Synaxarium would remember the aftermath of Mehmet Ali’s 1820 Sudan expedition as the period in which “al-Nuba and Sudan returned to the Chair of Alexandria after a separation of five hundred years,” the legacy of connectedness was by no means discontinued during the centuries of so-called “separation.”<sup>112</sup> Sennar itself was a mere 90 miles from Gondar, and the impression of a forbidding distance between Christian “Egypt” and the archdiocese of “Ethiopia” is arguably not unrelated to the virtual disappearance of “al-Nuba” from a formal “Alexandrian landscape.” Medieval sources provide a picture of a geographic fabric which “naturally” linked the regions we are discussing, including the ecclesiastical chronicles in which actors and events from the lands of “*al-Habasha*” and “*al-Nuba*,” *al-Sa'id*, *Misr*, *al-Bahri* and elsewhere appear and reappear (in typical chronicle style).<sup>113</sup>

Richard Adams has noted that twelfth and thirteenth century sources, including those of Abu Salih “the Armenian,” Ibn Selim and others, have left us a “picture of prosperous and well order kingdoms, living generally on good terms with one another and with their Moslem neighbors.” And then, he adds, a silence descended, and when the Arabic sources spoke again nearly a century later, the southernmost Christian kingdom of Alwa was out of sight, while the northern kingdom of Makouria was on the verge of collapse. This was a prelude to the ultimate

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<sup>112</sup> *Coptic Synaxarium*, (Baramhat, 28), 282.

<sup>113</sup> See for example *HPEC* 2:3, 203-205, 211.

narrative silence that fell over these regions after the Ottoman conquest of *Bilad Misr* in the early sixteenth century.<sup>114</sup> But this did not mean that communications and interdependencies, including between the Solomonic kingdom of Abyssinia and its Western neighbor(s), was terminated; it was in fact quite strong, particularly after the mid-seventeenth century founding of the fixed capital of Gondar (as opposed to royal encampments) with its proximity to the newly established Funj capital at Sennar.

Only a year before Krump's arrival in Sennar, French pharmacist Charles Poncet made a stop in Sennar on his way to *al-Habash* to provide medical care for Emperor Iyasu I (1682-1706). In his account of the journey, he described the vigorous trade that passed through Sennar and *al-Habash*, involving civet, gold, spices, paper, brass wire, pearls and other commodities that were carried eastward across the Red Sea and northward into the lower regions of *Misr* and beyond. Poncet spent three months at the royal court of Sultan Badi' III before he joined the caravan to Gondar.<sup>115</sup> This caravan included none other than the brother of the *abun* of *al-Habash* who was travelling from *Bilad Misr*, and who claimed to have made the same journey two times previously.<sup>116</sup> Poncet lauded the generosity of Badi' III for enabling a felicitous journey. The sultan ensured secure conveyance to the borders of *Bilad al-Habasha*, at which point the travelers made their way to the transit town of Serka before continuing on to Gondar.<sup>117</sup> Taken together, the incidental journey of the *abun*'s brother and Krump's description of a population of Copts at Sennar are vaguely suggestive of the "lost" histories of contact to which we have alluded.

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<sup>114</sup> Adams, *Nubia*, 70.

<sup>115</sup> Charles Poncet, *A Voyage to Aethiopia Made in the Years 1698, 1699, and 1700 Describing Particularly that Famous Empire; as Also the Kingdoms of Dongola, Sennar, Part of Egypt, &c. With the Natural History of those Parts* (London, 1706), 27-28; 81-82.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. Serka (Serki) had been a tributary of the Funj Sultanate of Sennar until 1616 when Emperor Susenyos invaded it, set it ablaze and conducted its women and children into captivity. Pankhurst, *Ethiopian Borderlands*, 369.

A shift in vantage can throw light – or flickering glimpses – across a geographical canvas on which the archdiocese of “*al-Habash*” was not a distant ecclesiastical side-show, but a "natural" extension of a wider Alexandrian Orthodox geography. The importance of the intermediate zone – the border regions – between the two kingdoms might be further conjectured from a series of events within the Abyssinian Kingdom that led to the assignment of a bishop to the town of Serka. The Christological disputes - which were a direct outgrowth of the Jesuit interlude - raged during these decades, and succeeding *abuns* were customarily obliged to declare for one or another school of theology.<sup>118</sup> After arriving at Gondar by way of Sennar, *Abuna* Shenuda (1671-1699) called a number of councils to deal with doctrinal and other disputes, and he eventually declared for the “Unctionist” position held by Emperor Yohannes I.<sup>119</sup> However, Yohannes’ successor Iyasu I was a supporter of another position (known as "Unionist") and at his accession to the throne he requested a new metropolitan from *Bilad Misr*. When this prelate, Bishop Murqus, reached Gondar in 1689 (also by way of Sennar), it appears that *Abuna* Shenuda's relationship with the emperor had improved and Murqus was initially sent to Serka where he was in residence for a number of years. Thus, during an atypical period in which two bishops were in the kingdom, a border town was considered to be an appropriate location for the second bishop.<sup>120</sup> Incidentally, it was this Bishop Murqus whose brother had arrived in Poncet's company, and there is evidence that the bishop's parents were with him too.

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<sup>118</sup> The role of Catholic polemics in these Christological disputes is masterfully illuminated by Merid Wolde Aregay in "The Legacy of Jesuit Missionary Activities in Ethiopia from 1555 to 1632," *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*, eds. Getatchew Haile, Aasulv Lande and Samuel Rubenson (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 31-56. The competing positions grew out of efforts on the part of native religious to seek compromise positions between the Christology of Catholic polemicists and the traditions of the Alexandrian Church.

<sup>119</sup> Details for this council and the respective roles that emperor, *abun* and *echage* played may be found in the royal chronicles. See Igantius Guidi, ed. *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, *Scriptores Aethiopic* (Parisii: Otto Harrassowitz, 1903), 5:61-62.

<sup>120</sup> French Consul de Malliet provided a brief account of this affair from the perspective of Cairo. See de Maillet, *Description*, 1:325. This testimony would seem to suggest that the patriarch wanted the ruler to return the now redundant ecclesiastic to *Misr*. If so, he was unsuccessful in this object.

Such a condition, in which the family of the “Egyptian” prelate would willingly join him in his “exile,” stands in stark contrast to claims about the loathsomeness of the assignment and the estrangements that it entailed.

Another narrative distance exists with respect to the episcopal "exile," and this is the one separating the "Egyptian" prelates from the milieu into which they were surrendered. From an Ethiopian nationalist perspective, the problems connected with the *abun's* "Egyptian" identity were quite extensive.<sup>121</sup> Linguistic and other barriers, it has been said, were so stark that the Ethiopians had to suffer a metropolitan who was only superficially involved in the life of his surroundings. Ethiopia, according to one modern Ethiopian Orthodox publication, had suffered from a “bizarre situation” in which “an expatriate primate ... wielded supreme ecclesiastical power in an alien country with whose language, culture, and psychology he rarely became acquainted.”<sup>122</sup> In another dismal assessment of the arrangement, Ayele Teklehaymanot provided a litany of complications:

The presence of the Egyptian Coptic metropolitan on the chair of the ... Ethiopian Church was mostly one of dignity with very little or no positive influence in the organization of its life and activity. The Egyptian metropolitans, not having a good knowledge of the local language and completely ignorant of the mentality of the people, could not carry out any constructive catechesis or pastoral program adapted to the different local situations. I would even say that the Egyptian abunas, by playing the ambiguous role of spiritual leaders of the Ethiopian people and of faithful citizens on the one hand, and by allying themselves to the sultans of their country on the other ... helped much more the interests of Islam than the organization and strengthening of the Christian faith.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> In remarks published on the eve of autocephaly in the 1950s, the Greek Orthodox archbishop of Axum echoed one prevailing sentiment, noting that while it was unclear "how much Ethiopia had gained or lost from its association through the Abunas with the Church of Alexandria," it was clear that "except at rare intervals that church had little to give to her daughter!" Nicolas, *Church's Revival*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> Aymro Wondmagegnehu and Joachim Motovu, eds., *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Orthodox Mission, 1970), 10-11.

<sup>123</sup> Ayele Taklahaymanot, "The Egyptian Metropolitan of the Ethiopian Church," in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 54 (1988), 184.

Such portrayals have a long pedigree. In 1751 Remedius Prutky, a Franciscan of the *Sa'id* mission, visited *al-Habash* and he had this to say:

The Coptic [*abun*], an ignorant man, takes no thought for the souls in his charge and neglects his duty ... he teaches no doctrine because he cannot speak the Ethiopian language; he never appears in public; performs no priestly function, and behind the walls of his own houses he passes his time eating and drinking.<sup>124</sup>

Interested parties – whether foreigners or particular factions within *Bilad al-Habasha* – seeking to denigrate a particular *abun* were often responsible for such appraisals, and it has not been uncommon for the substance of their polemics to pass uncritically into the scholarship.<sup>125</sup> In the case of Prutky, he was hardly an impartial observer. He only undertook the mission to *al-Habash* after he encountered an uprising of Coptic clerics against him and his confreres at the *Sa'id* mission. On his arrival in this new mission territory, the emperor was apparently generous toward the Franciscans, and the missionary thought that some people “seemed interested in embracing the Catholic faith.” However, prospects dimmed in the face of “the devil’s special instrument, the heretical Coptic archbishop” who conspired against the missionaries.

The narrative sources sometimes provide direct and indirect evidence that calls into question the claims of episcopal ignorance and isolation. While Poncet was at Gondar, *Abuna* Shenuda passed away, and the visitor provided the following commentary:

This present patriarch’s predecessor, who had been governour to the emperour, dy’d at the time I was in Gondar ... the prince [Emperor Iyasu] full of gratitude for the good education he had given him, had always conserv’d a particular affection for him. He fell sick at Tenket, a country-house belonging to him. The emperor order’d me to go to him, and begg’d of me, to preserve the life of a man, for whom he had an affection.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Prutky, *Travels*, 229, 237-38.

<sup>125</sup> In his study of the Jesuit period, Leonardo Cohen found widely divergent accounts of Sama'an, the *abun* who helped to lead - and who eventually died in - a rebellion against Susenyos. In the hagiography of Walatta Petros, an Orthodox saint and contemporary to these events, the *abun* was a righteous figure while in the emperor's chronicle, he was lustful, cruel and corrupt. Politically motivated charges against *abuns* were not uncommon, and such claims should be read with discretion; see *The Missionary Strategies of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1555-1632)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz & Co., 2009), 55-7.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.



The endearment of the Emperor towards the former metropolitan does not exactly square with the trope of alien *abun* and titular figure who fulfills little more than formal tasks such as ordaining priests and crowning emperors.

Meanwhile, the passing reference to the education that Iyasu had received from Shenuda – who had been *abun* during his childhood - reveals something more. This teacher-student relationship would not have been possible without the existence of mechanisms for overcoming linguistic and other barriers that are so imposing in retrospect. This is further substantiated in the testimony of Hassan b. Ahmad al-Khaymi, who arrived in the lands of *al-Habasha* as part of a Yemeni embassy less than two decades after the expulsion of the Jesuits. When Al-Khaymi initially heard about the reigning *abun* (*Abuna* Murqus – c. 1635-72) he was described as “among the most outstanding of the priests and religious men.” Murqus ingratiated himself with the various social strata until “the persons of rank (*akabir*),” as al-Khaymi related it, “had been favorably disposed to him and the subjects and soldiers relied on him.” As the *abun*'s wealth and influence grew, he was said to have “become haughty,” which stirred the wrath of an envious emperor who imprisoned him on contrived charges and sent to *Misr* for his replacement.

Later in his mission, when al-Khaymi was able to venture outside of Gondar, he stopped at one of the adjacent parks that had been frequented by the deposed *abun*. In this verdant setting, he discovered not only books written in the Arabic language, but also “a group of students of the *abun*” who spoke with the visitor at great length. He was eventually introduced to their “superior” who spoke with him “without the assistance of an interpreter” because of the Arabic education he had received from that *abun*.<sup>127</sup> Beyond this evidence for the pedagogic role

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<sup>127</sup> E.J. Van Donzel, *A Yemenite Embassy to Ethiopia, 1647-1649. Al-Khaymi's Sirat al-Habasha* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1986), 178-85. Van Donzel provides a facsimile of the original Arabic manuscript. For the

of the *abun*, the very fact that an "Egyptian" prelate could find favor with an array of disparate elements is illuminating. By the time of Prutky's writing a century later, the empire and its institutions are often said to have been on the brink of disintegration. Yet he too encountered an *abun* who was able to unite diverse orders behind his cause. Although Prutky derided the ignorance and linguistic impairment of the *abun*, he never explains how such an ineffectual figure was able to "provoke the [people]" against the Franciscans, and so stir their sensibilities that "the whole empire was of his faction."<sup>128</sup>

This two-fold separation – the geographic one addressed earlier, and the one that was opened between "foreign" prelates and their immediate surroundings – suggests some of the challenges to the conceptualization of "transregional history." In a sense, both of these are indirectly challenged in Poncet's description of his journey to Gondar in the company of the *abun*'s brother. After leaving Serka, they spent the next night in "Tambisso," a sizeable village along the route to Sennar that also happened to be one of the fiefs belonging to the *abun*. Some days later, the caravan came to Girana where the village headman and a 30-man royal guard met them to ensure their security and "to do honour to the brother of the patriarch [sic]."<sup>129</sup> When they finally reached Gondar, Poncet noticed the conspicuous authority of the foreign prelate. Regardless of whether the normative principles of his account were followed so neatly in practice, he presented an image of an ecclesiastical hierarch who "names all the superiors of the monasteries" and who holds "absolute authority over the monks." For his part, Emperor Iyasu

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published Arabic text - with a number of small omissions - see *Sirat al-Habasha of al-Haymi al-Hassan b. Ahmad*, ed. Murad Kamil (Cairo: Dar al-'alim al-'arabi, 1972), 108-110.

<sup>128</sup> Prutky, *Travels*, 305.

<sup>129</sup> Poncet, *A Voyage*, 36, 38.

showed considerable deference to the hierarch, ordering the visitor to have an audience with the *abun*, probably at what Poncet calls the latter's "fair palace" near his Gondarine cathedral.<sup>130</sup>

The nature of narrative sources - and our reading of these sources - has also had some role to play in the fragmentation of transregional history. One episode from the reign of Fasiladas (1632-67) reveals how a peripheral relationship, regardless of its relative "importance," could be relegated to silence in the sources. The lands of *al-Habasha* were in a disturbed state following Susenyos' decision to adopt Catholicism as the religion of the kingdom. Susenyos and some of the nobility desired to consolidate power, and they were likely attracted to the models of order that the Jesuits had introduced.<sup>131</sup> Susenyos eventually abdicated amid widespread rebellions, and Fasiladas went on to restore the empire to its Alexandrian Orthodox roots. Despite the significance of al-Khaymi's mission, which was initiated by Fasiladas himself and aimed at an alliance against the twin Ottoman and Portuguese threats, there exists no narrative evidence for it in Abyssinian sources. Van Donzel has noted that this silence is logical in light of clerical suspicions of the emperor's intentions after the treachery of his predecessor.<sup>132</sup>

This background – the period before the *Zemene Mesafint* – serves as a useful backdrop to the untidy history of the later eighteenth and particularly the first decades of the nineteenth century when the links between the patriarchate and *al-Habash* appeared to be tenuous, and the metropolitan seat was vacant for substantial periods, including one span lasting 13 years. Even so, various Copts from "Egypt" still wandered in and out of the sources as agents in the life of the Abyssinian highlands. During the unsettled period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for example, Coptic craftsmen appeared in Tigre, and provided the Tigrean grandee Wolde Sellassie with an abundance of valuable items, including crosses, chalices, ornamented

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>131</sup> Isaac, *Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church*, 207-208.

<sup>132</sup> Van Donzel, *A Yemenite Embassy*, 26.

cloths and silk carpets, for which they received a large sum of gold.<sup>133</sup> Correspondences and relationships of various kinds persisted, as did a rich ecclesiastical inheritance. As we shall explore in Chapter Four, it was this to which *Abunas* Kirulus III (elevated in 1816) would look as he sought to reconfirm the traditional prerogatives of his office.

But it is important to add that even across the most tumultuous decades of the *Zemene Mesafint*, the Alexandrian Church hierarchy continued to be informed of - and exercised by - the affairs of the archdiocese of *al-Habash*.<sup>134</sup> This is plain in existing letters written by patriarchs Yuannis XVIII (1769-1796) and Murqus VIII (1796-1809), as well another written by Yusab al-Abbah, the metropolitan of Girga and Akhmim. Many of the themes that they addressed will be familiar to us. They challenged the doctrines and practices of Catholic missionaries, as well as a range of "unorthodox" theological speculations that were in circulation. After providing a didactic summary of orthodox teaching, Patriarch Yuannis XVIII condemned and excommunicated those people who followed the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon (i.e. the Catholic teaching.) He continued, "you must remove them from your midst and expel them from your land."<sup>135</sup> Some years later, Patriarch Murqus VIII issued a strident condemnation of the heretics and a defense of the Alexandrian position in a letter directed to the "echage, the judges and all the priests and *mu'allimin* in the seat of *Bilad al-Habasha*." He affirmed that the people of *al-Habash* had "always submitted to the Faith from the see of St. Mark." He then asked rhetorically how such a distinguished people could stray from correct teaching:

How do you now fabricate a new faith different from our Faith that we received

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<sup>133</sup> Yared Fanta, "Cheleqot Holy Trinity Church: The Legacy of the Era of the Princes," in *Ethiopian Church: Treasures and Faith*, ed. Daniel Seifmichael Feleke (France: l'Archange Minotaure, 2009), 43.

<sup>134</sup> Zahir Riyad, *Tarikh Itiyobiya* (1966) claimed that it was fairly routine that the patriarch should direct letters twice annually to the archdiocese, including one to the emperor and one to the metropolitan. However, he probably reached this conclusion based upon early norms; Mikhail, "Egypt in Late Antiquity," 330 fn. 1052.

<sup>135</sup> Murad Kamil, "Letters To Ethiopia from the Coptic Patriarchs, Yo'annas XVIII 1770-1796 and Morqos VIII 1796-1809" in *Société d'archéologie copte* 8 (1942), 89-143. This citation is from "Pope Yo'annas XVIII to the Sultan of al-Habash," 102-104.

from our Fathers? For you have always had a metropolitan who is from the see of Mark, not from those who are separated from it. This pains us greatly, and we asked from where this serpent came, infusing its poison, because we always took pride in you among the communities [*tawa'if*] for your perfect devotion and your correct faith.<sup>136</sup>

In the introduction to his publication of these letters, Murad Kamil noted that while the involvement of patriarchs and *abuns* in the intellectual and doctrinal life of Ethiopia had been underestimated, the recovery of these texts would help to fill the lacunae.<sup>137</sup> When Kamil wrote these words 70 years ago, the "Ethiopia connection" was a topic of considerable interest, as debates raged about the nature of the relationship between "Alexandria" and Ethiopia. But the moment that gave vitality to his historiographical optimism was largely over by the 1950s. Rather than being filled, the gaps in the scholarship simply vanished from view as scholars turned them a blind eye. With the autocephaly of the Ethiopian Church and the entrenchment of nationalist historiographies, other research agendas replaced the one motivating Kamil's publication, and the letters were largely consigned to oblivion.

While the theological details do not fall within our present scope, we can note the patriarchs' acute familiarity with the ideas circulating in various quarters of *Bilad al-Habasha*. A scholar who was commissioned to make a translation of one of the patriarchal letters indirectly acknowledged this point. In 1812 Henry Salt, the future English consul at Cairo, acquired the document during his travels in *Bilad al-Habasha* and he forwarded it to London for study. The translator remarked that the composition revealed the curious "state of religion in Habbesh," for it "has too much theology for a layman and an English Gentleman, too much perhaps for most divines." Here it might be said that the encounter with this developed field of theological

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-41. He also emphasized that Alexandria was the guardian of orthodoxy, and that it had never "deviated from the Holy Faith" of the [Church] Fathers. This passage occurs in one of Patriarch Murqus VIII's letters to the kingdom. To underscore the tenacity of the see in preserving orthodoxy, he cited its rejection of the Council of Chalcedon, which "was from Satan."

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

discourse produced a dissonance on his mind, perhaps because the letter was at once "Christian" and a touch alien. The bewildered scholar concluded that the "mysterious nature of the controversy ... is calculated to terrify rather than delight the reader."<sup>138</sup> When patriarchs asserted their authority, they did so within the context of distinctive intellectual and theological traditions and discourses that had developed organically over centuries.

But historical continuities aside, these patriarchal epistles are shot through with tension. After devoting multiple pages to explanations of correct doctrine, Patriarch Yuannis XVIII revealed his exasperation with the effects of the prevailing state of affairs at *al-Habash*:

From now on, do not frustrate us with your correspondence because since we sat on the Chair of Mark, we have not received any response from your country except a small paper from our revered brother Anba Yusab [1770-1803], the metropolitan regarding this. This has caused us great concern because our responses have always been very fast. Answer us as we have answered you, so that we can trust you ... because some Abyssinians have come to us with letters in Amharic from you. We would not have been able to read them if they had not been translated into Arabic at Jeddah.

A number of points might be drawn from these closing lines. In the first place, the tone of frustration in the appeal calls attention to the state of the polity at the time of his writing. In *Bilad al-Habasha*, competing regional grandees vied with one another for ascendancy, and for the distinction of serving as "protectors" of the frail emperors. According to the standard narrative, the *Zemene Mesafint* was inaugurated in 1769 when Mikhael Suhul, the strongman of the northern province of Tigre, assassinated the emperor and installed his own handpicked successor.

However, the fractures in the old Solomonic Empire were long in the making, and while the processes that led to these are beyond our scope, a few of these can be mentioned. The Oromo (referred to as the "Galla" in older sources), a Cushitic pastoralist people, began to make

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<sup>138</sup> John James Halls, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), 1:334. This quote is taken from a letter directed to Henry Salt from Rev. Alex Murray, dated May 2, 1812. I must concede that as I muddled through these abstruse theological expositions, I was rather more terrified than delighted myself.

intermittent raids into the Abyssinian highlands during the sixteenth century. This was due in part to the devastating Islamic-Christian conflicts that had enervated the empire. To manage the "problem," Oromos were gradually recruited to serve in the imperial hierarchy, which proved to be a source of tension between these parvenus and the traditional aristocracy.<sup>139</sup> Other causes of enfeeblement included the doctrinal controversies, the decline in Red Sea commerce and the weakening ties between the highlands and their lowland tributaries.

When a patriarch, then, sent "authoritative" letters to *al-Habash*, it was surrendered into a kaleidoscopic environment in which established channels of authority were breaking down. Such was the state of affairs in the archdiocese at the time of Patriarch Yuannis' complaint that he had received only one "small paper" from the *abun*. The statement itself would seem to suggest that intercourse had all but ceased. However, his reference to additional letters that "some Abyssinians" had delivered indicates that the problem was not the absence of communication. It was, rather, the difficulty in ascertaining whether messengers who purported to represent the emperor were legitimate. Individuals were known to arrive to *Bilad al-Habasha* with spurious claims - such as imposters who occasionally appeared in the kingdom with claims to the abunate. The Chronicle of Iyasu II cited one such incident during the tenure of *Abuna Yusab's* predecessor, in which Mikhael Suhul received a Syrian monk who had claimed to come from *Misr*. Suhul was only too pleased at the arrival, for he had recently seized the metropolitan fief of Addi Abun and was at odds with the reigning *abun*.<sup>140</sup> The corollary to this occurred as well, with Abyssinian intriguers and imposters repairing to *Misr*, particularly during unsettled periods.

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<sup>139</sup> Harold Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 37-38, 42-47. In the seventeenth century, some of these "new" elements in the hierarchy were initially procured through a series of slave raids. To this end, Susenyos raided the Shanqallas and other peoples inhabiting the western borderlands. It is impossible here not to see strong parallels with the Mamluk system. For general details of the Ethiopian case, see Pankhurst, *Ethiopian Borderlands*, 352-54.

<sup>140</sup> Guidi, ed. and trans., *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo'as*, 61-62; 147-48.

Patriarch Yuannis acknowledged as much when he stipulated that the emperor's letters must be in the language of the *abun* so that he can "trust that they are from [him.]" <sup>141</sup>

As competing political actors and parties vied for influence, a favorable patriarchal letter was no trifling artifact. Here we do well to recall Crummey's observation that the authority of Alexandria was never repudiated, even amid the most intense doctrinal and political quarrels. <sup>142</sup> The significance that a patriarchal letter could carry is glimpsed in the course of an encounter between *Ras* Wolde Sellassie (an early nineteenth century grandee of Tigre) and the English traveler Henry Salt. The *ras* had seized the northern province from *Ras* Mikhael's successor, and at the time of the meeting he was in the process of fortifying his position under the mantle of Orthodoxy and the Solomonic tradition. His sites were set against the Yejju upstarts then dominating the government to the south, whom he considered among other things to be heterodox in their Christology. The *ras* prepared a letter for the King of England in which he complained of the heterodoxy that had overtaken the heart of the kingdom under the domination of *Ras* Gugsä. Wolde Sellassie laid out the dilemma very simply:

I have carried on hostilities with him who does not agree with us in the faith, who is called Gougousa and he has made a king who is not orthodox in the faith. And therefore I have gone to war with him. <sup>143</sup>

In the letter, he went on to offer a laconic description of his own orthodox beliefs. But perhaps what is most interesting is that in addition to this personal composition, the *ras* presented a manuscript to Salt, assuring him that it contained "the true doctrines of the faith" of Abyssinia.

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<sup>141</sup> Kamil, "Letters to Ethiopia," 107. In this issue, Kamil published the complete Arabic text of a number of patriarchal letters sent by Yuannis XVIII and his successor, Murqus VIII.

<sup>142</sup> Crummey, "Doctrine," 2:568-69.

<sup>143</sup> Trans. of the letter of *Ras* Wolde Selassie, Governor of Tigre, Alex Murray to Castledouglas, NA UK FO/1/1 (March 12, 1811), ff. 155-6. Salt's travels were a very early sign of rising Western involvement in *Bilad al-Habasha*. Salt gifted the *ras* with lances, knives and cannons.



<sup>144</sup> This definitive exposition of faith was one of the pastoral letters from the patriarch that he had in his possession - the very document in fact that was to so mystify the scholar who was charged with rendering its terrifying passages into English.

This speaks to the life of the *idea*, one that persisted even if some of its visible signs were obscured by apparent theological or political anarchy. This point is all the more evident in light of the fact that at the time of this exchange, the metropolitan chair had been vacant for as many as nine years. <sup>145</sup> We have heard it contended that the "bishops alone" embodied the "institutional unity" of the church. During the baleful hostilities which marked the *Zemene Mesafint*, contemporary evidence suggests that the *abun* could still play an important and active - if perhaps intermittent - part in various episodes and movements aimed at reconciling parties and dealing with other problems of state. <sup>146</sup> But in the case of a protracted vacancy to the abunate, when the idea of "institutional unity" - of communion - was not *embodied*, it could still remain *tangible*. Bernard Cohn's insights into the nature of an imperial firman can help to elucidate the peculiar power of the authoritative letter. He explains that the issuance of a firman from the Mughal ruler was not simply an entitlement or a contract. Instead, it constituted

a sharing in the authority and substance of the originator, through the act of creating the document. Everything about it was charged with a significance that transcended what might be thought as its practical purpose. The paper, the forms of address, the preliminary phrases of invocation ... all were meaningful. <sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of that Country* (London: Frank Cass, 1967 [1814]), 364-65.

<sup>145</sup> *Abuna* Yusab passed away in 1803, and his would-be successor was selected in 1805 or shortly thereafter. It is likely that he died en route to *al-Habash*, and he is not included in most lists of metropolitan succession. See Salvatore Tedeschi, "Ethiopian Prelates - Yosab II (d. 1803)" in *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Karen J. Torjesen and Gawdat Gebra, Claremont Colleges Digital Library, accessed March 17, 2012, <http://ccdlib.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cce/id/854>. *HPEC* contains a brief mention of this hapless prelate who was identified as Macarius II in 3.3, 172.

<sup>146</sup> Among other things, the *abun* helped to lead an ultimately abortive movement to curb the leverage of Oromo in the administration, which involved the segregation of Islamicized and pagan Oromo. Later, the son of Mikhael Suhul launched an incursion of Gondar. The situation could only be resolved with the direct intervention of *Abuna* Yusab. A summary of some of these activities can be found in Tedeschi, "Ethiopian Prelates - Yosab II."

<sup>147</sup> Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 19.

We can surmise that a patriarchal document was similarly "charged" with authority and served as a visible sign of ecclesiastical continuity, even in the absence of an *abun*.

At last, we return to the final lines of the patriarchal letter of Yuannis XVIII, which recall our attention to the geographic dimension of this regional peregrination. The patriarch ended his missive with the perfunctory observation that the Amharic-language letters would have been unintelligible had they not been "translated into Arabic at Jeddah." While it is unclear who exactly was responsible for rendering the translations into Arabic, it is not out of the question that a Copt of "Egyptian" extraction might have contributed to the task. When 'Ali Bey traveled to Jeddah at the beginning of the nineteenth century, he noticed that a number of Coptic residents were quartered in a house near the quay.<sup>148</sup> And although perhaps unlikely, it was not unheard of for Arabic speaking Copts to obtain knowledge of Ethiopian languages. For instance, when Wolde Sellassie wished for a patriarchal letter to be translated into Ge'ez, he commissioned one "Girgis the Copt" to make the translation.<sup>149</sup>

It is probably more likely that Abyssinians would have contributed to the translation. The Red Sea was in fact an important nexus linking the lands of *al-Habasha* to the wider region. In the sixteenth century, the Ottomans established the province of "*al-Habash*" on the African coastal lowland of the Red Sea between Suakin in the north and Zayla' in the south, with the administrative center at Masawa. The province quickly became defined by an arrangement of indirect rule under the nearly independent local authorities. One of these local notables, the *na'ib* of Hergigo, paid sporadic tribute to the rulers of *Bilad al-Habasha* even as he collected rents from the Ottomans. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman province of *al-Habash* was brought under the auspices of the governor of Jeddah, an arrangement which continued into

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<sup>148</sup> 'Ali Bey, *Travels of Ali Bey in Morocco, Tripoli, Cyprus, Egypt, Arabia, Syria, and Turkey Between the Years 1803 and 1807* (Philadelphia, 1816), 2:44.

<sup>149</sup> Halls, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:280.

the nineteenth century.<sup>150</sup> From a "Red Sea" vantage, *Bilad al-Habasha* can appear less remote in relation to other "world areas" than it does in many "land-based" narratives which depict a kingdom that is closed off from the outside world.<sup>151</sup> Traders from the African littoral and its hinterlands traveled the length of the sea, and in fact when an *abun* set out for *al-Habash* in the middle part of the seventeenth century, he lodged with "Abyssinian" merchants at Suez.<sup>152</sup>

If the Abyssinian trade became less vigorous during the eighteenth century, the Red Sea remained a vital zone of contact. In the nineteenth century, the *sharif* of Mecca still possessed some influence along the coastal plains of *al-Habash*, and when Burckhardt was undertaking his Arabian travels, he discovered that an entire quarter of Jedda was the exclusive preserve of traders from Suakin.<sup>153</sup> At an important entrepôt such as Jedda, diverse fields of activity -

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<sup>150</sup> Wolbert Smidt, "Habeš," *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2:950-52. The *na'ib* was on the peripheries of two major empires, and his status cultivated a kind of "borderland" or peripheral politics. The complexity of the prevailing politics, as well as the deteriorating influence of the Abyssinian Empire in the Red Sea is highlighted in the challenges faced by metropolitans seeking to enter the kingdom through Masawa - particularly in the fiasco of 1745. These details are related by Bruce, *Travels*, 4:133-5. For a more in-depth study of Masawa, see Jonathan Miran, *Red Sea Citizens: Cosmopolitan Society and Cultural Change in Massawa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). This monograph represents a significant contribution towards a regionally-inflected historiography.

<sup>151</sup> One of the contributing factors to the myth of Ethiopian insularity is the enormous focus given to the "Great Tradition" (of the Ethiopian "center") in the historiography of the country. The neglect of the peripheral lowlands certainly contributes to the effect of insularity, in much the same way that the deserts of *Misr* have served as daunting barriers of mind. Markakis has addressed the neglect of these peripheral lowlands in *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 21. In the study, he draws attention to the highland and lowland peripheries in the context of modern state-building endeavors.

On the canard of Ethiopian "isolation," see Matteo Salvatore, "Muslim Partners, Catholic Foes: The Selective Isolation of Gondarine Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012): 51-72. Salvatore disputes this characterization, arguing that if Gondar was less open to "Catholic Europe," it opened new ties with a number of Muslim societies along the Red Sea/Indian ocean circuits.

Trends in the scholarship have provided promising prospects for new departures, as some researchers have revived the study of nautical space as a strategy for pursuing trans-regional and global networks and webs of communication between "world regions." Jonathan Miran, "Space, Mobility, and Translocal Connections across the Red Sea Area since 1500," *Northeast African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012): ix. Miran's article offers a good overview of this methodological turn, which has been termed the "new thalassology."

<sup>152</sup> Giacomo Baratti, *The Late Travels of S. Giacomo Baratti into the Remote Countries of the Abissins*, trans. G. D. (London, 1670), 10. It appears that this *abun* was brought from Jerusalem, for which there was some precedent - see for example *ibid.*, 188-89. Later, most of the *abuns* seem to have been drawn from the monks of *Dayr Antonius*, although during other periods they are said to have originated at *Dayr al-Muharraq* in the *Sa'id*.

<sup>153</sup> 'Ali Bey, *Travels*, 2:123; Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 439. There has been a tendency in the historiography to approach the Ottoman coastal ports such as Suakin not only as outposts of minimal significance to the Ottoman Empire, but with little connection to the continental hinterlands; for a study of the Suakin port in the Ottoman period which addresses some of the problems in the scholarship, see Andrew Peacock, "Suakin: A Northeast African Port in the Ottoman Empire," *Northeast African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012): 29-50.

ecclesiastical, commercial, cultural, political - met and overlapped. This was apparent in the case we have already cited of a Syrian monk arriving in Tigre with spurious claims to the abunate. His travels were initially to take him to India (where there was a community of Anti-Chalcedonian Christians that followed the see of Antioch) and it was none other than an Abyssinian trader at Jedda who hatched the scheme that redirected his route to Tigre. <sup>154</sup>

But more important than the question of who exactly rendered the Abyssinian-language text into Arabic is the very existence of such medial mechanisms and the relationships upon which they depended. The communications and other relations between "Alexandria" and the archdiocese of *al-Habash* were not simply "private" affairs involving ecclesiastics. Patriarch Murqus VIII noted in one of his letters to *al-Habash* that his communication was in part at the urging of the "lay leader" Girgis al-Gawhari. <sup>155</sup> And this "web" of connectivity was by no means exclusive to Christians, as is prominently evidenced in the embassies to obtain metropolitans, which typically included Muslim merchants. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, Patriarch Kirulus V explained that whenever he "had any communication of importance" to send to the archdiocese of *al-Habash*, he invariably "despatched it by a pilgrim," which provoked his English interlocutor to wonder at the wisdom of "employing this primitive post." <sup>156</sup> The "mechanisms of Alexandria" involved a diversity of "informal" devices and practices and ancillary agents, and if we overlook these in favor of "formalized" ecclesiastical structures and channels of transaction, then the "regional life" of Alexandrian Orthodoxy will virtually vanish before our very eyes.

Travel and transit and the movement of people and articles was an elaborate business, and one that from the "outside" might have appeared to be arbitrary and even chauvinistic - as

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<sup>154</sup> Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II*, 148.

<sup>155</sup> Murad Kamil, "Letters," 130. This is an excerpt of the second letter of Patriarch Murqus VIII to the emperor.

<sup>156</sup> Montague Fowler, *Christian Egypt: Past, Present, and Future* (London: Church Newspaper Co., 1901), viii.

more than a few frustrated Western travelers were quick to point out. But there were rules to the business, and these sometimes led to developments that might have appeared counterintuitive to outsiders. This is exemplified in the case of a *sharif* of Mecca chaining and incarcerating a Muslim merchant for 18 months on the charge that he had wasted the money of Abyssinian Emperor (Iyasu II) during an embassy to obtain a new *abun*.<sup>157</sup> These communications necessarily involved a multiplicity of relationships across a wide geographic web, the material of a system that was complex, even if it was not so painstaking as to prevent a cunning merchant from hatching an ecclesiastical scheme. But perhaps the most important point to all of this is that these mechanisms made possible the kind of movement across the metaphorical deserts that we have addressed in this section. We have mainly discussed a southward movement - be it of traders or prelates or the conveyance of letters and other articles. But there is another kind of movement across deserts and seas that we have only lightly touched upon. This is the one that flowed northward, and which serves as an important correlate to what we have explored. As we turn to this component of a regional life, we will draw particular attention to what might be called a cultural/religious intercourse of the followers of the Alexandrian see.

### **Beyond the Deserts, Part Two**

In 1817, English traveler Robert Richardson was sojourning in a small village to the north of Beni Suwayf when he caught sight of the following scene:

Our attention was roused by the hallowed notes of devotion that pealed from a cangia moving past us. It was full of Coptic and Abyssinian Christians singing hymns, and keeping time to the oars by which the vessel was impelled. They were proceeding to Cairo, on their way to Jerusalem, to be present at the feast of Easter.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> The story is recounted in considerable detail in Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II*, 127-29.

<sup>158</sup> Richardson, *Travels*, 2:142.

This portraiture captures a kind of movement that brought people of *Bilad al-Habasha* through *Bilad Misr*. One scholar suggests that Copts made the Jerusalem pilgrimage in part "to see the extension of a landscape in which their native lands had played a part."<sup>159</sup> We can add that pilgrims of *Bilad al-Habasha* also saw their landscape "extended" as they passed - in company with other followers of Alexandrian Orthodoxy - many sacred sites along the way. Richardson's portrayal points to a religious and cultural inheritance that was not restricted by the handicaps of language or geography. The profound weight of this inheritance triumphed over barriers that were to loom so large in modernity's gaze. It also draws attention to an aspect of the life of the communion that is more than a theoretical abstraction or the preserve of interested ecclesiastical or lay leaders. There was surely a dimension to this life of communion that found expression in a multiplicity of ways in the lives of ordinary, anonymous "followers" of the Alexandrian see. It might be argued that this following was something more profound and encompassing than merely the ecclesiastical apparatus and other formalistic markers of communion. The pilgrim - and perhaps more so, the *returning* pilgrim - is an obvious agent for the widespread diffusion of pious customs and oral and written traditions.

But in addition to the pilgrimage, the monastic system can also be identified as a vehicle for the dialectical development and diffusion of customs and ideas. In both of these areas, comparisons can be drawn with the processes involved in the intellectual and ritual life of Islam. If it is not difficult to see the correspondences between the Christian and Muslim pilgrimages, parallels for the monastic system are not so readily apparent, which is perhaps related to the respective tropes attached to each of these sets of institutions. As they were relegated to the margins of the modern order, whether as vestigial structures or monuments of that now isolated modern sphere of "religion," they were also relegated to isolated fields of classical interest. Yet,

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<sup>159</sup> Armanios, "Coptic Christians," 137.

there are compelling consonances between the "regional" life of the monasteries and that of Al-Azhar. The great center of Islamic learning contained individual *riwaqs* (literally "corners") in which students were sub-congregated according to the regions from which they came. In the early nineteenth century, these divisions included *riwaqs* for students from Darfur and other regions of the south, in addition to those for Indian, Afghani, Abyssinian ("Jabarti"), Yemeni and Mughrebi students, among others.<sup>160</sup> On the return to their diverse native lands, these students effected a far-reaching diffusion of ideas and practices.<sup>161</sup>

If the draw of the monasteries was not so expansive as that of al-Azhar, these institutions also attracted denizens from diverse regions, particularly during the medieval period. In fact, one of the four continuously occupied monasteries of Wadi al-Natrun, namely *Dayr as-Suryan* ("The Monastery of the Syrians") was likely founded in the ninth century by cenobites from Takrit (in modern day Iraq), and Western and Eastern Syrians remained in this cluster of desert monasteries at least until the early seventeenth century. The sources also speak of Abyssinian, Nubian and Armenian inhabitants across these periods.<sup>162</sup> Although we are principally interested in the populations of Abyssinian monks that come in and out of view in the narrative sources, this monastic diversity contextualizes the curious appearances of "Abyssinians," and emphasizes the vital point that these were not "Egyptian" monasteries. No less than the scholars of al-Azhar, the monastic inmates were brought together by theologies and systems of belief that they held in

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<sup>160</sup> Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 410.

<sup>161</sup> For example, when Burckhardt visited al-Damer (a Nilotic town located in what is now northeastern Sudan) he noticed a large quantity of books, many of which had been brought back from al-Azhar by these returning pupils. *Ibid.*, 266-67. The same can be found repeated along the vast reaches of an Islamic oecumene. The previously cited works of O'Fahey and Spaulding demonstrate aspects of this phenomenon in its "southern" dimension. For an earlier period, Michael Winter has briefly looked at al-Azhar in the context of the linkages between the communities of Abyssinian Muslims and the wider Islamic World, including Egypt. See "The Closest Egyptian-Ethiopian Relationship: The Mamluk Sultanate" in *Narrating the Nile*, 13-28.

<sup>162</sup> Karl-Heinz Brune, "Multiethnic Character of Wadi al-Natrun," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Wadi al-Natrun*, ed. Maged Mikhail and Mark Moussa (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 19-21; Otto Meinardus, "Multicultural, Ecumenical Desert Monasticism," *Coptic Church Review* (Winter 1999), 20:132.

common, or one might say a common worldview. This fundamental bond is discernible in one scholar's suggestion that the apparent disappearance of the Syrian community may very well be a sign of their absorption into the "mainstream" of "Coptic life."<sup>163</sup>

The populations that constituted this diversity did not belong to reified "nations" in the modern sense of the term. We can perhaps speak of them as secondary regional or linguistic accidents that have been reified retrospectively. This will prove to be a point of crucial importance, particularly in Chapter Four, when we address the strains that developed between "Abyssinian" and "Coptic" monks at Jerusalem in the nineteenth century. To state the case differently, it was nothing new that there should be various kinds of distinctions and even rivalries based upon these distinctions. In fact, regional antagonisms in *Bilad al-Habasha* could be reflected at Jerusalem where "Abyssinian" monks from various provinces were sometimes in conflict with one another.<sup>164</sup> Similar dynamics could prevail at al-Azhar as well, where in one representative episode students of the Darfur *riwaq* were discovered to have incited a minor riot.<sup>165</sup> And indeed the medieval and early modern Western Church was rife with "national" agitations. But in the words of G. K. Chesterton, while students "came together in great groups called nations," they had all arrived "to learn the same philosophy." He continued, "Though that might not preempt the starting of a quarrel, it might have a great deal to do with ending it."<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Johannes Den Heijer, "Relations Between Copts and Syrians in Light of Recent Discoveries at Dayr al-Suryan," *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, August 27-September 2, 2000*, eds. J. van der Vliet and M. Immerzeel eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 2:937.

<sup>164</sup> Chris Prouty, *Empress Taytu and Menilek II: Ethiopia 1883-1910* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1986), 249.

<sup>165</sup> O'Fahey, *Darfur Sultanate*, 76. The conflict at al-Azhar broke out between students from the neighboring Sudanic "kingdoms" of Darfur and Wadai, which were in conflict at the time. According to le Compte d'Escayrac de Lauture, Wadai's recent military victory over Darfur angered the Furians at al-Azhar, and the small number of students from Wadai became "victims of the brutality of their enemies." *Memoire sur le Soudan: Geographie Naturelle et Politique, Histoire et Ethnographie, Moeurs et Institutions de l'Empire des Fellatas, du Bornou, du Baguermi, du Waday, du Dar-Four, Redige d'apres des Renseignements Entierement Nouveaux et Accompagne d'une esquisse du Soudan Oriental* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1855-1856), 93.

<sup>166</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, 'The Dumb Ox'* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 47. Berques offers helpful insights about the medieval "nations" that gathered in the *riwaqs* of al-Azhar in *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution*, 79.



Returning then to the case of the "Abyssinian"- "Coptic" quarrels from the nineteenth century, modern processes - which must include the connivance of outside powers, particularly of the British - conspired to unsettle fundamental theological and philosophical bonds until, in a great reversal, what were once secondary accidents would gradually come to be seen as primary.

The anachronistic usage of denominations such as "Coptic/Egyptian" or "Ethiopian" has also acted to conceal monastic diversity. These mostly anonymous "Abyssinian" monks arrived from various regions of the lands of *al-Habasha* – Gojjam, Tigre, Begemder, Shoa and elsewhere - speaking a diversity of dialects. As to the "Egyptian" lands, we have already addressed the problem of the homogenized representation of national space, with particular emphasis on the question of the *Sa'id* in the national imaginary. We need only look again in the direction of al-Azhar to notice that, alongside the *riwaqs* of Darfur and the land of Jabart, or India and the Maghreb, the institution also contained a *riwaq* for "*al-Sa'id*." <sup>167</sup> And the *Sa'id* is a distinctive referent for the monastic landscape as well. Attempting to expound the reasons why *Dayr al-Muharraq* was considerably larger than the monasteries of the Eastern and Western deserts, an author of the ecclesiastical chronicle noted that it was the "only monastery of the *Sa'id*," and therefore had a larger territory from which to draw postulants. <sup>168</sup>

Here, the *Sa'id* can be considered as at once a center and a periphery, bearing a "local" stability even as it was a transitional space along a geographic continuum. As the region's solitary monastery, *Dayr al-Muharraq* had its "natural" territories from which to draw a sizable population of monks, while it remained an intermediate site through which generation upon

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<sup>167</sup> In the 1840s Mehmet 'Ali received a petition from the Sennari students at al-Azhar for their own private *riwaq* on the "model of that for the *Sa'idis*, Maghrebis and other nations [*ajnas*]." At that time, there existed a *riwaq* for approximately 22 different *ajnas*. The Arabic translation for the government's response to this request (dated 16 Safar, 1263) is published in 'Abd al-'Aziz Amin 'Abd al-Majid, *al-Tarbiya fi al-Sudan Min Awal al-Qarn al-Sadis 'Ashar ila Nihayat al-Qarn al-Thamin 'Ashar wa al-Usus al-Nafsiya wa al-Ijtima'iyat alayha* (Cairo: al-Matba'at al-Amiriya, 1949), 3:74.

<sup>168</sup> The chronicler makes this observation in the course of explaining the causes for *Dayr al-Muharraq*'s sizeable population relative to the monasteries of the Eastern and Western deserts. *HPEC* 3:3, 184.

generation of monks and pilgrims would pass. In the late eighteenth century, a metropolitan of the *Sa'id* joined successive patriarchs in addressing the theological disputes that were current in *Bilad al-Habasha*. Yusab al-Abbah composed a lengthy sermon regarding the theological errors of some Abyssinians whom he criticizes for contending that "the Holy Spirit anointed Christ, and [who] thus call the Messiah 'Son of Grace.'" In his assertion that he himself had "encountered these descriptions of people, specifically among groups of Abyssinians," the metropolitan revealed something important.<sup>169</sup> These "Abyssinian disputes" were not self-contained controversies in the "far-off" lands of *al-Habasha*; they traveled with their adherents, and could even become "local" controversies in the "Egyptian" *Sa'id*.<sup>170</sup>

As various populations of monks and pilgrims traveled the pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem, the journey itself was invested with meaning, and there were many points of sacred significance along the way that had developed and evolved over many centuries. Emperor 'Amda-Siyon was the first of many Solomonic emperors who is on record as having patronized the Ethiopic library in Jerusalem, and the three centuries which were to follow witnessed the heaviest traffic of pilgrims to and from the Holy City.<sup>171</sup> And although the numbers of pilgrims traveling from *Bilad al-Habasha* diminished after the sixteenth century, the "shared" quality of this geography continued to be manifested in many ways. In the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth, Abyssinian monks could be found in fairly significant numbers at *Dayr al-*

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<sup>169</sup> Yusab al-Abbah, "Kitab al-Maqalat," Bibliothèque nationale Paris MS Arabe 4711, f. 48.

<sup>170</sup> Approximately 30 of the metropolitan's sermons are preserved in manuscript at the Bib. Nat. in Paris and at the Coptic Patriarchal Library in Cairo. His treatises deal with a range of theological and moral topics, and include polemical sermons against the Catholic missionaries, whose presence in the *Sa'id* remained significant. For a list of his extant works see Khalil Samir, "Yusab, Bishop of Jirja and Akhmim," *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 7:2360a-2362a.

<sup>171</sup> Otto Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1989), 159; Tamrat, *Church and State*, 251. Evidences for monastic communities along the route, particularly at Qusqam/*Dayr al-Muharraq*, the Scetis (Wadi al-Natrun) and Harat Zuwayla become more apparent during the reign of Sayfa-Ar'ad [1344-71], Amda Siyon's successor. *Ibid.*, 251 n.3. Some medieval itineraries from the period prior to Ahmad Gran's devastations have been preserved, and are collected in O.G.S. Crawford ed., *Ethiopian Itineraries 1400-1524, Including those Collected by A. Zorzi at Venice in 1519-24* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1958). These reveal a number of different pilgrimage routes. The information given by Friar Nicholas (circa 1470) provides the most substantial description of the land route that passed through the *Sa'id*. See 125-129.

Muharraq - due in part to its southern location - in addition to their more irregular presence at the monasteries of the Eastern and Western deserts. In other words, intermittent disappearances of Abyssinian monks from certain "Egyptian" monasteries in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries did not mean that the sacred geography ceased to be "theirs." There was nothing peculiar or "unnatural" about their presence, which a deeply rooted historical arrangement had authorized and enabled. When Curzon visited Wadi al-Natrun in 1833, he discovered this living legacy at *Dayr* al-Suryan:

'What,' I said to a bearded Copt, who was seated on the steps, 'is that strange howling noise which I hear among the trees? ... It sounds something like a chant, or a dismal moaning song : only it is different in its cadence from anything I have heard before.' 'That noise,' replied the monk, 'is the sound of the service of the church which is being chanted by the Abyssinian monks. Come down the steps and I will show you their chapel and their library. The monastery which they frequented in this desert has fallen to decay; and they now live here, their numbers being recruited occasionally by pilgrims on their way from Abyssinia to Jerusalem, some of whom pass by each year.'<sup>172</sup>

The sources are replete with such visible signs of "supranational" communion. It can be observed in the case of an "Abyssin" of the late seventeenth century who was sufficiently at ease in the deserts of *Bilad Misr* that he wished to serve as Vansleb's guide on the desert road connecting the Nile Valley with *Dayr* Antonius. And it is also evident in the case of a modest Cairo church called Abu Sayfayn that was for a time an "Abyssinian" possession and where services were conducted in the Abyssinian language.<sup>173</sup> It can also be observed in a mid-eighteenth century account of two Abyssinians who were in residence with the patriarch alongside their fellow clerics from further north. When the Moravian missionaries visited Cairo

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<sup>172</sup> Lord Curzon, *Visit to the Monasteries in the Levant* (London: John Murray, 1849) 1:82-83.

<sup>173</sup> Wansleben (Vansleb), *Present State*, 195-96; Benjamin Cranz, *The Ancient and Modern History of the Brethren; Or a Succinct Narrative of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren or Anitas Fratrum*, trans. Benjamin La Trobe (London, 1780), 490; "From Egypt and Abyssinia, Letters and Papers, 1769-1788," Moravian Archives UK, Letters and Papers from Egypt and Abyssinia, 1769-1788, (n.d., 1770/1), f. 5. Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*, 146.

in the 1770s, they were informed that the patriarch kept an "Abissinian priest allways in his house" as an interpreter for the Abyssinian priests who would usually pay respects to the patriarch during their pilgrimages.<sup>174</sup>

But perhaps the most compelling exposition concerns the "monastery of the *Sa'id*," al-Muharraq. Located slightly to the north of Asyut and to the west of al-Qusiya, the monastery has been called "the first leg in [the Ethiopians'] journey to Jerusalem."<sup>175</sup> An early sermon ascribed to Patriarch Theophilus [385-412 CE] provided an account of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt from Herod during the infancy of Jesus. These details, which were reputedly revealed during locutions that the patriarch received from the Virgin Mary, were the basis for the tradition that the Holy Family had stayed for six months at this site on the southern extremity of their wanderings. Historians do not know precisely when the monastery of al-Muharraq was founded, but it is located in the general vicinity of a spot where, according to pious tradition, Jesus himself had consecrated the first church in all of Christendom. Abu al-Makarim, writing in the thirteenth century, provided a fairly substantial description of the locale as well as some of the traditions that were in circulation at his time. He began his exposition with the following words:

It was from this place ["The church of the Lady, the Pure Virgin Mary, at al-Muharraq"] that Christ returned to Misr and thence to Syria. It is the first church that was founded and consecrated in the southern provinces. This town is called Qusqam in the desert ...<sup>176</sup>

In the thirteenth century, no less than in succeeding periods, this site was recognized in its "southern" context.

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<sup>174</sup> "From Egypt and Abyssinia, Letters and Papers, 1769-1788," Moravian Archives UK, Letters and Papers from Egypt and Abyssinia, 1769-1788, (n.d., 1770/1), f. 5.

<sup>175</sup> al-Anba Ghrighuriyus, *al-Dayr al-Muharraq*, 401.

<sup>176</sup> al-Mu'taman Abu al-Makarim, *The Churches & Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries Attributed to Abuh Salih, the Armenian*, trans. B. T. A. Evetts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 224-25. The nineteenth century English translation falsely ascribed authorship to the Armenian from whom it was acquired. The author of the manuscript in fact was Abu al-Makarim, a Coptic priest.

It might be said that by virtue of its location, the monastery bore distinctive "hinterlands" that cut across later nationalist imaginaries. In the Ethiopic sources, the cultural significance of "Gabal Qusqam" or "Qusqam" - as the sacred site is generally denoted in these sources - is unmistakable. Important manuscript versions of the Vision of Theophilus exist in Ethiopic, and Qusqam holds a special prominence in the Ethiopian Synaxarium, where "Debre Kueskuwam" ("monastery of Qusqam" or Quesquam) is memorialized on two different days. The first of these is the feast of the Holy Family's flight from Herod on 24 Genbot, and the other is on 6 Khedar, when the monastery's foundation is commemorated.<sup>177</sup> But references to *Dayr al-Muharraq* are also made in other entries, including in the commemoration (5 Terr) of Patriarch Matta I [1378-1408], one of the most prominent patriarchs to have been chosen from the monastery. Interestingly, this record includes a considerable amount of information about the patriarch that is not available in the Coptic Synaxarium. Although, as Fatin Guirguis has noted, the Coptic Synaxarium provided the basis for the Ethiopic one, the latter gradually accumulated various oral traditions about saints, patriarchs and events. These accretions attest to the centuries of sustained contact between "Abyssinian" monks and their northern coreligionists in the monastery of the *Sa'id* and in the desert monasteries.<sup>178</sup>

It can be speculated that the Ethiopic entry on the eminent patriarch, which is substantially longer than its Coptic counterpart, speaks to those sets of relationships that linked the environs of *Dayr al-Muharraq* with *Bilad al-Habasha*. After describing the superlative holiness of Matta while he was still a monk at Qusqam, the text goes on to tell of a prophesy that

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<sup>177</sup> These entries can be found in E. A. Wallis Budge's translation of a seventeenth century manuscript of the Synaxarium, published under the title *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church I/II: A Translation of the Ethiopic Synaxarium Made from the Manuscripts Oriental 660 and 661 in the British Museum* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1976).

<sup>178</sup> Fatin Guirguis, "The Vision of Theophilus: Resistance Through Orality Among the Persecuted Copts," (PhD diss., Florida Atlantic University, 2010), 68. See also Budge, *Book of Saints*, 1:xix.

he made during the reign of Emperor Wedem Asfare [1372-82] that the emperor's brother Dawit would accede to the throne.<sup>179</sup> And in fact after the monk Matta had become patriarch, he himself was purportedly summoned by the Mamluk sultan to serve as an interlocutor with the very emperor [Dawit II - 1382-1413] of his prophecy.<sup>180</sup> Whether or not this series of events transpired as it has been recorded, it emerged out of a milieu in which an eminent monk of the *Sa'id* and future patriarch of Alexandria was alive to the details of regnal affairs to the south.<sup>181</sup>

These details materialized during the Mamluk period, which Michael Winter has called the era of "the closest Egyptian-Ethiopian relationship." Yet, fluctuations in the priorities of state can obscure the persistence of "peripheral" relationships. In a study of the monastery written some 50 years ago, Bishop Ghreghorius observed:

There is no doubt that it is because of the holiness of Dayr al-Muharraq in the eyes of our Ethiopian brothers that the great majority of the metropolitans for Ethiopia were chosen from among the Coptic monks at Dayr al-Muharraq.<sup>182</sup>

If it was an exaggeration to claim that the "vast majority" of metropolitans arrived from this monastery, the pattern of episcopal appointments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries certainly evinces the persistence of the southern dimension of *Dayr* al-Muharraq. When Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889) successfully secured four bishops for his kingdom, Patriarch Kirulus V selected all of them from among the monks of *Dayr* al-Muharraq. A metropolitan was

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<sup>179</sup> Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, 2:453-54.

<sup>180</sup> One tradition says that Dawit II reached Aswan before being repelled. See Tamrat, *Church and State*, 255. Approximately half a century earlier, the son and successor of the legendary Amda-Siyon is said to have invaded the *Sa'id* in retaliation against the imprisonment of Patriarch Murqus - René Basset, "Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie. Première partie. Chronique éthiopienne d'après un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris," *Journal Asiatique* 18 (August-September 1881), 95.

<sup>181</sup> The fairly close intercourse between the Mamluk and Solomonic dynasties during these decades is not immaterial. On at least two occasions, Solomonic emperors are believed to have launched military expeditions into areas of Mamluk influence on the extremities of the *Sa'id*.

<sup>182</sup> al-Anba Ghreghorius, *al-Dayr al-Muharraq*, 397. At least during the centuries immediately preceding this period, *Dayr* Antonius supplied many if not most of the metropolitans for *Bilad al-Habasha*. At the same time, this does not mean that *Dayr* al-Muharraq was necessarily uninvolved in the proceedings. During the fourteenth century, *Dayr* al-Muharraq and *Dayr* Antonius appear to have had a special relationship. We should not oversimplify monastic dynamics, which could involve inter-monastic arrangements. See "Dayr al-Muharraq" in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz Atiya (New York: MacMillan, 1991).

selected for Asmara, and three suffragan bishops were sent to the dioceses of Axum, Gojjam and Addis Ababa. Upon the death of the last of them in 1929, a successor also was taken from *Dayr al-Muharraq*, as were a number of bishops for the dioceses of al-Sudan including Nubia, Atbara and Omdurman.<sup>183</sup>

It appears then that this great intermediate *dayr*, which was the "first leg" of a hallowed journey during the medieval period, remained an important point of connectivity well into the twentieth century. Meanwhile, monks from the lands of *al-Habasha* were often in residence at the monastery. Although information about the community is limited, Ethiopic manuscript colophons exist which outline the rules for the dependency.<sup>184</sup> Monks of *Bilad al-Habasha* possessed their own monastery in the immediate vicinity of *Dayr al-Muharraq* from the thirteenth century until its abandonment, perhaps before the turn of the nineteenth century, after which they cohabited the principal monastery.<sup>185</sup> They later requested their own church at *Dayr al-Muharraq*, and *Qumus 'Abdul Malak al-Houri* yielded to the appeal. In 1838, a church was built under the patronage of Saint Tekle Haymanot, which they used when "they wanted to [pray] in their Ethiopian language."<sup>186</sup>

But these centuries of intimacy and contact also reveal something else - what we might call a sacred elasticity. *Dayr al-Muharraq* was known among the faithful as a "second Jerusalem"

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<sup>183</sup> al-Anba Ghrigoriyus, *al-Dayr al-Muharraq*, 225-26; 242; 309-10; Yolande Mara, *The Church of Ethiopia*, (Asmara: 1972), 33.

<sup>184</sup> These colophons, ZotBNat. 32, 35, 42 and 52, are in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, as cited in T. P. Platt, *A Catalogue of the Ethiopic Biblical Manuscripts in the Royal Library of Paris* (London, 1823), 18-21.

<sup>185</sup> When two Franciscans, Fathers Protaise and Charles François, passed the monasteries in 1668, they were struck by the numbers of Abyssinians that populated the site. The friars left an account of their travels in *Relation de voyage du Sayd ou de la Thebayde fait en 1668*. Only a few copies of this book are extant. Serge Sauneron included significant extracts from the work in *Villes et legende* (Cairo: Institut Français d'archeologie Orientale du Caire, 1983), 129-130. Around this same time, Vansleb noted a separate Abyssinian monastery nearby *Dayr al-Muharraq*. See *Present State*, 217.

<sup>186</sup> al-Anba Ghrighuriyus, *al-Dayr al-Muharraq*, 128, 196.

due to its supreme significance in pious tradition.<sup>187</sup> Al-Anba Ghrighorius has noted that "the Ethiopians believe, as the Egyptians do, that *Dayr al-Muharraq* and its ancient church are as holy as the Holy Land in Palestine."<sup>188</sup> The "Holy Land" or holy lands were not bounded or self-contained; they were given to a kind of sacred sprawl. In fact, even sites of *Bilad al-Habasha* became extensions of far off holy lands. This was magnificently demonstrated in the imposing rock-hewn churches of Lalibela that represented a Zagwe-era endeavor to recreate Jerusalem in the mountains of Lasta. Centuries later, when Patriarch Yuannis XI [1428-53] notified the emperor that the sultan had demolished the celebrated monastery of al-Maghtas near Rosetta, the Solomonic ruler "rebuilt" it as "Debra Mitmaq" - at Tegaulat in the region of Shoa.<sup>189</sup>

Likewise, the rich traditions of the flight of the Holy Family admitted various accretions, so that the terminal point of their journey slowly crept southward. *Dayr Durunka*, located to the southeast of *Dayr Muharraq* was only much later counted among the sites that they had visited. In local Abyssinian traditions, the Holy Family's voyage even carried them to territories of *al-Habasha*, including the Lake Tana region of Begemder.<sup>190</sup> The sacralization of lands involved a kind of collaboration between heavenly agents and the terrestrial faithful. According to tradition, Empress Mentewab, the powerful regent-mother of Emperor Iyasu [1730-55] personally visited the venerated site of *Dayr al-Muharraq* and collected soil that she carried back to Gondar. This

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<sup>187</sup> John Watson, *Among the Copts* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 14; F. Guirguis, "The Vision," 87. Guirguis' draws on several manuscript editions of The Vision of Theophilus in her literary analysis. While this work contains some insightful material, it is one of the more extreme examples of the "persecuted minority" model.

<sup>188</sup> Ghreghorius, *al-Dayr*, 394.

<sup>189</sup> Tamrat, *Church and State*, 261-62; Abu al-Mukarim, *Churches and Monasteries*, 319. The Zagwe dynasty ruled over an extensive territory of the Abyssinian highlands from the tenth until the early thirteenth century. It probably extended across much of modern Eritrea in the north, and Wollo in the south. In the traditional periodization of Ethiopian history, the Zagwe kingdom is the successor to ancient Aksum, and the predecessor to the "restored" Solomonic dynasty (1270). The Zagwe period has suffered gross neglect in the scholarship. For a recent look at these centuries, see Tekeste Negash, "The Zagwe Period and the Zenith of Urban Culture in Ethiopia, CA. 930-1270 AD," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 61, no. 1 (2006): 120-37.

<sup>190</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, "Evangelizing the Evangelized: The Root Problem Between Missions and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church," *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*, eds. Haile et al. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 22.



soil was incorporated into the building of Debre Sahay, the church of the royal capital that was constructed under the title of Quesquam and consecrated by *Abuna* Krestodolos III.<sup>191</sup> The Gondarine church was to include a royal tomb in which the empress herself would be interred.

Incidentally, Debre Sahay was also the final resting place for the *abun* who consecrated the extravagant monument.<sup>192</sup> In other words, even as monks of *Bilad al-Habasha* were at home in and about the Qusquam of the *Sa'id*, the remains of an "Egyptian" prelate lay alongside "Abyssinian" royalty beneath the Qusquam of *Bilad al-Habasha*. Such interpenetrations contributed to the woven fabric of a shared landscape and a shared cultural inheritance. This profound interpenetration was conspicuous from the mid-seventeenth century, and well into the eighteenth, which marked a period of considerable cultural production in *Bilad al-Habasha*, as well as in *Bilad Misr* and the *Sa'id*.<sup>193</sup> Manuscript copying, illumination and similar pursuits substantially enriched the communion's inheritance to the north and to the south. Among the foremost sponsors for this cultural efflorescence in *Bilad Misr* was a family that had originated in *Bilad al-Habasha*. The activities of this "House of Habashi" included the patronization of copyists and translators.<sup>194</sup> Their situation might be likened to the that of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, whose father was a native of the "land of Jabart."<sup>195</sup> While "Jabart" initially referred to the southeastern coastal regions in the vicinity of Zayla', "Jabarti" later came to refer more

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<sup>191</sup> Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II*, 52-3, 126. The grants of land for the church of Qusquam were given in the 1730s and 1740s. Donald Crummey has analyzed these documents in "Gondar Land Documents: Multiple Copies, Multiple Recensions," *Northeast African Studies* 11.3 (2011), 1-42, 149-50. The structure was extremely ornate, and became a model of church architecture. It was filled with Qebat partisans (which the regent-mother and Emperor Iyasu II supported) to counterbalance the prominent Unionist establishment of Debra Berhan; Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 108.

<sup>192</sup> H. Weld Blundell, trans. and ed. *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia 1769-1840* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 447-48. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II*, 88.

<sup>193</sup> Kathleen Bickford Berzock, *The Miracles of Mary: A Seventeenth Century Ethiopian Manuscript* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2002), 7.

<sup>194</sup> 'Abd al-Shaheed 'Abd al-Nour, "Copyists and Sponsors," 7-8. Georges Legraine makes reference to the al-Habashi family of Zawiya in the Luxor region which, he was assured, originally came from Abyssinia. See *Une Famille Copte de Haute-Egypte*, (Bruxelles: Édition de la Fondation Égyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1945), 31.

<sup>195</sup> Al-Jabarti, *'aja'ib al-Athar*, 1-305.

generically to those Muslim settlers and converts of the northern Abyssinian highlands.<sup>196</sup> The assimilation of the al-Jabartis into the cultural milieu of Islamic *Bilad Misr* was possible by virtue of a common worldview.<sup>197</sup> The same can surely be said for these Copts of "Abyssinian" extraction. Their place of origin was secondary - what was primary was a shared worldview and a shared communion.

But if al-Qusqam has provided occasion for speaking of the entwinements of an interregional fabric, it also provides an illustration of this fabric in the course of its unraveling. During restorations at the monastery in the mid-1930s, concerns were raised that the structural integrity of the Church of the Virgin Mary was imperiled by the overhead Church of Saint Tekle Haymanot, and for the sake of caution the Abyssinian structure was demolished. Whether or not it posed any real danger, there is no question about the endangerment of an order in which an Abyssinian church could be incorporated very naturally within the great monastery of the *Sa'id*. The affair culminated in a flourish of unintended symbolism as the iconostasis of the demolished structure was used to replace the one in the lower church that had been eaten by termites.<sup>198</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter begins and ends with a discussion of monasteries at two kinds of "peripheries;" the desert and the *Sa'id* respectively. At *Dayr al-Muharraq*, monks from the *Sa'id* and *Bilad al-Habasha* and elsewhere could share a sacred space - but just like in the case of the desert monasteries, this was hardly a pure world of sacred isolation. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the monastery was under the protection of Shaykh 'Abdallah ibn Muwafi, the

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<sup>196</sup> On the historical development of the term, see Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform, Reaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 60-62.

<sup>197</sup> Indeed, this kind of assimilation was a rather prosaic affair, and Al-Jabarti only offered an off-handed remark about his origins in an autobiographical note.

<sup>198</sup> al-Anba Ghrighuriyus, *al-Dayr al-Muharraq*, 128.

head of the tribe of al-Maghariba that controlled a modest stretch of territory including Sanabu and al-Qusiya.<sup>199</sup> These kinds of relationships have constituted the substance of regional history. Indeed, the life along an "Alexandrian geography" cannot be conceived apart from them. Even as late as the 1880s it could still be said that "the convent contained ... a population of 1,110 inhabitants, consisting of monks, peasants and Bedouin."<sup>200</sup> This is a phenomenal testament to the resiliency of an order that defies sterile classifications, one that could admit "Abyssinians" and "Egyptians," laity, clerics and religious, bedouin and peasants. Our "travels" to the deserts and beyond have been impelled by the conviction that intermediate sites and relationships are vital to the very conceptualization of transregional history, and that their neglect has been a primary cause for the historical obstacles to conceiving of an "Alexandrian geography." But notwithstanding a certain durability of some features of the order that we have engaged, there is no question that it would be eroded over the course of the nineteenth century. It is this process to which we now turn.

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<sup>199</sup> In the only reference to *Dayr al-Muharrag* in the volumes commissioned during the French expedition, the monastery was said to have been dependent upon Shaykh 'Abdallah - see E. Jomard, "Antiquités de l'Heptanomie" in *Description de l'Égypte* (Paris: Imprimerie de C. L. F. Panckoucke, 1821), 4:301-302. Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, *Qaba'il al-'arab fi misr wa as-Sudan* (Damascus: al-Wataniya al-Jadida, 2009 [1935]), 36.

<sup>200</sup> Abu al-Mukarim, *Churches and Monasteries*, 224 fn. 4. B. T. A. Evetts cites this figure in a footnote.

## Chapter Three

### “Out of Africa?”

In the preceding chapters, we have explored various questions related to the see of Alexandria and its following from a number of perspectives in an effort to uncover histories that have been concealed, distorted or fragmented in the historiography. We have problematized bounded objects and concepts - institutional, territorial, communal - with an emphasis on relationships and liminal sites that in various ways challenge their limiting effects on the historical imagination. We have also touched upon various processes that laid the groundwork for the emergence of those very objects. In the next two chapters, some of the processes and discourses of the nineteenth century are brought into greater focus, with a continued emphasis on "regional" - and particularly "southern" - dimensions. These chapters are divided geographically, with *Bilad al-Sudan* and *Bilad al-Habasha* serving as respective focal points. This arrangement is a practical one, and it is in keeping with the aim of the project that there will be considerable overlap between the two.

In the first two sections of Chapter Three, we are concerned with the emergence and development of discourses and narrations that contributed to an effect of distance between "Egypt," and "Africa." We also consider critically a number of frames and concepts that have been used to apprehend the relationship of "Egypt" to "Africa," with attention to the distortions and constraints that they sometimes entail. In the subsequent sections, we follow a range of material processes and interventions that profoundly affected the region, its dynamics and relationships, taking Mehmet 'Ali's "opening" of *al-Sudan* as a point of departure. Along the

way, the regional life of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion will factor prominently as we explore the transformations that impacted and unsettled "the Sudan" and "Egypt" simultaneously.

### **Coptic Cameos; or Eunuchs, Slaves and Civilization**

During the nineteenth century, perhaps no issue carried more capital in the mission civilisatrice than that of slavery. The status of slavery in the Ottoman Empire and the networks of the Ottoman slave trade, including the African trade, would become convenient moral objects for Western governments. The first stirrings of European abolitionist interest in the region began at the end of the 1830s, and only at mid-century did the slave trade become a dominant theme among moralizing Westerners. These concerns were closely entwined with political, diplomatic and economic concerns, so that the moral distance that was projected from Europe was not so evident on the ground.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as the upper Nile became a viable field for Western traders, a motley array of Europeans involved themselves in the business of human trafficking. At least one among their ranks, wishing to maximize his returns, even sent some of his slaves with the stipulation that they should be returned to him as eunuchs. A German traveler and scholar detected the hypocrisy among Europeans, noting that the same people who "bristle up at the very mention of slavery" in Europe are capable of finding it "so agreeable to possess slaves themselves when they are here."<sup>2</sup> As the century progressed, the struggle against the slave trade was not only a grave cause for European governments and humanitarians, but it became a proving ground for leaders like Isma'il Pasha as they sought to demonstrate to Europeans the

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<sup>1</sup> Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad Ali, *The British, the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Sudan: 1820-1881* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1972), 7. Alice Moore-Harell provides an overview of some of these political considerations in "Economic and Political Aspects of the Slave Trade in Ethiopia and the Sudan in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," (*International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32, no. 2/3 (1999): 407-21.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Puckler-Muskau, *Egypt Under Mehemet Ali*, trans. H. Evans Lloyd (London: Henry Colburn, 1845), 2:104; 2:251; 2:311.

enlightenment of their rule. Civilizational projects, whether emanating from Western capitals or from Cairo, accompanied the projection of modern regimes of power, and the blight of the slave trade was peppered throughout correspondences of British agents in *Bilad Misr* and *Bilad al-Habasha*. As Isma'il Pasha pursued his dream of an African Empire, the eradication of the trade provided ethical support for his endeavors.

Historical fixations, together with profound social, economic and political transformations of the nineteenth century have tended to vitiate an appreciation of a complex of relationships and networks as they reached across vaguely defined regions. This is apparent in myriad ways in the scholarship. Walz has noticed one such example in Andre Raymond's equation of the "Jallaba" with "slave merchants," although the Jallaba were simply merchants of the long-distance African trade - which included a very wide range of commodities.<sup>3</sup> This association reaches back at least to the time of the French Expedition, when one savant off-handedly remarked that "the ghellabis, or slave merchants, can only go to Egypt in caravans of somewhat considerable size."<sup>4</sup> After 1815, Mehmet 'Ali's trade monopolies and price-fixing had a detrimental effect on many long distance merchants of the southern trade, as the commodities that they had previously handled were now unavailable to them. As early as 1813, English Consul Missett noticed that the impossible conditions gave rise to an unprecedented frequency of bankruptcies at Cairo, and "almost all the native merchants had ceased trading."<sup>5</sup> Belzoni glimpsed the early intrusion while visiting the *Sa'id* market at Manfalut (near Asyut), to which a "constant commerce" brought articles from Darfur. Ibrahim Pasha (Mehmet 'Ali's eldest son and then governor of the *Sa'id*) was, in Belzoni's description, "always the first to select what he pleases from the caravan ;

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<sup>3</sup> Terence Walz, "Egypt in Africa: a lost perspective in Artisans, commerçants au Caire au XVIIIè siècle," in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 4 (1975): 664.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Frank, "Mémoires Sur le commerce des Negres au Caire, et sur les maladies auxquelles ils sont sujets en y arrivant" in *Mémoires sur l'Égypte* 4:130.

<sup>5</sup> Missett to Edward Cooke, NA UK FO 24/4 (November 9, 1813), ff. 85-6.

for which he fixes his own price, and pays what he likes." In light of these changes, the trading opportunities for the Jallaba narrowed and they were increasingly confined to the trade in slaves.

<sup>6</sup> In a very real way, the "center" contributed material out of which caricatures of "benighted" peripheries could be fashioned.

Coptic traders were counted among these brutal "Egyptian" slavers. By mid-century, the rising tensions among the followers of Alexandrian see – as well as the mediatory role of central authorities - can be discerned in a communication between 'Abbas Pasha and *Ras 'Ali* of Yejju, the regent of the puppet emperor at Gondar. According to 'Abbas Pasha, the regent discovered that "some Copts" in the province of Aswan were breaking with convention in their acquisition of slaves. They sought to "gain access by deception and tricks to the freeborn among the Habasha for whom it [was] not permissible to sell their children." The latter were lured across the frontiers of *Bilad al-Habasha* and then sold as war prisoners. One Copt, Da'ud at Khartoum, was singled out for his use of this stratagem. As part of his intervention in the situation, 'Abbas drafted two letters concerning the "illegal affairs" of the Copts. <sup>7</sup> By the eve of the British occupation, the Asyuti Copt Maqar Dumyan turned up in consular reports as the foremost figure in the disreputable trade, and all of the slave dealers were said to have been his associates or paid agents. <sup>8</sup> What affinities may have existed between the *Sa'id* and regions further south were gradually replaced with reductionist narratives of antagonism and subjugation, with Western powers and "enlightened" agencies at Cairo collaborating or competing to introduce the good manners of civilization.

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<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Battista Belzoni, *Narrative of Operations and Recent Discoveries in Egypt and Nubia* (London: John Murray, 1822), 2:31; Walz, *Trade*, 233-36.

<sup>7</sup> This letter, written on 4 Ramadan, 1268 (June 22, 1852), is available in a volume of the collected writings of 'Abbas Pasha. See *Al-Amir Muhammad 'Ali, Majm'ua Khitabat wa Awamir Khasa fi al-Maghfur lahu. 'Abbas Basha al-Awal* (Cairo, 1900), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Baer cites this intelligence in "Slavery in Nineteenth Century Egypt," *Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (November 1967): 436.

The complex material transformations across the nineteenth century remain beyond our immediate scope. For now, we consider in brief the emergence of narrations about the region in which "Copts" have tended to appear in certain limited roles - when they appear at all. In describing the treatment of Copts in modern histories of Egypt, Nelly Van Doorn-Harder has observed a marked absence, aside from what she calls the usual "stereotypical cameo appearances," an insight which can be extended to include the wider region as well.<sup>9</sup> Before Western governments and "enlightened" officials at Cairo spoke together the language of civilization and barbarism, certain topics stirred the interest of Western observers, and these inhabit the archives in a state of magnified significance. Perhaps nothing epitomizes the peculiarity of the regionally inflected "cameo appearances" more than the subject of the "eunuch industry." During the course of his early nineteenth century travels to *Bilad Misr*, *Bilad al-Sudan* and *Bilad al-Habasha*, French naturalist Frédéric Caillaud made the following characteristic report:

The Copts, by means of a duty that they pay to the government, enjoy the privilege of exercising the infamous occupation of mutilating children between eight and ten years of age; it is with a razor that they practice this cruel operation.<sup>10</sup>

As we will demonstrate, Caillaud was hardly the first or the last to address the topic. But before doing so, some preliminary points are in order on the significance of eunuchs in an Ottoman context.<sup>11</sup> Eunuchs served a range of functions in the prominent households across the

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<sup>9</sup> Van Doorn-Harder, "Finding a Platform," 479.

<sup>10</sup> Frédéric Caillaud, *Voyage à Méroé au fleuve Blanc, au delà de Fâzoql dans le midi du royaume de Sennâr, à Syouah et dans cinq autres oasis fait dans les années 1819, 1820, 1821 et 1822* (Paris, L'Imprimerie Royale, 1826), 3:117. When Evliya Celebi made his travels to *Misr* in the late seventeenth century, he observed that there were ten eunuch surgeons practicing. At the time of his visit, they had recently operated on 100 black slave children, who were "sent as a gift to Katkhada Ibrahim Pasha." However, he did not specify whether they were Copts; he only noted that they were "brown-skinned." His censure was severe however. These men, he declared, "do not know mercy, they are brutal, and there is no light in their grotesque faces." See Evliya Celebi, *Rihlat ila Misr wa al-Sudan wa al-Habash*, ed. Magda Makhluf (Cairo: Dar al-Afaq al-'Arabiya, 2005), 1:500.

<sup>11</sup> Their significance was by no means limited to Ottoman statecraft. For an account of their presence in the Seventeenth Century Abyssinian court, see Baratti, *Late Travels*, 52. The presence of eunuchs in the courts of



empire, and by virtue of their access to the inner sanctums in what Hathaway calls the "politics of households," their influence was significant, particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, Ottoman historians have sometimes spoken of a period during the seventeenth century as the "Sultanate of the African eunuchs."<sup>12</sup> The black eunuchs serving the Imperial Harem at Topkapi Palace held some of the most sensitive positions of state, and the Chief Black Eunuch was among the most powerful figures after the vizier. They were also an integral part of the networks connecting provincial households with the palace. Local grandees in Ottoman *Misir* understood that the favor of the Chief Black Eunuch could, in Hathaway's words, "propel an aspiring grandee into the highest and most lucrative local offices." She continues: "between 1678 and 1754, with few exceptions the party favored by the eunuch dominated Egypt's key beylical and regimental offices."<sup>13</sup> Into the nineteenth century their role was integral to Ottoman statecraft, and Mehmet 'Ali followed the "traditional" protocols of the *walis* at *Misir*, at one point remitting as many as 200 eunuchs from Darfur "as a present" to the Sultan.<sup>14</sup>

The transregional dimension of the eunuch "industry" was not merely a "southern" affair. At one level, this is because some eunuchs had also come from the Balkans. But more fundamentally, they were part of a web of networks linking the imperial center with the province of *Misir* and elsewhere. In all of this, "the Copts" are objects of a double process of *isolation* and

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Abyssinia persisted well into the modern period. In the 1840s, the mother of the regent of the emperor was said to have had favored eunuchs, and *Ras Webe*, the grandee of Tigre, kept his treasury staffed with eunuchs who were involved in the "ordering of domestic matters;" see Walter Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country: With an Account of a Mission to Ras Ali in 1848* (London, 1868), 44, 380. In the late nineteenth century, eunuchs were employed in the kingdoms to the southwest, including Gera in the Gibe territory, and in the Kaffa kingdom, where they served a mediatory role between the nobility and the ruler; see Timothy Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifra: Modes of Production and Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2010), 69.

<sup>12</sup> Eunuchs figured prominently in the Ottoman "decline" literature. Their influence was said to have drawn "harem women" into the realm of court politics, which in turn – according to this older literature – had a corrupting effect on the imperial system. Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 44.

<sup>13</sup> Hathaway, *Politics*, 163. Chapter Four of Hathaway's study, "The Qazdaglis and the Chief Black Eunuch" (139-164) is an excellent study of eunuchs in the context of the Ottoman province of *Misir* for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

<sup>14</sup> Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 330.

*magnification* that has contributed to certain idiosyncrasies in the script. On the one hand, they are isolated from the wider web of Ottoman networks; on the other, the practice of a small section of Copts at a specific locale is magnified. The isolation means that the implications of the involvement of specific Copts in a field so integral to the mechanisms of empire go virtually without comment.<sup>15</sup> But just as importantly, what has been magnified is now universalized - a localized practice has become one of the familiar historical markers of "the Copts." They arrive in time for a terrible "cameo appearance," and then promptly make their egress.

Among European observers, inquiries into the southern trade began to appear in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Hence we find the representative reports of Louis Frank of the French expedition and George Baldwin, British Consul-General in Egypt. Each report was produced within the context of the material designs of their respective nations - Frank in cooperation with the vast French project of mastery through knowledge, and Baldwin somewhat earlier in obedience to a request from the council of trade at Whitehall. In 1788, a correspondence was forwarded to Baldwin asking him to undertake a study relating to the commerce in slaves and other articles from the interior of Africa. Among the many details that the board wished to learn was the volume of the slave trade, where the slaves had originated and whether "the male slaves are usually castrated."<sup>16</sup> Baldwin made a report, and some years later he shared some of his findings with a more general audience in the publication of his memoirs. A limited number of slaves, he recollected, were "castrated for the seraglio, and for other people in power." The text continues:

[they] do not undergo that abominable fate until they arrive in Upper Egypt -where,

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<sup>15</sup> One historian provides an incidental reference to a Coptic arkhon's investment in eunuchs, a rare reference to the Coptic "eunuch connection" which goes beyond the "surgery" itself. He notes that one of the wealthiest eighteenth century lay notables, *al-Mu'allim* Girgis Abu Shahata, invested a significant amount of money in eunuchs, although he does not elaborate. See Muhammad 'Afifi, *al-'Aqbat*, 126.

<sup>16</sup> Whitehall to Baldwin, NA UK FO/21/1 (October 3, 1788), ff.148-9.

I am informed, a Copht family, which has exercised that profession from father to son for a series of years, continue to live by their dexterity in that practice.<sup>17</sup>

While Baldwin offers no critical commentary on this “Copht family,” the appearance of “Cophts” is merely incidental, which is arguably a sign of a more general marginalization of “Eastern Christianity” in the Western view.<sup>18</sup> In the late eighteenth century, there was a marked shift away from what one scholar has described as an “imaginary and apocryphal discourse” and toward one that was self-consciously “rational and scientific.”<sup>19</sup> This shift closely accompanied emergent projects aimed at exploring the region with an eye to material exploitation. Already in the 1780s, the French government was entertaining the possibility of occupying Egypt as a counterpoise to British influence and to solidify its position in the Near East against Russian and Austrian gains in the event of the Ottoman Empire's collapse.<sup>20</sup> For centuries, the Christians of the East represented an alluring object of “Western” interest, as was perhaps most powerfully exhibited in the “Prester John” legends, which maintained some popularity across the Latin West for 500 years. While these did not entirely disappear, the Christian East became increasingly peripheral to the Western gaze. In the first chapter, we observed an ambivalence about Copts, and at times even a brazen hostility, in the years leading up to and inclusive of the French Campaign. Here, we might preliminarily suggest that a discursive distance between “Eastern Christians” and the “West” was opening which served as the backdrop for the emergence of a civilizational distance.<sup>21</sup> In his study of the southern trade undertaken during the French

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<sup>17</sup> George Baldwin, *Political Recollections Relative to Egypt* (London, 1801), 228.

<sup>18</sup> As time went on, Coptic artifacts increasingly fell into the shadows of the magnificent creations of the ancients. Hermann Puckler-Muskau's abhorrence at the Coptic desecration of ancient monuments was representative of this trend. While exploring the ancient Thebes, he grumbled that at Karnak "the Copts have again intruded a church, and have daubed hideous pictures of saints on the master-pieces of the pharaohs;" see *Egypt*, 2:58.

<sup>19</sup> Ali Behdad, “Orientalism” in *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jennifer Speake, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 3:890.

<sup>20</sup> Dodwell, *The Founder*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Levine identifies a similar trajectory in the orientation toward Abyssinia, the once charmed land of Prester John. When in the eighteenth century Bruce described certain uncouth details of his experience, his account

Campaign, Frank provided considerable space to the details of the eunuch industry before noting that with the arrival of the French, “the barbaric practice of such an inhumane mutilation of negroes stopped spontaneously.”<sup>22</sup> Eastern Christians were gradually marginalized, and associated directly or indirectly with their corrupted environment, and it was [here] the salutary influence of the French that halted - if temporarily - such a barbaric practice. Years later, a French scholar described his encounter with one of these Coptic surgeons, noting his "cold-blooded" affirmation that eunuchs "always existed" and his justification that "if we quit the practice, others will do it, and perhaps less successfully." The Frenchman admitted, however, that he "admired the subtle malignancy" of his interlocutor.<sup>23</sup>

The various strands are brought together in the later assessment of Guillaume Lejean, briefly the French consul at Masawa in the early 1860s:

The invasion of Egypt by the Muslims made the oppressed Alexandrian Church depraved and barbaric, dishonoring the Christian name in Egypt and having the most disastrous influence on the Upper Nile. The Abyssinian clergy, relatively moral, and educated ... found itself subordinated to those ignorant and haughty monks who left the desert convents where just 50 years ago they created eunuchs for the Muslim harems.<sup>24</sup>

By now, the somber history of the eunuch trade was matter-of-factly integrated into the account, but with the added detail that not merely Copts, but monks were known to have performed the surgeries. This was perhaps first reported by Burckhardt, who recorded that during his stay in the country, the surgeries were performed at the small village to the south of Asyut called Zawiyat

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was pilloried by those who "refused to believe his gory accounts." Levine argues that the "image of highland Ethiopia as a savage place" only gained purchase in the nineteenth century when "European attitudes toward Africa hardened toward arrogant ethnocentrism at best and a vicious exploitative ethnocentrism at worst." See *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Frank, "Mémoire sur le commerce des negres au Kaire et sur les maladies auxquelles ils sont sujets y arrivant" Appendix in *Voyages dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte, pendant les campagnes du Général Bonaparte* (London, 1802), 2: cxxxxix.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Hamont, *Égypte sous Mehemet-Ali* (Paris: Leautey et Lecointe, 1845), 1:360-61.

<sup>24</sup> Guillaume Lejean, *Theodore II: Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie et les Intérêts Français dans le Sud de la Mer Rouge* (Paris: Amyot, 1865), 36.

al-Dayr at the hands of “two monks who were said to excel all their predecessors in dexterity.”<sup>25</sup> For Lejean, the Alexandrian church bore the effects of an insalubrious Islamic climate, a point that was punctuated by the cooperation of monks themselves in the ghastly services rendered to the “Muslim harems.” The distance between the corrupted church and the “West” could not have been more starkly drawn.

Certain earlier orientations bring into relief the *modernity* of these civilizational distances between "East" and "West." The Franciscans of the *Sa'id* mission would seem to exemplify an earlier disposition, which in fact overlapped with later trends. From the seventeenth century, they sought to insinuate themselves within the local setting. When English traveler Henry Light visited the *Sa'id* in 1814, he witnessed a pair of boats transporting 150 eunuchs from Asyut to Cairo. A Franciscan friar of the Akhmim mission who was a medical practitioner accompanied these boys. When asked, the friar answered potential criticisms of the industry, explaining that while the operation was “painful and cruel,” it was “easily performed and without much danger, eleven only having died out of 160.”<sup>26</sup> These missionaries arrived with no elaborate vision for remaking the mission territory in the image of “Europe,” and they certainly did not appear as heralds of civilization. Two very different casts of mind can likewise be observed in the contrast between French Jesuit Claude Sicard and French orientalist Claude Étienne Savary. When Sicard toured the environs to the east of Wadi al-Natrun during the 1720s, he burned a large trove of notes in the possession of the Copts believing them to contain “magic characters.”<sup>27</sup> Fifty years later, Savary – himself an exemplar of the “scientific and rational” currents of his time – passed

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<sup>25</sup> Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 329.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Light, *Travels in Egypt, Nubia, Holy Land, Mount Libanon, and Cyprus, in the Year 1814* (London, 1818), 46. Some years later, Jowett described his meeting with Franciscan Father Luigi who explained that the surgery was performed on approximately 2000 boys. The father said that Ibrahim Pasha sent him 500 to treat, of whom "only" three perished. Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*, 159.

<sup>27</sup> Sicard, *Description*, 44.

the same region, pointing out the spot at which Father Sicard “burnt heaps of ancient manuscripts, deposited in a dove-house, pretending they were books of magic.” He regretted that in his “blind fanaticism” – after all, such “superstition” was the bane of enlightened thought – the priest had in a moment destroyed the “treasures of many centuries.”<sup>28</sup>

A shift was taking place, and one that would drive a wedge between “Europe” and the “East;” and indeed one that would also distance “Europe” from aspects of its own past.<sup>29</sup> The reputed “blind fanaticism” of Sicard was not unlike criticisms leveled against Copts or other Orientals. In the nineteenth century, European missionaries would increasingly appropriate the civilizational discourses of the age, as would the disciples of “modernity” in the East from the large landowners and Isma’il Pasha to reformist men of religion like Muhammad ‘Abduh or Coptic Patriarch Kirulus IV.<sup>30</sup> But while the later “European” missionaries spoke of modern ideals as insiders, “Eastern” actors had to contend with prevailing claims that “modernity” was a Western phenomenon. When the Church Missionary Society arrived to work with the Copts and Abyssinian Christians, conversion was not their principal aim. Rather they sought to revive the Oriental churches. But the roles were set, and it was perfectly clear who were the purveyors of vitalization and progress, and who were its recipients. As Reinhardt Shultze summarized the phenomenon, “Europe” has described the

Islamic (as well as other) worlds in diachronic terms; that is, it has defined an ‘Islamic condition’ ... and looked at Islamic history exclusively in terms of the extent to which it represents a deviation from early Islamic norms.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Claude Savary, *Lettres sur l’Egypte*, Tome 1 (Paris, 1786), 73.

<sup>29</sup> This gulf was apparent in the writings of French physician Charles Cuny, who in the 1840s noted the credulity of the people of Egypt. They believed universally in magic and spells, including even “the *Mu’allim* Suryan Shenouda,” a respected Coptic merchant of the Darfur trade. To underscore the point, he noted that the *mu’allim* had recounted having seen a Taqruri “changed before him into a jackal and a wolf.” Charles Cuny, “Notice sur le Dar-four et sur les caravanes qui se rendent de ce pays en Egypte, et vice-versa,” in *Bulletin de la societe geographique de Paris*, 4th ser., 8 (1854), 114-15.

<sup>30</sup> For a consideration of the comparable initiatives of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Patriarch Cyril (Kirulus) IV, see Sedra, “Textbook Maneuvers,” 22ff.

<sup>31</sup> Reinhardt Shulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 4.

His assessment applies to a good deal of the discourse about the Coptic Church, insofar as it has been identified with the “traditional” East. Thus, a popular history about the Coptic Church suggested that signs of vitality could possibly present “interesting paradoxes” in a contemporary Coptic condition:

Some might say [Coptic Christianity] is quite tradition bound; indeed one can experience directly much of the tone and flavor of primitive Christianity by observing Coptic Church life. Yet in the 1990s, the Coptic Church is a lively movement by most standards.<sup>32</sup>

The “lively movement” does not discredit the claim that the church is “quite tradition bound;” rather, it may simply introduce a compelling paradox. Sicard’s “fanaticism” could fade within the structured recesses of a “European” discourse of progress. Europe, as the subject of history, was at liberty to distance itself from features of its past in a way that “other worlds” were not. Sicard’s moral proximity to his surroundings or the Franciscans’ passive cooperation in the eunuch trade faded with the march of time, while the participation of Copts in the eunuch industry or the slave trade remain strangely immanent to the historical memory.<sup>33</sup>

In brief, new discourses tended to peripheralize the Copts while their regional involvements were distilled into a few relatively predictable roles. The fragmented picture that emerges has sometimes been translated in civilizational terms, for which “Europe” becomes a direct or indirect mediator. But even the material from which the basest “cameo appearances” have been fashioned can provide seeds for fruitful “against the grain” readings of history. For instance, in seeking to uncover the number of slaves sold annually at the Wakalat al-Jallaba,

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<sup>32</sup> Theodore Partrick Hall, *Traditional Egyptian Christianity: a history of the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Greensboro: Fisher Park Press, 1996), viii.

<sup>33</sup> Castration also existed as a cultural phenomenon in the Christian West. At least from the sixteenth century, and well into the nineteenth, a group of vocalists, called the “castrati,” were used in Italian music culture to serve as altos and sopranos. Some of these castrati sang in the Sistine Chapel, and many seventeenth and eighteenth century Catholic theologians argued that castration was licit in certain circumstances; see John Rosselli, “The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550-1850,” *Acta Musicologica* 60, no.2 (1988): 151; 155.

Frank was thwarted in his efforts. He approached the Coptic scribe, who “for 30 years registered all the negroes that were sold,” but he was unable to acquire any information. He noted that the registers would be of no use either, for “instead of conserving the registers, they burned them every year.”<sup>34</sup> This represents a clash between distinctive regimes of knowledge that we addressed in the first chapter; On the one hand, that which was self-consciously "scientific" and comprehensive; and on the other, that which inhered in the interstices - the “local,” the guarded - and increasingly the endangered. The modern forms of knowledge held a unique relationship with the text and the artifact; as such, the annual burning of ledgers was surely a serious offense to modern bureaucratic sensibilities in much the same way that Sicard’s burning of “books of magic” might have violated epistemological sensibilities. When Madden made his travels south of Asyut in the 1820s, the traces of this order were still apparent. While he had difficulty obtaining information about the eunuch surgery, “the Copts” assured him that they possessed “a styptic, prepared from herbs, which was unknown to all the world besides.”<sup>35</sup> The European inquisitors sometimes read these grudging and limited disclosures not as maneuvers that characterized a particular regime of guarded knowledge, but as signs of mendacity or shame. Burckhardt concluded that the whole enterprise was "held in contempt even by the vilest Egyptians," and that the marvelous profits must have induced their participation in an industry "which many of them in their hearts abhor."<sup>36</sup>

And these fragments might also speak to a subsequent period in the erosion of the described order. Established industries, economies and trading networks deteriorated with the rise of state monopolies, the increasing supply of cheap European imports and the shift toward a

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<sup>34</sup> Frank, "Mémoire" (1802), ccxl.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Madden, *Travels in Turkey, Egypt, Nubia and Palestine, 1824, 1825, 1826 & 1827* (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), 292.

<sup>36</sup> Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 329.



cash crop economy.<sup>37</sup> In Gabriel Baer's 1969 social history of modern Egypt, Copts are predictably wheeled onto the stage in their role as eunuch surgeons. But he then adds that this practice was "prohibited later" in Mehmet 'Ali's reign after which time "the eunuchs were imported 'ready-made' from Kordofan and Darfur."<sup>38</sup> One might note that as ready-made European products flooded local markets and disrupted local industries, even the eunuchs that had been "made" near the town of Abu Tig were now arriving "ready-made." Although Baer does not elaborate on the point, narrative accounts of the persistence - or perhaps the transference - of the practice are available. A testimony from Kurdufan in the 1840s identified "Sultan Tehme," a "sheikh" at al-Ubayyid, as a prominent surgeon in the trade.<sup>39</sup> Some years later, the British consul at Masawa noted that the same was being performed in a "Galla" (Oromo) region in the southwest of *Bilad al-Habasha*.<sup>40</sup> Many of these eunuchs would be transported north, into "Turkish" markets.

Usama Makdisi has contended that in "an age of Western dominated modernity, every nation creates its own orient," and here the very early material for such a process might be observed from Cairo, with its own distinctive "orient."<sup>41</sup> We have already suggested how policies issuing from the "center" narrowed the trading sectors for provincial merchants and contributed to the construction of the very caricatures of provincial/*Sa'idi* uncivilization that the

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<sup>37</sup> Fred Lawson, *The Social Origins of Egyptian Expansionism During the Muhammad Ali Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 69.

<sup>38</sup> Gabriel Baer, *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 164. Ehud Toledano was unable to find evidence that eunuch surgeries were being performed in the Ottoman territories during the latter half of the nineteenth century; see *Slavery and Abolition*, 45. Although G. Tournés cited Asyut as the location for these surgeries after mid-century, his information seems to have been outdated. Tournés did provide an accurate description of the surgery itself, although the fatality rate that he cited (60%) was much higher than most accounts have indicated. G. Tournés, *Les eunuques en Egypte* (Geneve: Vaney, 1869), 10-13.

<sup>39</sup> Ignatius Pallme, *Travels in Kordofan. A Description of that Province on Egypt with a Review of the Present State of the Commerce in those Countries, of the Habits and Customs of the Inhabitants, as Also an Account of the Slave-Hunts Taking Place Under the Government of Mehemed Ali* (London: J. Madden and Co., 1844), 86.

<sup>40</sup> Plowden, "Report on Slave Trade," NA UK FO 195/375 (December 20, 1850). When the grandee of Tigre sent an embassy to Cairo in 1841 to request a new *abun*, he remitted gifts for the patriarch as well as for Mehmet 'Ali. Four eunuchs were included among the gifts for the pasha; Kruse to Secretaries, CMS, C M/O 45/100. (May 20, 1841).

<sup>41</sup> see Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism" in *American Historical Review* 107, no. 2 (June, 2002): 769.

“center” was charged with redeeming. We might also suggest the possibility of multiple grades of "orientalization" for which eunuch surgeries were re-inscribed at gradations further afield.

### **Egypt, the Sudan and Colonialism**

It is impossible to speak of regional fragmentation in the historiography without addressing the preeminent fragmenting object, the bounded national unit. The vast metanarratives of civilization, or particular concepts and institutions, like "race" or "slavery," are often deployed with explicit or implicit reference to these objects. In *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, historian Eve Trout Powell has engaged some of the themes we have touched upon, and her work figures prominently in this section. She provides a theoretically-informed study of a "southern" dimension to Egyptian and Ottoman history, correctly identifying a serious deficiency in the historiography of modern Egypt; that is, the gaping neglect of the Sudan in virtually all of the studies that seek to understand the development of modern Egyptian national identity. The fraught questions of slavery and race are central threads which run through her investigation as she attempts to navigate a discursive terrain complicated by the multiple perspectives of the tangled web of power – Egyptian nationalists, Turkish pashas, British officials. Through a critical study of the cultural production of successive generations of Egyptian nationalists (particularly for the 50-year period subsequent to Britain's 1881 occupation of Egypt) Trout Powell explores how "the Sudan helped Egyptians identify what was Egyptian about Egypt, in a burgeoning national sense." But her work is also of interest due to certain controversial points in her analysis that call attention to deficiencies in the state of the field. Perhaps due to her primary focus on a later period, the complexity of transregional histories is sometimes lost within discursive parameters that she deploys; the protagonists in the “triangulated” context of colonial

modernity (Egypt, Sudan, Great Britain) would seem to be well in place.

In reference to Mehmet 'Ali's southern conquest in 1820, Troutt Powell notes that "by absorbing the Sudan into Egypt's borders, [the Pasha] distinguished Egypt from Sudan and brought Egypt a little closer to Europe." This excerpt is characteristic of a usage pervasive in the wider literature. Despite theoretical rigors about the modern national imaginary, "Egypt" and "the Sudan" are nonetheless employed as self-evident objects across time. She speaks of their respective inhabitants in like manner, noting for example that before Mehmet 'Ali's conquest "there had existed a long tradition of trade between Egyptians and Sudanese of different kingdoms and sultanates."<sup>42</sup> Although she acknowledges fundamental changes after 1820 (when the relationship between "Egypt" and "the Sudan" was "institutionalized") these two entities remain self-evident for the periods before and after 1820. Two sets of analytical questions then might be linked - *who* were these "Egyptians"/"Sudanese" and *what* complicating factors are concealed within these transhistorical markers of "Egypt" (or "the Sudan")? There is no question that elite writers would begin to position "Egypt" closer to Europe and away from "Africa;" but care should be taken, lest we affirm the very constructs that we seek to scrutinize. How do we get from an eighteenth and early nineteenth century polyvalence of regional relations, the condition of amorphous "boundaries" where one region led into the next, to the condition that Troutt Powell identifies? How has a rich regional complexity all but disappeared beneath simple rubrics such as "Egypt" and "Africa" or "the-Sudan?" And can categories like "slavery" and "race" obscure the manifold relationships that constituted that complexity?

Scholars have noted that compared with many other regions of the world, the study of

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<sup>42</sup> Troutt Powell, *Different Shade*, 47, 29.

(non-white) slavery in the Ottoman/Middle East has been underdeveloped.<sup>43</sup> At first sight, this may appear to gainsay the contention that slavery is a dominating category in the apprehension of "Egypt's" or the "Middle East's" relationship with "Africa." However, this critique is arguably too narrow. The historical neglect of the African slave trade and slavery in Islamic and Middle East studies is related to a wider neglect of the "southern" dimension of Egyptian/Middle East history. Many reasons for this "rupture" can be identified, among these the colonialist and Orientalist compartmentalization of the world in the American and European academy.<sup>44</sup> But the practical effect of the rupture is that the "Arab" or "Islamic Middle East" exists against an "African" backdrop, although there has been no consensus as to where exactly this "Africa" begins. Sometimes "the Sudan" has been a generic gateway into Africa. Other studies have emphasized a borderland between Sudan's "Arab north" and "black African" south - a conceptual division which itself can be traced at least in part to the methods of governance during the period of British colonial rule.<sup>45</sup> Elena Vezzadini has recently made an important intervention in the literature, situating the discourses about slavery in the Sudan in their colonial context. Slavery not only served as a justification for Britain's takeover of the Sudan in 1898, but

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<sup>43</sup> Terence Walz and Kenneth Cuno, "The Study of Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean," *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, eds. Terence Walz and Kenneth Cuno (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 1. On the specific historiography of slavery, the authors' point is certainly valid, and their aim was not to address this wider problematic. In fact, Terence Walz's contributions to African/Middle East historiography have been invaluable.

<sup>44</sup> John Hunwick, "The Same but Different: Africans in Slavery in the Mediterranean Muslim World," *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam*, eds. John Hunwick and Eve Trout Powell (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2002), xiii.

<sup>45</sup> From a geographic perspective, the Bahr al-'Arab is often cited as the boundary separating the "Arab" north and the "African" south. This is located just north of the *Sudd*, or the massive Nilotic swamplands below Kurdufan; Robert O. Collins, *Waters of the Nile*, 12; 14-15; 17. According to Collins, "Old Nile hands will still be heard to say, 'Africa begins at the Malakal'" (located near the Bahr al-'Arab). Collins notes that "interaction and borrowing" existed at these borderlands, but unfortunately this dynamic has been obscured by the kinds of divisions we have been discussing. Toledano has pointed out that in much of the historiography of Africa, it "seems to exist in isolation, a closed system which can be studied most legitimately by itself, ignoring the web of networks that extended across the continent between its Muslim peoples and the world of Islam outside." Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 140.

it persisted as a leitmotif in colonial discourses until the Sudan's independence in 1956. The Arab-African/*Sudani* binary was cultivated, which contributed to a simplistic (and highly politicized) construction, in Vezzadini's words, of "victims and executioners, 'Arab enslavers and 'African' enslaved ... as if 'Arabs' and 'Africans' were two concrete, biologically defined, and separate entities."<sup>46</sup>

It should be clear then that although "slavery" has been called a neglected field of inquiry in Middle East studies, this does not mean that the category has not cast an immense shadow over the literature of Middle East-African relations.<sup>47</sup> While some scholars have contributed to the growing body of literature about the slave trade and slavery in the Islamic lands, many others have been understandably reticent to wade into these waters, not wanting to resurrect the themes of "Oriental despotism" that still fester in the field. These concerns are certainly justified, especially if "slavery" is presented as the primary conceptual bridge between the areas of "Africa" and the "Islamic Middle East," while other kinds of transregional interactions are marginalized or ignored.<sup>48</sup> Troutt Powell claims the "underlying centrality of slavery in the historical relationship between Egypt and the Sudan."<sup>49</sup> How did this come to be? In our discussion of slavery and eunuchs, we have tried to show that categories and analytical frames that are sometimes used to apprehend regional dynamics have their own histories. If these are not

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<sup>46</sup> Elena Vezzadini, "Making Sudani, Making Slaves: Essentialism, Subalternity, and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial Sudan" in *Slavery, Migration and Contemporary Bondage in Africa*, eds. Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013), 96-98.

<sup>47</sup> The authors do point out that the scanty research on slavery does not apply so much to the subfield of the Sudan, in which slavery has been covered in considerable depth; *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of this historiography, including the disinclination of Arab historians to discuss the topic, see Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 135-154. It should be noted, however, that Toledano is ungraciously dismissive of the concerns of these scholars. For example, he critiques Ghada Talhami's complaint that "modern Western scholarship on Africa... has marred the memory of this long and historic association [between Islam and Africa] with detailed emphasis on the nineteenth-century Arab involvement in the slave trade." This quote is taken from "The Muslim African Experience," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 4 (1982): 32. It is to be hoped that such "long and historic" interactions will receive more attention in the scholarship, but with sensitivity to the misgivings of those who are wont to shake the enduring legacies of Orientalism.

<sup>49</sup> Trout Powell, *Different Shade*, 219.

carefully considered, ruptures that are *effects* of nineteenth century discourses and practices can be assumed uncritically into even the most theoretically informed texts.<sup>50</sup>

In the first two chapters, we gave considerable attention to the problem of national space and national community. Troutt Powell's "shade" of colonialism invites a preliminarily reading of some of these historiographical challenges in the context of a later period. We have already engaged that nebulous "space" of the *Sa'id*, and it would seem that attention to contested sites such as this one can mediate the starkly drawn divisions between "Egypt" and "the Sudan" or "Africa." Troutt Powell finds it curious that the very same Egyptian notables who "often feared being posted to the Sudan, as if it were an exile" nonetheless "continued to regard the region as an intrinsic part of Egypt."<sup>51</sup> Assignments to "*al-Sudan*" could be considered an exile, and indeed "*al-Sudan*" also became a site of formal banishment for various orders of infraction. Yet, parallels to the idea and practice of exile are to be found for the *Sa'id* as well. At least by the 1840s the location of Qena, which we have already encountered as a vital entrepôt, was becoming known for something else - for the large population of women who had been "forbidden to dance in Cairo."<sup>52</sup> During this same period, Hekekyan noted that prostitutes were being expelled in large numbers from Cairo and the lower country to the *Sa'id*. Passing through Esna in 1844, he observed that the "chief attraction" of this "wretched and squalid" town were the "pitiable women who were barbarously expelled [from] Cairo and exiled." Later, he made reference to the exile of the entire lot of prostitutes from Mansura to the same location, and by

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<sup>50</sup> The question of slavery in the historiography Ethiopia, like in the Islamic Middle East, was not addressed in any great detail until recently. This revisionist work has, in words of John Markakis, sometimes "implausibly presented [slavery] as an exclusively Abyssinian practice;" see *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2011), 98.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Gardner Wilkinson, *A Handbook for Travellers in Egypt* (London: John Murray, 1847), 333; Rieker, "The Sa'id," 52.

1848 there were as many as 1800 of these women at Esna alone.<sup>53</sup> Colonial processes and civilizational interventions were complex, they were operative within "Egypt" and outside of it, and our methods for addressing them must be able to distinguish these subtleties.

Questions of race present another analytical dilemma in approaching regional history. This is demonstrated in Troutt Powell's exposition of the writing of a North African who travelled to Darfur in the early nineteenth century, and who later served in Mehmet 'Ali's administration in Cairo. She follows Muhammad al-Tunisi's "feeling of alienation" as he encountered visages all around that were "blackness in blackness in blackness" and toured the territories of those who were "not of" his tribe. She notes that al-Tunisi "regretted having exposed himself to the danger presented by these 'sons of Ham.' He remembered what he had heard of their hostility to the 'sons of Shem.'" In Troutt Powell's interpretation, the author drew a distinction between the "wild other," the sons of Ham, and his own community, the sons of Shem. In the process he ascribed to the sons of Ham "a universalist, timeless (and timelessly accursed) identity."<sup>54</sup>

This perhaps most strikingly reveals the pitfalls to her approach, for while she acknowledges the modernity of the ruptures that drew "Egypt" away from its "African" milieu, she also minimizes what these modern ruptures have concealed. Some years before al-Tunisi undertook his travels, a new Coptic *abun* (to whom we shall return in the next chapter) arrived to *Bilad al-Habasha*. *Abuna* Kirulus III almost immediately found himself at odds with the resident Englishmen who were offering informal services to the grandee of Tigre. He ordered that these

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<sup>53</sup> The secretary of war, Ahmad Pasha, was responsible for the exile of the prostitutes of Mansura. Journals 1844-1850, Hekekyan Papers, BL Add. Mss. 37450, (April, 1845), 3: f.64. The figure of 1,800 exiled women at Esna was cited in 1851; See An American, *Journal of a Voyage Up the Nile: Made Between the Months of November, 1848, and April, 1849 by an American* (Buffalo: Phinney & Co., 1851), 128. At the start of the 1840s, banished women were already appearing at Esna; See Puckler-Muskau, *Egypt*, 2:64. Esna was also a potential destination for less disreputable exiles. In the early 1860s, a reform-oriented rector of al-Azhar sought to have some of the *'ulema* banished there; Juan Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 37.

<sup>54</sup> Powell, *A Different Shade*, 34-5.

"kaffirs" should be "stripped naked and flogged three times round the marketplace" and "sent into the lands of the Galla ... to be left to their mercy" if they happened to survive. Seeking to mollify the *abun*, one official turned to the very "timeless" categories that appear in al-Tunisi's text. The official provided a lengthy commentary for the *abun* on the temperamental differences between the "white people" - the Englishmen - who were the "offspring of Shem and Japhet" and the Abyssinians and the *abun* who had "some of Ham's blood in them."<sup>55</sup> The convention of associating disparate populations with the sons of Noah had deep roots. In his fourteenth century delineation of Ham's offspring, al-Maqrizi identified among them the "Habasha and the Zindj" and the "Qibt, Misr and the Nubians."<sup>56</sup> Centuries later, it would seem that it still had currency. The official's recourse to an essentialist explanation for the cause of the quarrel seems to have persuaded the episcopal son of Ham who soon thereafter issued a proclamation that he had forgiven the foreigners.<sup>57</sup>

The contrast between the self-identification of al-Tunisi and the one recognized in common by the Tigrean official and the "Egyptian" prelate is suggestive of the kinds of transregional affinities that would gradually fade as the "nation" came into view. Khaled Fahmy has

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<sup>55</sup> Nathaniel Pearce, *Life and Adventures*, 2:70-5. Even in the contemporary period, we can still find references to this fundamental bond linking the "sons of Ham." At the beginning of the twenty first century, Antonious Markos, the Coptic bishop of African Affairs, noted that southern Africa was "the first natural geographic expansion of the Church" (of Alexandria), where among other things, "there is a link of ... blood" insofar as "Africans are all belonging to the one blood of Ham." This, he adds, has animated the missionary endeavors of the Coptic Church. See Bishop Antonious Markos, *An Introduction Into Theology of Mission* (Johannesburg: Coptic Orthodox Church Bishopric of African Affairs, 2001), 168.

<sup>56</sup> Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *A Short History of the Copts and of their Church*, trans. S. C. Malan (London: Strand, 1873). Jane Hathaway provides a fascinating elucidation of this phenomenon in *A Tale of Two Factions: Myth, Memory and Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003). She discusses the medieval usage of the "sons of Noah" in Islamic letters, relating this with the "fictive genealogies" so prevalent in the pre-modern "politics" of factions; see 34-35.

<sup>57</sup> His usage of the modifier "some" is interesting here, and it may derive from the founding myths of the Solomonic line, as preserved in the *Kebrā Nagast*. This work is a fourteenth century account of the Queen of Sheba's travels to King Solomon, who became the father of her son, Menelik. But such questions are not simply of medieval interest - they took on modern forms. In fact, it might be said that the sons of Noah haunted the imaginations of Europeans as they began to project their own "scientific" theories of the Ethiopian past. For a helpful discussion of this point, see Messay Kebede, "Eurocentrism and Ethiopian Historiography: Deconstructing Semitization," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1-19.



demonstrated the role of conscription and other disciplinary regimes in the construction of modern national identity, as the nation emerged in a "process of violence, silence, and exclusion."<sup>58</sup> The innumerable silences and exclusions must include those affinities that could link an "Egyptian" *abun* lineally with his Abyssinian flock. But perhaps the strongest case for a nuanced approach to "race" derives from the deployment of what we might consider to be "racial" taxonomies in the disciplinary measures within the very lands of "Egypt." During the age of conscription, peasants who wished to take leave of their villages were issued formal permits, which identified them according to age and color.<sup>59</sup> The very early efforts of the regime to attract native units also distinguished prospective recruits along such lines. Lighter-skinned peasants were offered a quantity of fodder, clothes and weapons as inducements to serve in the Sudan campaigns.<sup>60</sup> Explaining his decision to send soldiers of the *Sa'id* to *al-Sudan*, Mehmet 'Ali noted that the "Turks are members of our race" and "should be saved from being sent to these remote areas."<sup>61</sup> Beyond the obvious "racial" distinction between the Turks and the *fellahin* of the *Sa'id*, something else is apparent in the recourse he took. The Turkish campaign certainly encountered hard fought battles, but the majority of Turkish losses "fell victims to the climate."<sup>62</sup> Upon returning from his initial campaign in *al-Sudan*, Ibrahim Pasha apprised Mehmet 'Ali of the losses that the army sustained due to illness. They then surmised that the sons of the *Sa'id* were more naturally disposed to the climatic conditions, which is underscored in Mehmet 'Ali's claim that "excessive heat" factored into his decision to "round up in the provinces

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<sup>58</sup> Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 314.

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants: Land, Society and Economy in Lower Egypt, 1740-1853* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 123.

<sup>60</sup> Mikha'il Sharubim, *al-Kafi fi Tarikh Misr al-Qadim wa al-Hadith* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2004), 4:54.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 89.

<sup>62</sup> Pallme, *Travels*, 13.

of the *Sa'id*" soldiers for service.<sup>63</sup>

Isolating questions of "race" or taxonomies of color to "Egyptian" or "Arab" relations with "Africa" or "the Sudan" is misleading, for they clearly were a constitutive part of emerging discourses and practices within the territories that we now call modern Egypt.<sup>64</sup> A neglect of this important facet of regional development may have the consequence of reinforcing the rhetorical contrivances of those who sought to will "Egypt" out of Africa. It may also minimize the heterogeneity of a population out of which "modern Egypt" emerged and which included population centers with deep ties to the African interior.<sup>65</sup> The largest populations of Copts resided in the *Sa'id*, and in the nineteenth century it could be observed that "Assiout is sometimes called the Coptic capital, and not without reason, for the Copts constitute a very large, and by far the richest, section of the population."<sup>66</sup> This "southern" position may have at least in part informed the language of the fierce early twentieth century polemics of al-Liwa' editor 'Abd al-'Aziz Jawish when he referred in his editorials to the "black-skinned Copts." But alas, Copts make only three fleeting appearances in Troutt Powell's work - a number not unusual in narrations of modern Egypt. Rather than complicating questions of region and "race," they are simply subsumed by association into an "Egypt" for which the break from Africa was sufficiently clean for its gaze southward to be likened to England's; a gaze toward a foreign land

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<sup>63</sup> Georges Douin, *Histoire du Soudan Egyptien, La Penetration, 1820-1822* (Cairo: l'Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1944), 335. This dispatch was written on December 17, 1822.

<sup>64</sup> This problem is particularly prominent in the historiography and discourses of the Sudan itself. Contemporary binaries are frequently deployed to describe the contemporary Sudan, including the "Arab north" and "African south." In his investigation of the social history of nineteenth century Khartoum, Ahmad Alawad Sikainga has argued that "oversimplified discourses" have concealed the cosmopolitanism and hybridity in the Sudan, which he tries to demonstrate in his investigation of nineteenth century Khartoum; "Arab/Muslim/North versus African/Christian/South," in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, eds. Terence Walz and Kenneth Cuno (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 149.

<sup>65</sup> In his discussion of the slave trade during the late seventeenth century, Evliya Celebi commented that most of members of the guild were from the *Sa'id*; see *Rihlat*, 1:500. We might recall Walz's observation that across the long period from 1731 to 1850, a large majority of the members of the guild of traders with the interior (Ta'ifat al-Jallaba) came from the *Sa'id*. Walz, *Trade*, 662.

<sup>66</sup> Mackenzie Wallace, *Egypt and the Egyptian Question* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1883), 32.

that could be described in comparably colonial terms.<sup>67</sup>

But the evidence suggests that the "breaks" were not so clean. Even in the late nineteenth century literary sources that she uses, Troutt Powell finds cracks in the narratives - although unfortunately she does not pursue them very far - that reveal an ambivalent position on "Africa;" it would seem that centuries of entangled spaces were not so easily undone. An example of this occurs in her analysis of 'Ali Mubarak's novel *'Alam al-Din*, in which the "Egyptian" author has fictional Europeans making familiar racist descriptions of Africans. She then comments:

My reading of *'Alam al-Din* leads me to think that 'Ali Mubarak was not so dismissive of Africans. There is a stronger identification with Africans within the text and the narrative finds interesting links between Africans and Egyptians.<sup>68</sup>

Other histories are waiting to be written that follow the cracks in the master narratives and the threads of continuity with periods before "Egypt" and "Africa" could be conceived as isolated objects. In her historicization of the *Sa'id*'s location of marginality within modern Egypt, Martina Rieker has suggested a number of avenues for this very kind of work. These include the now largely forgotten *Sa'id*-centered histories that were written in Asyut. She argues that these were part of an ultimately failed effort to "intervene in the discourse" of Cairo-centered historiography using a language of independence in place of marginality. In looking to these, she explored "what older histories might be entangled with the modern inscription of the *Sa'id*."<sup>69</sup>

One of the *Sa'id*-centered histories to which Rieker has drawn attention is 'Uthman Fayd-

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<sup>67</sup> A similar approach can be detected in some of the scholarship about the "Ethiopian Empire," which nearly doubled in size during the reign of Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913). Haggai Erlich's summary of nineteenth century Ethiopia bears striking parallels with a common assessment of Egypt's "African Empire" when he states that while Ethiopia rebuffed "imperialism successfully in the north, [it] managed to practice it in the south." Quoted in Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 3. For his part, Menelik thought of this southern expansion as a "restoration" rather than as an imperialist venture. *Ibid.* 4, 6. In arguing against this kind of presentation, Tibehe points out that the Ethiopian case did not have the racist foundations of European colonialism, and the lines of separation between "northern" Abyssinians and the southern peripheries were fluid and even ambiguous. See *Making of Modern Ethiopia*, 44. This is analogous to the "Egyptian-Sudanese/African" dynamic.

<sup>68</sup> Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade*, 61-62.

<sup>69</sup> Rieker, "The *Sa'id*," xv-xvi.

Allah's history of Asyut, written during the 1930s and published in 1940. Turning to this text, we find a number of compelling features, including the integration of Copts within an unfolding history of Asyut that is a surprising contrast with the cameo roles that tend to prevail in other historiographies. The distinguished Coptic families are not peripheral to the text, but woven throughout it, and *Dayr al-Muharraq* is respectfully described in some detail as one of the *Sa'id's* significant landmarks.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the intimacy with the "south" is a dominant feature, and the lands of al-Sudan are integral to the biographies of many of the prominent Asyuti families featured in the text.

These two threads are joined in a number of fascinating ways. In his discussion of the Coptic family of *al-Muqaddis* Girgis al-Kabir, the author describes the vigorous trade in which succeeding generations were involved in *Wajh al-Qibli*, *Bilad al-Sudan* and later *Bilad al-Habasha*. The family's optimism about the opportunities in *Bilad al-Habasha* was such that it named one of its sons Habashi, a point which Fayd-Allah recounted with no apparent irony.<sup>71</sup> From his location in early twentieth century Asyut, Fayd-Allah is in position to see not only the economic importance of the "south;" His pages also offer signs of more profound bonds. As he described Father 'Abd al-Masih, a monk of *Dayr al-Muharraq*, the author noted "the light of piety shining from his eyes," but he did not bother - or perhaps deem it worthy - to mention another detail. The fact that the pious father was an Ethiopian is a prominent feature in most descriptions of the angelic monk, but it is nowhere to be found in this text.<sup>72</sup> When Fayd-Allah elsewhere referred to *Bilad al-Sudan* as the "brother country," one suspects that it would be unjust to dismiss the usage as the borrowed cant of colonialists.

Finally we might foreshadow a later development that speaks to regional inclinations that

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<sup>70</sup> 'Uthman Fayd-Allah, *Madinat Asyut* (Asyut: Matba'at al-Jihad, 1940), 86.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

are at variance with established narratives, and this relates to the emergence of Muhammad Ahmad, the self-proclaimed "Mahdi" who led an uprising in "the Sudan" against the "Turco-Egyptian" occupation. Troutt Powell notes a shift in the writings of Ya'qub al-Sanu'a, one of the prominent "Egyptian" writers of the time. He considered the Mahdi as a potential partner in the struggle to resist British ascendancy in the region. Yet, she shrugs off the implications of this, noting that he was "misinterpreting the message of the Mahdi's revolution completely."<sup>73</sup> Here again, the barrier between Egypt and the Sudan would seem to be so indelibly drawn as to foreclose any genuine, anti-colonial collaboration. Like British colonial officials and various Western writers of old, this Western scholar is situated as arbiter between natives.

In the years after San'ua's writing, there was an even more "unlikely" case of anti-colonial cooperation. Although Abyssinian Emperor Yohannes IV was killed in battle against the Mahdi's forces in 1889, there was a real possibility that his successor would collaborate with the Mahdiya in a common anti-colonial struggle. Khalifa 'Abdallahi led an embassy to Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) after which the latter insisted to his advisors that "the Dervishes only raid and return to their country, whereas the Italians remain, steal the land and occupy the country." In an 1895 letter to the khalifa, Menelik made an unambiguous overture: "The enemy has come to enslave both of us. We are of the same color. Therefore, we must co-operate to get rid of our common enemy."<sup>74</sup> The analytical approach that has San'ua misreading the Mahdi's message – with its "anti-Egyptian" implications - could be extended to include Menelik, a Christian emperor somehow failing to notice the Islamic framework of the Mahdiya.

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<sup>73</sup> Powell, *A Different Shade*, 76.

<sup>74</sup>Zewde Gabre-Selassie, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Menelik's Foreign Policy," in *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory Against European Colonialism*, eds. Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 120-21. Menelik's predecessor, Emperor Yohannes, had already made overtures to the Mahdiya in 1888, and on the eve of the Battle of Adwa (where Menelik's forces routed an Italian invasion) envoys of the Mahdiya were at Menelik's camp discussing the possibility of concerted action against Italian forces; *Ibid.* 118-121.

But beyond the judgments of political and literary elites, the question arises about the potential for popular responses to the Mahdi. In her discussion of the *Sa'id's* emergence in the colonial archive as a "law and order" problem, Rieker alludes to the British concerns about the spread of "Mahdism." They went so far as to deploy soldiers to a number of points in the *Sa'id* to fortify the region against the agents of the Mahdi.<sup>75</sup> The concerns were well founded for a number of reasons, including the leverage of the Khatmiya Sufi order in the *Sa'id*, which was a potential conduit for the spread of the movement.<sup>76</sup> The possibility that "Egyptians" could follow a "Sudanese" movement against the "Turqiya" (as it was revealingly called in the Sudan) is in contrast with depictions of "Egyptian" domination of the south.<sup>77</sup> The complexity of the situation can be gleaned from a report that Lord Kitchener sent from Dongola in August, 1884. He contended that the people of Dongola province "appear to have less sympathy with the Mahdi than the people of Upper Egypt."<sup>78</sup> In other words, "Egyptians" could be moved to follow the "Sudanese" resistance while sections of "the Sudan" were inclined to side with the "Turks." These details, which had so occupied the British authorities at the time, later disappeared into the recesses of colonial memory. When a longtime civil secretary for Khartoum wrote a book about the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan 35 years later, the plot was substantially simplified. He asserted very simply that "Egypt was threatened by the Sudanese" and "the duty of protecting her" devolved to Great Britain, "her guardian."<sup>79</sup>

Here, we might allude to a remote parallel in the life of the Alexandrian communion. As

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<sup>75</sup> See Rieker, "The Sa'id," 159-61. Troutt Powell herself notes that a large number of "Egyptian" soldiers who had participated in 'Urabi's revolt later joined the Mahdi after the colonel was defeated; Trout-Powell, *A Different Shade*, 106.

<sup>76</sup> Gran, "Upper Egypt," 88.

<sup>77</sup> The reference to the "*Turqiya*" had a parallel among the *fellahin* of Bilad Misr, who often referred to the ruling elites as "*atraq*" (Turks); Toledano, *State and Society*, 250.

<sup>78</sup> Egerton to Earl Granville, "Further Correspondence respecting the Affairs of Egypt," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1884, lxxxix. (August 5, 1884), 44.

<sup>79</sup> Harold MacMichael, *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 62.

self-declared "Mahdis" could find popular sanction to address social injustices, a kind of millenarianism existed in Ethiopic/Alexandrian tradition, the earliest evidence of which survives in the "Fekkare Iyasus" (The Explanation of Jesus"), a sixteenth century "end times" treatise.<sup>80</sup> It was believed that a figure taking the regnal name of "Tewodros" would one day rise to restore justice:

Then I will send Teoudros who will bring together those I have spared, and he will do my will. There will come a metropolitan [*abun*] who will dedicate the land; all the destroyed churches will be rebuilt and reconstructed without negligence ... all will march according to the word of a king and a metropolitan. The entire land will be filled with my blessing, the towns that have been destroyed will be restored.<sup>81</sup>

For the worldviews upon which the modern civilizing mission would be imposed, there was no logical incongruity in looking to the south for leadership or deliverance. When a newly crowned ruler of Abyssinia took the name of "Tewodros" in the 1850s, this elicited widespread excitement that the figure of prophecy may have arrived. The British consul at Alexandria was surprised to discover the attention that his career attracted "even in Egypt by the enlightened Copts and their priesthood" who didn't disguise "their ardent vows for his success."<sup>82</sup>

Commenting on the emergence of nationalism in a colonial setting, Chatterjee has noted that from its inception, the nationalist movement was thinking of "new forms of modern community." To dislodge the colonial regime, an elite domain of nationalist politics would need to lead a mass mobilization involving "popular elements" that existed outside the elitist program, and whose consciousness and modes of resistance were much different than those of the

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<sup>80</sup> Merid Wolde Aregay, "Literary Origins of Ethiopian Millenarianism" in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1986), 5:169. See also Denis Nosnitsin, "Fekkare Iyasus," *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, 2:516-18.

<sup>81</sup> René Basset, trans., "Fekkare Iyasous" in *Les Apocryphes Éthiopiens*, XI (Paris: Librairie de l'art indépendant, 1909), 25-26.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/9 (June 30, 1856).

"enlightened" elites.<sup>83</sup> Messianic expectation represented modes of popular resistance that could potentially draw disparate populations into a mass movement. Might we then read in Ya'qub Sanu'a's sympathies for the "Mahdi" a very early manifestation of this creative impulse? And can the regional appeals of later nationalists be read in the same way, as creative encounters with genuine "fragments" that were suggestive of potential, though ultimately stillborn political communities? In the 1940s, Egyptian nationalists still made impassioned claims that the Sudan was an integral part of Egypt. When Egyptian geographer 'Abbas 'Amar argued the case for the artificiality of political boundaries between the lands of Egypt and the Sudan, he cited among other things the pasturelands of the Bishara bedouin that traversed the imaginary line.<sup>84</sup> It was only after this moment of maneuver was over that the objects of creative negotiation became vexatious "fragments" for the hegemonic postcolonial state.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that such lively discourses largely fell silent after the 1940s. It was during roughly the same time that the raging debate about the historical relationship between the Copts/Coptic Church and the lands of *al-Habasha* died away as well. And significantly, it was during the 1940s that the remnants of *Sa'id*-centered histories also faded from view as the *Sa'id*'s location of marginality in the modern Egyptian nation-state was cemented. We may find in the 1952 revolution and its aftermath a very approximate case of transition from Chatterjee's "moment of maneuver" to the "moment of arrival" - when an anti-

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<sup>83</sup> Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation and Its Fragments," in *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>84</sup> 'Abbas 'Ammar, "Wihdat wadi al-Nil" in *Wihdat wadi al-Nil Usulha al-Jughrafiya wa madhahirha fi al-tarikh*, Shafiq Ghurbal et. al. (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Amiriya, 1947), 6. Another, and more famous Egyptian geographer who wrote of the "Unity of the Nile Valley" was Sulayman Huzayyin. He too deployed various ecological arguments to make the case for the artificiality of the division of Egypt from the Sudan; For a short review of some of the themes that he covered in his long career, see Israel Gershoni, "Geographers and Nationalism in Egypt: Huzayyin and the Unity of the Nile Valley, 1945-1948" in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths*, eds. Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni (Lynne Rienner, 2000), 199-215. The late 1940s was the apogee of the nationalist calls for the "Unity of the Nile Valley," but the practical death knell to this abortive national community came with Sudan's independence in 1956.



colonial nationalism was incorporated "within the domain of a state ideology."<sup>85</sup>

In summary, the homogenizing projects have not only concealed earlier dynamics, but they have also smoothed over the tensions and resistances which they engendered. The modern national community is the result of a long period of "violence, silence and exclusion." Therefore, it is imprudent to speak of "Egypt" and "the Sudan" of the mid-nineteenth or late nineteenth century without great care, for even in the 1940s this process of contestation was still manifestly fluid. And with this long view in mind, we return again to the question of the occupation of "the Sudan." A new kind of "occupation" was indeed occurring in the lands of "Egypt" and "the Sudan" simultaneously, and a depiction of Abu Tig in the 1830s provides a tableau of this historical moment. Its British author says nothing of a eunuch industry that so haunted the imaginations of other European visitors. Perhaps by then it was already vanishing. But he does note the dire conditions of this "once a flourishing town" whose inhabitants were now "very poor and wretched." Abu Tig had been home to a bishop, but this prelate was since deceased and none had taken his place "because of the supervening poverty of the people." MacBrair watched as the authorities arrived in force for "a levy of all the men that they can lay hands upon." They gathered throngs of *fellahin* who had been "pinioned together by their necks," and they carried these pitiable souls away. Meanwhile, not far off a boat could be seen carrying 41 slaves who were captured in Sennar and bound for the Cairo market.<sup>86</sup> The juxtaposition of the pinioned *fellahin* and the slaves from Sennar provides scarcely a contrast, a reminder of the profound distress that affected "Egypt" and the southern lands together. This fact should inform a contemplation of the relationship of the two sets of "lands" to each other. In the coming section,

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<sup>85</sup> Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?" *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 132.

<sup>86</sup> R. Maxwell MacBrair, *Sketches of a Missionary's Travels in Egypt, Syria, Western Africa &c.*, (London, 1839), 136-37.

we hold this two-fold objective in mind as we seek to situate the participation of "Copts" in "the opening of the Sudan."

### The "Opening" of the Sudan

Mehmet 'Ali's conquest of *Bilad al-Sudan* has been recalled in church history as a critical watershed as these lands were restored to the fold of Orthodoxy after centuries of separation. The historical reference is to the collapse of the medieval Christian kingdoms of Makouria and Alwa, and the gradual evanescence of "Christian Nubia."<sup>87</sup> An early twentieth century Coptic historian conveyed a characteristic rendition of the historical moment of return:

Peace reigned in church territories, even in far away regions and in regions of the Sudan after the shadow of Christianity dwindled [there] from the turn of the sixteenth century ... After a system of government had been established, this wakeful patriarch [Butrus VII] announced correct doctrine, sending two bishops in succession.<sup>88</sup>

Among the crowning moments of the 43-year papacy of Butrus VII, the ecclesiastical chronicle included "Muhammad 'Ali Pasha's conquest of *al-Sudan*, [during which] many of its inhabitants returned to the Christian religion."<sup>89</sup>

But the chronicle immediately moves to another account that would seem to temper the buoyancy of the moment. It tells the tale of a demonic possession that had reputedly seized Mehmet 'Ali's daughter Zahra Hanem - who incidentally was the wife of Muhammad Bey al-

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<sup>87</sup> There is a relative paucity of sources for the period subsequent to the fall of the Christian Nubian kingdoms of Makouria and Alwa, and various causes have been put forward to explain the disappearance of "Nubian Christianity." It appears that a number of factors contributed to the enervation of the Christianity in these lands, not the least of which were the wars and internal power struggles which weakened the kingdoms politically, as well as the protracted absences of Christian bishops from these lands. Additionally, the church did not have deep roots or well-established structures and it atrophied with the diminishment of the monarchies. See Adams, *Nubia*, 541-42. For a survey of the period, see *ibid.* chapters 16 and 17, "The Feudal Age" and "The Anvil of Islam," 508-591. See also Giovanni Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Bologna: EMI, 1981), 199-207.

<sup>88</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh al-Aqbat*, 1:65.

<sup>89</sup> *HPEC*, 3:3, 172. Elsewhere, her name is given as Nazli. She was known for her dissolute character, and at one point the *wali* is said to have ordered her execution, a decision which he later withdrew in response to the pleading of 'Abbas Pasha; al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign*, 95; Nubar Pasha, *Mémoires de Nubar Pacha*, ed. Mirrit Butrus Ghali (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1983), 21.

Defterdar, a figure notorious for his brutality in the Sudan campaign. Zahra's physicians suggested that a malevolent spirit might have been the source of her illness, and they advised a consultation with the Christian leaders. In response, Patriarch Butrus VII sent for a saintly bishop and celebrated exorcist. As Sarabamun of Minufiya prayed over the patient, she began thrashing about on the floor and vocalizing terrifying shrieks that undulated through the palace. The chronicle then details the fearsome encounter between the bishop and the demon, and Zahra's eventual deliverance. But the dramatic tale ends in a stroke of bathos as the bishop declines Mehmet 'Ali's monetary reward, explaining:

I should not profit from the gifts of the Lord ... in preference to this, I implore your highness to extend your kindness to the Coptic people, and to reemploy its sons who have been dismissed from service.<sup>90</sup>

This account provides ample room for allegorical interpretation, but what is most salient here is the bishop's unadorned request. We have already discussed the regime's aspirations to exploit more fully the potential wealth of the province. Standardized methods of calculation and extraction and other novel practices were the desiderata of these aims. But first, that arcane order of "hidden wealth" would need to be penetrated and reordered; the "middle-men" would need to be subverted. This included the hierarchical bureaucratization of a range of social formations - including bedouin tribal confederations, Sufi *turuq*, the guilds, the *'ulema* and the Church of Alexandria.<sup>91</sup> And indeed, the abstruse fiscal complex would need to be penetrated, and its "secrets" learned.

Whether or not Zahra Hanem's story is a veiled commentary on a malign dimension to an

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<sup>90</sup> *HPEC*, 3:3, 172-73.

<sup>91</sup> Fred De Jong produced an excellent study of this process as it pertained to the Sufi networks. See *Turuq and Turuq-Linked Institutions in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A History Study in Organizational Dimensions of Islamic Mysticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978). The penetration and transformations of the guild system is addressed in Pascale Ghazaleh's *Masters of the Trade: Crafts and Craftspeople in Cairo, 1750-1850* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999).

epoch of transformation, the bishop's petition speaks plainly to its unsettling effects. We will recall the pervasive signs of this erosion. There was of course a trend at the highest levels of state for the elimination of Coptic advisors and counselors in favor of other Christians - most notably Armenians. This preference was partly due to the latter's familiarity with the mechanisms of the European market, particularly with the increasing demand for cash crop exports.<sup>92</sup> And by the end of the 1820s, some tasks related to the collection of taxes, a traditional bailiwick of Copts, were beginning to devolve to soldiers of Mehmet 'Ali's *Nizam Jadid*. A section of Copts remained instrumental in the restructured departments of government - in fact, in the short term, new employment opportunities even opened for Copts. Yet, they operated under the careful surveillance of *nazirs* (supervisors.) The introduction of more "transparent" methods such as double entry bookkeeping "on the European style" probably facilitated this innovation.<sup>93</sup> If Copts remained in the pasha's service, it was increasingly by reason of the very modern methods that also contained the seeds of their expendability.<sup>94</sup>

But this is in advance of the story. We go back then to an unusual historical juncture in which the celebrated return of an ancient patrimony could be comingled with alarming symptoms of estrangement. In 1820, Mehmet 'Ali sent his son Isma'il and son-in-law Muhammad Bey al-Defterdar in front of an expedition to *Bilad al-Sudan*. A remnant of Mamluks that had not been exterminated in Mehmet 'Ali's famous massacre fled to the *Sa'id*, and eventually settled in Dongola where they established a minor state in those sprawling and

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<sup>92</sup> Guirguis and Van Doorn-Harder, *Emergence*, 66. Already by 1817 signs of this transition were manifest. Only a few years after the death of Guirguis al-Gawhari, the brother and successor of the "Coptic *amir*," European consular correspondences speak of a *wali* who was beholden to the "counsels of greedy Armenians around him whom he deems necessary." See Roussel to de Richelieu (May 31, 1817) in Driault, *La Formation*, 59.

<sup>93</sup> Ed. de Cadalvene and J. de Breuvery, *L'Égypte et la Turquie de 1829 à 1836* (Paris, 1836), 1:58, 107, 110. For a discussion of the role of *nazirs* within the evolving mechanisms of surveillance and supervision, see Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40-43.

<sup>94</sup> By the late 1830s, a member of the Church Missionary Society could boast that his weekly sermons were attended by upwards of 50 former students, nearly exclusively Copts, who were all in the employ of Mehmet 'Ali. Kruse to Coates, CMS, C M/O 45/63 (March 21, 1838).

contested lands far from the centers of power. The campaign was deployed to deal with these unsettling vestiges of the old regime, but also in pursuit respectively of slaves and minerals to service the vast projects that Mehmet 'Ali envisioned. In the summer of 1820 the campaign began, with one detachment directed against Sennar, and the other against Kurdufan and Darfur.<sup>95</sup> The expeditionary forces, 4,000 in number, were a rather motley collection that included Turks, Albanians and Maghrebis, in addition to 1500 bedouin that were organized into their own "tribal" unit.<sup>96</sup> Sections of the Harabi, Fawa'id, Gawazi and 'Ababda were included among the bedouin, and these were collectively described as the "best soldiers in the army."<sup>97</sup> The 700 'Ababda were particularly useful for their ability to navigate the precarious deserts to the south - in other words, the success of the undertaking hinged upon their unique knowledge of the terrain. Because the *wali* intended to annex and reorganize the territories, a group of Coptic scribes accompanied the expedition as well.

In Chapter Two, we discussed a range of relationships that could exist between Copts and bedouin. Here, we consider together these two groupings once again. By virtue of their respective and particular forms of knowledge, they were in league in the Sudan expedition, but under very different circumstances. The designs against tribal networks were contemporaneous with those aimed at what might be called "scribal networks." The fate of the Hawara confederation is characteristic of the historical trend. Mehmet 'Ali's eldest son dealt the final blow to what remained of the independent tribal structure, leaving the Hawara to serve as

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<sup>95</sup> P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *A History of the Sudan from the Coming of Islam to the Present Day* (Harlow: Pearson Educational Ltd., 2011), 35-36; Richard Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan, 1820-1881* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 7-8.

<sup>96</sup> Khaled Fahmy, "The Era of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, 1805-1848" in *Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:153.

<sup>97</sup> George Waddington, *Journal of a Visit to Some Parts of Ethiopia* (London: John Murray, 1822), 92; Douin, *Histoire*, 80, 85; P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *A History of the Sudan from the Coming of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1988), 49.

cavalrymen in Mehmet 'Ali's *Nizam Jadid*.<sup>98</sup> By 1826, after they had been incorporated into the new order, they were counted among the numbers deployed to *al-Sudan* under their chief, Isma'il Agha.<sup>99</sup> The efforts to dismantle independent tribal frameworks did not eliminate the "heads" of the tribes; shaykhs like Isma'il Agha remained, but they were drawn into the fold of unique forms of control. At the time of the Sudan campaign, tribal heads from the oases were required to make "daily attendance at court" for purposes of surveillance.<sup>100</sup> And it was said that the Ma'azi bedouin were no longer permitted to carry their traditional designation, for it was a "greater convenience of the government" that they should be called by the name of their shaykh who was "responsible for the good conduct of his tribe."<sup>101</sup> Just as Coptic scribes serving in the new bureaucracies were superintended by special *nazirs* established for their oversight, the "leaders" among the bedouin were supervised by *nazirs* who looked after "bedouin affairs," a bureaucratic responsibility without precedent.<sup>102</sup>

The Copts and bedouin of the Sudan campaign were partners in the *futuh* (opening up) of "new" frontiers. There was in fact nothing "new" about crossing these frontiers, as the relationships never ceased between "Egypt" and "the Sudan," although it would begin to appear so with the gradual elimination of a polyvalent social order. The 'Ababda could assist Mehmet 'Ali in the "opening" of the south precisely because it had never been closed. And just as Copts, as we have seen in Chapter One, could be made to collaborate in processes that were aimed at the obsolescence of "traditional" prerogatives, the 'Ababda were drawn into a similar kind of

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<sup>98</sup> Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 185. Khaled Fahmy has demonstrated that Mehmet 'Ali's novel military institutions contributed to the emergence of Egypt as imagined community. The *fellahin* and *awlad 'urban* were conscripted into the military, but were not elevated to superior ranks, which had the unintended consequence of helping to "homogenize the experience of these thousands of Egyptians. See Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 313-14.

<sup>99</sup> 'Abd al-Majid, *Al-Tarbiya*, 3:63.

<sup>100</sup> Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*, 130. This observation was made in February of 1819, as shaykhs were arriving to the provincial capital of Asyut.

<sup>101</sup> Diary of Eastern Desert (1822-23), BL, Burton Papers Add. Mss. 25624, (November 14, 1822), 1: f.119.

<sup>102</sup> Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 4.

cooperation. From this perspective it is apparent that the same process that included the "opening" of the southern frontiers was also responsible for the closing of others. As groups of Copts and bedouin were brought together in the "*futuh*" of the Sudan, a new kind of relationship was in germ, one that was mediated by a centralizing regime and would eventually find formal expression in the nation-state. As for the accompanying closure of other frontiers, it can be observed in the gradual disruption of relationships of these alternative orders.

In these volatile conditions, it is hardly surprising that when the decision was made about which Copts should accompany the Sudan expedition, the scribal class was beset by dissension and intrigue. Two figures whom we encountered in Chapter One are protagonists in these unfolding events - *al-Mu'allim* Ghali and *al-Mu'allim* Hanna al-Tawil. It will be recalled that *al-Mu'allim* Ghali assumed the headship of the scribes upon the death of Girgis al-Gawhari - the brother and successor to the revered "Coptic *amir*," Ibrahim al-Gawhari. From al-Jabarti we learn of his ongoing rivalry with al-Tawil. In 1816, al-Tawil participated in a clandestine campaign to discredit Ghali, which resulted in a bastinado and prison sentence for the latter and his associates.<sup>103</sup> Such jockeying for position amongst *arakhina* was nothing new. But some time later Ghali would convert to Catholicism at the behest of Mehmet 'Ali who, it was conjectured, wished to set a Catholic party against an Orthodox one as a stratagem for exposing the secrets of the fisc. These particular designs seem to have failed, but this historical moment signaled the introduction of novel techniques of governance that would have a profound effect on the social and political order in succeeding decades. Notwithstanding these trends, Ghali was no match for al-Tawil who "by means of his countrymen" was able to collect taxes and carry out civil affairs with much greater economy. It was on account of this thrift that he was chosen to accompany the

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<sup>103</sup> al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-Athar*, 3:352-53.

Sudan campaign.<sup>104</sup>

Hanna al-Tawil's role in the undertaking can hardly be overestimated. In the first place, Pascale Linant de Bellefonds (who spent a considerable amount of time with al-Tawil in the Sudan) asserted that the latter "furnished a very large sum to the government of Cairo to make this war and conquest of Sennar." This indicates the vast wealth that Coptic lay leaders could possess, even if their influence in the affairs of state was diminished from what it had been at the time of Ibrahim al-Gahwari.<sup>105</sup> Al-Tawil was the leading architect for the administration in *Bilad al-Sudan*. As the regions of the Sudan were subdued, he appointed scribal subordinates to staff the various positions in the fledgling administration.<sup>106</sup> After al-Tawil had assigned four scribes to the service of 'Abdin Kashef at Berber, Isma'il Pasha took it upon himself to make some of the appointments, which included the selection of one Yusuf Mina to head 50 subordinate scribes. When Mehmet 'Ali discovered what his son had done, he scolded him in writing, reminding him that he knew nothing of the revenues with which these scribes were charged and that he must always follow al-Tawil's recommendations for "reason of economy."<sup>107</sup> The *wali* recognized that the success of the conquest rested on an order of established roles. In late 1820, Isma'il sent al-Tawil to *Misr* to report on the privations of the army, and here again he incurred his father's anger. The furious *wali* responded that Isma'il displayed his "childishness" in delegating to al-Tawil

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<sup>104</sup> This is cited in William Jowett, *Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land in MDCCCXXIII, and MDCCCXXIV*, in *Furtherance of the Objects of the Church Missionary Society* (L. B. Seeley & Son and J. Hatchard & Son: London, 1826), 85. However, there is some question as to the historicity of his statement. In their volume on the modern Coptic papacy, Guirguis and Van Doorn-Harder cite the start of 1822 as the timing of Ghali's conversion, more than a year and a half after al-Tawil was chosen to accompany the Sudan campaign; see *Emergence*, 68.

<sup>105</sup> This information is provided in the October 5, 1821 entry of Linant's journal. See Pascale Linant de Bellefonds, *Journal d'un Voyage a Meroe dans les annees 1821 et 1822*, ed. Margaret Shinnie (Khartoum: Sudan Antiquities Service, 1958), 43. It is corroborated by George Waddington, another close observer of the campaign who spoke anonymously of the "rich Copt who is supposed to have lent the Pasha much money for this expedition;" Waddington, *Journal of a Visit*, 105.

<sup>106</sup> Anders Bjorkelo, *Prelude*, 83; Douin, *Histoire*, 80.

<sup>107</sup> Douin, *Histoire*, 80.



such futile questions of which any ordinary person could have been charged ... as though he was appointed to [the] suite for nothing but occupying himself with matters of the army.<sup>108</sup>

But in fact something more than Isma'il's "childishness" might have factored into his decisions. Despite the clearly delineated campaign plan, this project was of unprecedented scope and nature, and practical challenges necessitated some improvisation. At first sight, the relative ease with which the disparate factions and petty "kingdoms" were neutralized disguises these more fundamental challenges. In the spring of 1821 Mehmet 'Ali deployed his infamous son-in-law, Muhammad Bey al-Defterdar, who accomplished the conquest of Kurdufan, quickly putting an end to the Furawi occupation. Meanwhile in Sennar, the puppet sultan of the Funj Badi' VI offered his submission to Isma'il. But with conquest came the problem of organizing and controlling the territories. This is exemplified in the case of the Shayqiya, the confederation which offered the stiffest resistance to Isma'il, which according to the Funj Chronicles decisively routed Isma'il's "Maghariba and 'Ababda troops."<sup>109</sup> After the Shayqiya were finally subdued, they became a pillar of the new regime, which added to an already heterogeneous *mélange*. But this incorporation of "local" actors was indispensable, for without them controlling the diverse territories would have been impossible.

In the chronicle's description of a subsequent engagement between the vanquished Hamaj on the one side and the "Shayqiya and Maghariba troops" on the other, one finds hints of the way that new configurations of power could be translated according to long-established patterns of "tribal" alliance.<sup>110</sup> In fact, the chronicler's description of Isma'il's arrival gives the sense not of an illegitimate occupation, but of a *restoration*. Isma'il "brought an end to the tyranny in [the

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Douin, *Histoire*, 131.

<sup>109</sup> P.M. Holt, ed. *The Sudan of the Three Niles: The Funj Chronicle, 970-1288/1504-1871* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 79.

<sup>110</sup> Holt, ed., *The Sudan*, 87.

lands of *al-Sudan*] and replaced oppression with justice and beneficence."<sup>111</sup> This chronicler - with his "traditional" education - could translate the coming of Mehmet 'Ali's forces as a restoration of proper order, a point which is not entirely dissimilar to the Coptic chronicler's conceptualization of the restoration of the Alexandrian patrimony. Although these years marked the advent of a period of profound transformation, neither these nor their full implications were necessarily manifest at the time.

Even so, pioneering practices quickly triggered unrest in much of the region. The initial wave of disturbances was in large measure a consequence of the taxation policies that al-Tawil was charged with devising and implementing. Isma'il and his brother Ibrahim had initiated the preliminary land assessments in Sennar, during which the organizational menagerie was on full display. The "Turkish" *qa'immaqam* would oversee a cluster of villages, alongside a group of "Arab" cavalry, another group of Maghariba and several Shayqiya.<sup>112</sup> When this process was completed, al-Tawil, with the assistance of Isma'il's deputy Muhammad Sa'id and local collaborator Arbab Dafa'allah, set out to establish the revenue system, while the two pashas made their way southward in search of slaves. Traditional methods of taxation were largely disregarded in favor of a rather formulaic system that was ill-equipped to deal with the variability of local circumstances.<sup>113</sup> They recorded the villages of Sennar, established the *kharaj* taxes, and placed onerous levies on slaves and cattle, in addition to organizing the registers and placing scribes and *qa'immaqams* in the various villages.<sup>114</sup> The *kharaj* was not assessed according to a measure of cultivable lands, but rather the villages were charged with

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>112</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 11.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>114</sup> 'Abd al-Jalil al-Shatir Busayli, *Ma'alim Ta'rikh Sudan Wadi al-Nil, min al-Qarn al-'Ashir ila al-Qarn al-Tas'i 'ashar al-Milady* (Cairo: Maktabat al-'Arab, 1955), 138; Holt, ed., *The Sudan*, 82-83.

providing standard amounts of grain based upon crude calculations.<sup>115</sup>

After concluding the hurried appraisal of the Jazeera, al-Tawil made haste to Berber province to begin assessments there. He was thus conveniently absent when the population reacted to the measures. Some attacked the occupation forces, while thousands of others fled, many towards the borderlands of *al-Habasha*. When he received word that the people were "all in flight" and that al-Tawil had deserted the territories, Isma'il returned from Fazogli to deal with the crisis. Isma'il was unable to make any modifications to the assessments without the assistance of an "expert," so he summoned al-Tawil from Shendi.<sup>116</sup>

A period of intense trial had begun. In the fall of 1822, Isma'il arrived personally to Shendi, and gathering the "kings" together, he demanded what the Funj chronicler called an "intolerable sum of money."<sup>117</sup> After his protests were of no avail, the local "king," Mek Nimr, launched a nighttime raid on Isma'il's camp, which resulted in a conflagration that incinerated the pasha and his personnel. The news of his death led to uprisings all along the Sudanic Nile, and in the sudden absence of leadership, Muhammad Bey al-Defterdar withdrew from Kurdufan with some of his soldiers and Furawi warriors, and took the lead in combatting the revolt.<sup>118</sup> He brought his singular brutality to bear on the recalcitrant populations, and tens of thousands of people lost their lives over the next two years.

During the faltering early years of the occupation, superficial continuities might have obscured more subtle trends. Copts and bedouin were serving in familiar roles, and the "tribes" of *al-Sudan* were simply exchanging their tribute to a new overlord. But unsettling symptoms were certainly presenting, as we have noted in the ecclesiastical chronicle's oblique rendition of

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<sup>115</sup> Giovanni Battista Brocchi, *Giornale Delle Osservazione Fatte Ne'viaggi in Egitto, Nella Siria e Nella Nubia* (Bassano, 1845), 5:479.

<sup>116</sup> Douin, *Histoire*, 276.

<sup>117</sup> Holt, ed., *The Sudan*, 84.

<sup>118</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 16; Holt, *A History* (2011), 41.

loss alongside recovery. For their part, the 'Ababda continued to serve the regime faithfully as the *deftardar* battled the pervasive rebellions. But by 1828 these one-time "masters" of the southern desert routes had run afoul of their masters, and the government executed their shaykh for daring to exercise the traditional custom of offering sanctuary, for in so doing he was abetting an enemy of state.<sup>119</sup>

A kind of colonization was indeed under way, but to isolate this to "the Sudan" is to cast the net too narrowly. As the vivid details surrounding the "possession" of Mehmet 'Ali's daughter lived on in the ecclesiastical chronicle, so too the fantastic brutality of her husband lived on in popular memory in "the Sudan." Nearly 30 years after the conquest John Petherick, an English trader and vice-consul in Kurdufan, encountered some of his "mutilated victims" and listened to many outrageous tales of this "ruffian, whose memory, like that of his cruelties will long be retained in the Sudan."<sup>120</sup> They might have asked whether some kind of diabolical force had not taken hold of him. In the next section, we look forward with an eye to some of the symptoms of the underlying transformations that were operating across the as yet unimagined spatial objects.

### **Colonizing the Sudan, Colonizing Egypt**

In 1826, Mehmet 'Ali sent 'Ali Khurshid to *al-Sudan*, initially as governor (*hakim*) of Sennar, and later as *hukumdar* over all the provinces. As the first non-military ruler after the "*futuh*," 'Ali Khurshid was determined to establish an efficient operation in the territories under his charge, and his lengthy tenure - nearly 13 years - was a consequence of his aptitude as administrator.<sup>121</sup> Almost immediately after arriving, he convoked an assembly of senior officials

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<sup>119</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 59.

<sup>120</sup> John Petherick, *Egypt, the Soudan and Central Africa With Explorations from Khartoum on the White Nile to the Regions of the Equator* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1861), 279; Holt, *A History* (2011), 39; 175 n. 7.

<sup>121</sup> Holt, *A History* (2011), 44-45.

and notables to study the state of the province and to explore remedies for its many ills. The transcript of these proceedings shows two leading Copts, Hanna al-Tawil and one *al-Mu'allim* Mikha'il, figuring prominently in the lively exchanges among the various officials. Citing the immense size of Sennar, an attendee conceded that it would be "foolish" for anyone to discuss its conditions before hearing from al-Tawil, given his "knowledge of its circumstances."<sup>122</sup> At the *deftardar's* bidding, Al-Tawil provided a detailed timetable of the various taxes that had been assessed, and when pressed he gave cautious projections for what revenues might be anticipated if the collections were executed judiciously.<sup>123</sup> *Al-Mu'allim* Mikha'il abu al-'Ubayd, who had arrived in 1824 with 'Uthman Bey as the *mubashir* for the *Nizam Jadid*, presented the registers. He detailed the actual revenues that had been collected from the various sections of the Jazeera, in addition to figures relative to trade and the fluctuations in the gold market.<sup>124</sup> The two Coptic administrators were also actively involved in discussions of topics related to governance.

These proceedings are evocative of what we have seen before of the *arakhina* in their disparate roles. They could be at once high-ranking political counsels and experts in the complicated minutia of administration.<sup>125</sup> In the 1820s, al-Tawil fulfilled various tasks, including the mission to inform Mehmet 'Ali of the army's material needs and to present information on the condition of the desert route. Despite the *wali's* angry protestation that this administrative specialist had been misemployed, he proceeded to entrust him with the rather uninspired chore of overseeing the transport of materials between the northern Nile cataracts and Aswan.<sup>126</sup> However, even these more pedestrian services are a sign of al-Tawil's profound

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<sup>122</sup> 'Abd al-Majid, *al-Tarbiya fi al-Sudan*, 3:61. This volume contains an Arabic translation of the transcript for the *majlis al-Shura* meeting, convened 8 Muharram, 1242 h.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 59; 62.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 63; 68.

<sup>125</sup> Al-Tawil's prominence was illustrated in one recension of the Funj Chronicle in which he is included among the foremost figures of Isma'il's retinue, alongside the *qadi*, *mufti* and *kahya*. Holt, ed. *The Sudan*, 81.

<sup>126</sup> Douin *Histoire*, 130-31; 191.

incorporation within the mechanisms of state, which in fact gave him singular access to the centers of power. It is a rather symbolic footnote to his story that in the course of fulfilling these sundry tasks, he might have been at the center of one of the most significant breakthroughs of the century. One rendition of the "discovery" of long-staple cotton has al-Tawil returning from *Bilad al-Sudan* garmented in a checkered cloth that piqued Mehmet 'Ali's interest. After he explained that it had been fabricated from cotton grown in the district of Makada, the *wali* sent for a sample of the plant that was to make "Egyptian" cotton famous around the world.<sup>127</sup>

It is clear that like his predecessors among the *arakhina*, al-Tawil held a critical and sensitive position of service to the secular authorities. But also like them, his position hinged on what would later appear to be the entanglement of the "religious" with the "secular." Two years before the Sudan campaign, he hastened to report to the patriarch that he had procured a permit authorizing repairs to sacred sites in Jerusalem.<sup>128</sup> He was a man of craft and confession, living in a world in which sacred responsibilities and profane tasks, the lofty and the terrestrial, blended together. This is a crucial point to consider. It mitigates the flat caricature of the "Coptic scribe" which pervades the narratives of the "Turco-Egyptian" Sudan.<sup>129</sup> Writing towards the end of the next decade, a European officer serving in the administration offered a characteristic description of the Copts. They were a "perfidious race," animated solely by the desire for material gain, and constantly devising stratagems that would allow them to "do what they want with impunity."<sup>130</sup> Variations on the theme also occur in Turco-Egyptian sources. In the case of al-Tawil, Isma'il

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<sup>127</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 51-52. A more familiar version of the story places a French textile engineer, Louis Jumel, at the center of the story; see Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 28. For a small bibliography of the different accounts of the "discovery," see Rivlin, *Agricultural Policy*, 335-36, f.n. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Iskariius, *Nawabigh*, I:71-72.

<sup>129</sup> Linant de Bellefonds described al-Tawil - alongside Turkish soldiers - carrying a surfeit of precious metals that were a "product of the onerous contributions levied at Sennar, Shendi, Berber." Such details can easily reinforce the depiction of the servile and rapacious Copt. Pascale Linant de Bellefonds, *L'Etbaye Pays Habite Par Les Arabes Bicharieh Géographie, Ethnologie, Mines d'Or* (Paris: Librairie de la Société de Géographie, 1868), 15.

<sup>130</sup> The translated manuscript is published in Hill, *On the Frontiers*, 48-49.

was said to have ill-regarded his "financial morals," a sentiment that Mehmet 'Ali shared.<sup>131</sup> After the codes of taxation caused peasants to flee from their villages, the *wali* lamented that while the regime's interests required an exercise of justice, "Hanna al-Tawil does not even comprehend" the virtue.<sup>132</sup>

It is important, however, to keep in mind that Coptic functionaries were visible emblems of administration, and ready objects of blame for failure, excess or corruption. In subsequent decades, when the regime wished to make a show of its struggles to combat injustices, the pageantry included the public hangings of unscrupulous Coptic functionaries. A passing reference from de Bellefonds' journal of the expedition provides a glimpse of al-Tawil's world, beyond the flat caricatures that so offended the sensibilities of European mercenaries and "Turco-Egyptian" rulers alike. Al-Tawil spoke with de Bellefonds about the many old, Arabic language books that he had discovered to be in the possession of local notables. As they reclined in the *kashef's* quarters in Shendi conversing at length on matters of history and geography, the writer was struck by al-Tawil's breadth of knowledge about sacred history.<sup>133</sup> It is not far-fetched to imagine that al-Tawil conceived of a deeper significance to his endeavors, for he was a man imbued with a knowledge of sacred history and an apprehension of sacred space that had yet to be shattered. If his undertakings in these southern regions occasioned material gain, to limit the picture to this dimension would be, so to speak, and injustice.

And there is another incentive for considering this world that al-Tawil navigated; it serves as a backdrop against which to view the profound changes of the coming decades. In a sense, he was a man standing on the cusp of a new epoch, filling the "traditional" roles open to a Coptic lay leader of rank. His services in "the Sudan" helped to pave the way for the return of his

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<sup>131</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 16.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Douin, *Histoire*, 278-79.

<sup>133</sup> de Bellefonds, *Journal d'un Voyage*, 79.

confession's churches to those territories, and even for a succession of bishops. But this story of recovery thinly veils an alarming condition of alienation. The experiences of *al-Mu'allim* al-Tawil and *al-Mu'allim* Ghali, in "the Sudan" and "Egypt" respectively, divulge something of this peculiar historical moment while complicating simple narratives of conquest and occupation.

Ghali was a man of considerable talent who, like al-Tawil, was immersed in a world of the *ancien regime*.<sup>134</sup> His rise to prominence began while he was serving the house of Alfi Bey during the eighteenth century. He must have perceived the shifting dynamics, for he transferred allegiance to Mehmet 'Ali at the beginning of his rise to power and was thus able to maintain a position of influence.<sup>135</sup> Mehmet 'Ali placed considerable trust in Ghali's judgments and depended on him in matters of finance, while in return the *mu'allim* is said to have "never resisted" his patron.<sup>136</sup> A late nineteenth century Coptic historian was sufficiently embedded in the new order to praise the "great national service" that Ghali provided in generating unprecedented revenues for the country. He knew, the historian explained, "that there was much land throughout Egypt that was being farmed tax-free, so he imposed taxes on those lands." He contributed to divisions of the lands of towns and villages that had no precedent, and that made the penetration of these revenue sources possible.<sup>137</sup> In the first chapter, we addressed Ghali's cooperation with Mehmet 'Ali's projects of standardization in the lands of the *Wajh al-Bahri* and the *Wajh al-Qibli*. In his journal, Hekekyan noted that while the tax assessments had previously been calculated annually according to the vagaries of the Nile, during the reign of Mehmet 'Ali,

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<sup>134</sup> It is said that Ghali spoke Turkish, an indication of how intimately this class of scribes was incorporated within the ruling culture. Rufayla, *Kitab*, 297.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 297-98. His story fits a wider pattern of self-preservation at this time. Many merchants were destroyed in this period, but those who entered into the service of the *wali* early on fared better and became, practically speaking, his employees. Fahmy, *Mehmet 'Ali*, 33. In similar fashion, some astute leaders among the bedouin secured positions in the fledgling bureaucracies of the regime.

<sup>136</sup> As we have already seen, he even assented to the *wali*'s request that he join the Church of Rome.

<sup>137</sup> Rufayla, *Kitab*, 298. We might say that the very existence of "interstitial" spaces beyond the reach of the "center" became administrative "problems" in the same way that semi-independent tribal regimes became "problems" of disorder and lawlessness.



"the land tax has been made a fixed sum levied annually for each village." <sup>138</sup>

But there is an important - and scarcely recognized - regional correlate to this process. Anders Bjorkelo has correctly noted that the taxation system that the "Turks" tried to implement in the lands of *al-Sudan* was "not only alien to the Sudanese, but ... was also largely an innovation in Egypt." <sup>139</sup> Mehmet 'Ali sought to generate revenues to fund his monumental projects, and Ghali and al-Tawil were both employed to this end. Around the time that Ghali was working with Ibrahim Pasha to standardize land taxes in *Bilad Misr*, al-Tawil joined forces with the deputy of Ibrahim's brother and others to impose various taxes according to fixed principles in *Bilad al-Sudan*. <sup>140</sup> In both cases, the practical objective was the elimination of "traditional" assessments, which had involved an intimate relationship with circumstances on the ground - the kind of adaptability that accompanied "local knowledge." When disturbances erupted across the environs of Sennar, the village chiefs blamed them on a disregard for local conditions, including the integrity of the corporate village system. Had the tax "been set by the village rather than by the house," they claimed, "it would have been easier ... for the inhabitants were accustomed to this mode of taxation." <sup>141</sup>

Taxation is only one of a range of topics that can throw tentative bridges across the rifts that have so separated "Egypt" from "the Sudan," particularly in the recollection of the "Turco-Egyptian" occupation. Others may be mentioned, including the forced conscriptions for the *Nizam Jadid* army. During the early 1820s, twenty thousand slaves were forced to make the terrible journey north to the training camps in the *Sa'id* that were organized by Colonel Seve; but from the opposite direction, as many as thirty thousand *fellahin* would be compelled to make a

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<sup>138</sup> Journals 1844-1850, Hekekyan Papers, BL Add Mss 37450, (1846), 3: f.169.

<sup>139</sup> Bjorkelo, *Prelude*, 83.

<sup>140</sup> Journals 1844-1850, Hekekyan Papers, BL Add Mss 37450, (1846), 3: f.169.

<sup>141</sup> Douin, *Histoire*, 277.

similar journey at roughly the same period.<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, a range of common tactics was deployed against peoples from Sennar and Berber to the regions of the "Egyptian" *Sa'id*. Three *'ulema* accompanied Isma'il in 1820, and were commissioned to preach publicly about the religious duty not to oppose the armies which were acting in the caliph's service.<sup>143</sup> Likewise, when Mehmet 'Ali concluded that the *fellahin* should be conscripted into the *Nizam Jadid*, men of religion were deployed so that the *fellahin* would be "convinced gradually of its benefits."<sup>144</sup>

But perhaps more compelling are the popular reactions to the regime's designs, including a near simultaneity of revolts on both sides of the imagined border. In 1824, as the *defterdar* was still struggling to contain the fires along the Nilotic Sudan, a revolt broke out in the "Egyptian" *Sa'id* that swelled to more than 30,000 people. The leader of the revolt was one Shaykh Radwan who assumed the mantle of Mahdi and pronounced that Mehmet 'Ali was an infidel. The rebellion was only finally subdued when 'Uthman Bey arrived with his *Nizam* forces, and dealt a terminal blow to the heart of the rebellion near Qena.<sup>145</sup> Incidentally, 'Uthman Bey accomplished the task as he was on his way to *al-Sudan* with his modern regiments to take the place of the *defterdar*.<sup>146</sup> The initiatives of the regime had violated long-established rights and conventions in sections of the Egyptian *Sa'id* as they had in *Bilad al-Sudan*. It was hardly a coincidence that the locus for the three wide-scale rebellions of the period in "Egypt" all occurred in the very swath of territory that faced the initial conscription drives.<sup>147</sup> The dread of

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<sup>142</sup> Dodwell, *The Founder*, 64; Mekki Shibeika, *Tarikh shu'ub Wadi al-Nil fi al-qarn al-tasi' 'ashar al-miladi* (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1965), 347-48.

<sup>143</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 9.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in Douin, *Histoire*, 342.

<sup>145</sup> Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 95. The expression "vocabulary of rights" is borrowed from Rieker; see "The Sa'id," 123.

<sup>146</sup> Holt, *A History* (1988), 57.

<sup>147</sup> This important observation was noted by Lawson, *Social Origins*, 104. J. A. St. John provided an eyewitness account of one of these rebellions, led by a "Mahdi" whose base of operations was located near Girga; see *Egypt and Nubia* (London, 1847), 348. His followers said that they would rather "have sheitan [Satan] himself rule than Muhammad Ali."

conscription was graphically illustrated in the drastic measures that people took in order to secure exemption. Cases of self-mutilation were rampant, and mothers even maimed their newborns to protect them against future drives. Mehmet 'Ali eventually decided that the maimed should not be exempted, and he formed an entire regiment at Asyut made up of disfigured conscripts. In his commissioned report, Bowring noted that "every one of [them] was missing an eye, finger or front teeth."<sup>148</sup> All of this fortifies the case for a common interrogation of the lands of "*al-Sudan*" and "*Misr*" as they endured the conditions of a new kind of "occupation."

In these circumstances, Copts were not necessarily immune from the conscription drives. On one occasion in 1832, the British consul reported encountering 120 Copts who were "chained two and two to be enrolled in the military service." He added that the *wali* was preparing to conscript a total of 5,000 Copts, although this never materialized, due in part to pressure from European governments.<sup>149</sup> All populations were gripped by the terror caused by the conscription policy, including even monastic communities. A visitor to *Dayr al-Ahmar* in the late 1820s found that the monks recoiled in fear at the news of visitors, imagining that the "pasha's soldiers were come to seize them for the army." This prospect caused them to "live in constant dread."<sup>150</sup>

But these localized dynamics arguably reveal more than simply a fear of conscription on the part of the inmates. They perhaps also signal a more fundamental threat to these "intermediary" sites - to the closing of interstitial spaces writ large. If we speak of the penetration of "*al-Sudan*" as an "opening," then we might extend this to include an "opening" of the deserts and monasteries as well. Just as modern techniques of order were projected toward the desert routes of the unruly bedouin, the monasteries - which Sonnini once called the potential "magazines of provision" for hostile bedouin - were facing a new order of vulnerability as well.

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<sup>148</sup> John Bowring, "Report on Egypt and Candia," *Parliamentary Papers* 1840 XXI, 52.

<sup>149</sup> Rivlin, *Agricultural Policy*, 204.

<sup>150</sup> Platt, *Journal*, 1:180-81.

<sup>151</sup> This was graphically shown when one Hussein Bey led a military force to conquer the Western desert oasis of Siwa in order to safeguard the right flank of the Sudan expedition. Significantly, Hussein Bey's 1300-strong force proceeded with their cannons past Wadi al-Natrun en route to its remote destination. <sup>152</sup> If the monks took this forbidding and unprecedented apparition to be an ill omen of the age, it would not have been unfounded. By 1822, the inhabitants of a monastery near the Nile noted that for the first time they were required to pay taxes to the pasha, and later the monks of *Dayr* al-Abyad complained that the regime had expropriated monastery lands. <sup>153</sup>

Other intrusions were to follow. The rush for natural treasures in Fazogli and elsewhere in *al-Sudan* had its counterpart in the lands to the north, where even the most forsaken wasteland became a potential mineralogical jackpot. This object moved Mehmet 'Ali to send Hekekyan Bey on an 1844 expedition that brought him into the vicinity of the Eastern Desert monasteries. <sup>154</sup> Hekekyan's writings reveal that even this remote setting could become a theater of operation in the clash of orders - at least in the fantasies of this loyal agent of the regime. The engineer's attention naturally settled on construction and the artifacts of human engagement in the desert solitude. He was unsettled by the state of *Dayr* Antonius, and conceded his inability to describe "the confused structures of rude workmanship." Instead he enumerated the building materials, which served as terrible exclamation points in lieu of an adequate description. The structures

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<sup>151</sup> Sonnini de Manoncourt, *Travels*, 178. The degree of incorporation of such "peripheral" territories was uneven, and would continue across the century and into the twentieth. For a study of the Egyptian government's efforts to extend greater control over the Western territories, see Ellis, "Between Empire and Nation."

<sup>152</sup> The resistance was destroyed after only a few hours of fighting. C. Dalrymple Belgrade, *Siwa the Oasis of Jupiter Ammon* (London, 1923), 102-103; Marcel Kurz and Pascale Linant de Bellefonds, "Linant de Bellefonds: Travels in Egypt, Sudan and Arabia Petraea, 1818-1828" in *Travellers in Egypt*, eds. P. and J. Starkey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 63-64. Several Europeans accompanied the campaign, including Drovetti, Linant de Bellefonds and A. Ricci. The residents of Siwa were forced to pay an exacting tribute in cash, in addition to 2400 dates. See Alessandro Ricci, *E Il Suo Giornale Dei Viaggi* (Cairo: Societe Royale de Geographie d'Egypte, 1930), 2:10.

<sup>153</sup> The taxes amounted to 300 piastres; *Diary of Eastern Desert* (1822-23), BL Burton Papers Add. Mss. 25624, (July 31, 1822), 1: f.30; St. John, *Egypt and Nubia*, 339.

<sup>154</sup> Journals 1841-1844, Hekekyan papers, BL, Add Mss. 37449, (March, 1844), 2: f.273.

were composed of "lime stone rubble - plastered with a composition of marble, clay, limestone powder and unburnt bricks." But he continued, "should the place have to be reconstructed and the garden laid out, a beautiful place might be made of this spot, a very terrestrial paradise." He prepared diagrams of the hypothetical project, including square footages and other measurements so precise that one suspects that, at least in his own mind, they were more than mere flights of fancy.<sup>155</sup> He did not specify who might enjoy such a terrestrial paradise. Yet the scene is reminiscent of Andréossy's excursion to the Western Desert at the time of the French occupation, during which the general surmised that an exploitation of mineral deposits would require an "occupation of the Coptic monasteries."<sup>156</sup>

Like that of Andréossy, nothing came of Hekekyan's whimsical plan. However, the monasteries were certainly falling under new regimes of control, which was incidentally noted in a volume on modern education that Rifa'at al-Tahtawi authored during his educational mission/"exile" to *al-Sudan* at mid-century. The modern scholar extolled the monks for their refusal to admit "suspicious persons" and fugitives from "near or far" who were "hiding from the government." He enthused that they were "wary of persons coming from Abyssinia, even those of good standing, and they do not smell the breath of the south," including the "blacks of *al-Sudan*."<sup>157</sup> Al-Tahtawi's praise was unusual. In the midst of his description of the traditional rigors of coenobitic life, it would seem that he had discerned a new monastic rule - the meticulous cooperation with the demands of modern governance and its methods of surveillance.

As for his disclaimer about Abyssinia and the Sudan, it was an allusion to a rich world of

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<sup>155</sup> Journals 1841-1844, Hekekyan Papers, BL, Add. Mss. 37449, (March 28, 1844) 2: ff.300-303

<sup>156</sup> Général Andréossy, "Mémoire sur la vallée des lacs de natron, et celle du feu-sans-eau, d'après la reconnaissance" in *Memoires sur l'Égypte* (Paris: l'Imprimerie de P. Didot l'Ainé, 1799), 3:236-37; The French were already experienced in trespasses upon the monasteries, using them for quartering during the three years of their occupation; Yuhanna, *Kitab Tarikh*, 628.

<sup>157</sup> Rifa'at al-Tahtawi, *Kitab manahij al-albab al-Misriya fi mabahij al-adab al'asriya* (Cairo: Matba'at Sharikat al-Ragha'ib, 1912), 401-02.

desert encounters and relationships. And in this sense, it was something of a shadowy image in negative of an order that was going into eclipse. With the policing on the margins, faint lines began to appear to the south. These were not only the nascent stages of temporal clefts, but also the hair fractures in a kind of sacred geography that would - in one sense - eventually shatter. Such a view from mid-century was perhaps a logical unfolding of some of the developments - on "both sides" of emerging faults - upon which we have lingered. We now look beyond the 1820s to follow some themes of this unfolding, focusing more narrowly on "regional" and "local" dimensions of a "Coptic condition."

### **Copts in the Sudan, Copts in Egypt; or Restoration and Loss**

Many Copts migrated to regions of *Bilad al-Sudan* after 1820, and it has been said that they constituted the majority of "Egyptians" serving in civilian capacities there.<sup>158</sup> In 1838, Mehmet 'Ali dispatched another 40 scribes to staff the bureaucracy of the various regions where they joined, among others, the "Coptic traders and merchants" who are said to have "filled the Sudan."<sup>159</sup> Although the absolute numbers of Copts in *Bilad al-Sudan* increased markedly after the "*futuh*," and while the Mehmet 'Ali period certainly brought radical changes, the "familiar" was often adapted to novel circumstances. It is instructive that the migrations included a large number of individuals from the "Egyptian" *Sa'id*, and particularly the town of Naqada (located between Esna and al-Luqsur), from which as many as 80% of the relocated Copts originated.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Zahir Riyad, *Kanisat Iskandariya fi Ifriqiya* (Cairo, 1962), 186.

<sup>159</sup> Qumus Filutha'us Farag; *al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya lil-Sudaniyin al-Aqbat al-Urthudhuks* (al-Jama'iya al-Qibtiya bil-Khartoum, 2007), 6-7. Another large southward migration coincided with the end of the Mahdiya and the beginning of the "Anglo-Egyptian Sudan" in 1899. Between 1900 and 1913, six Coptic churches were built, and bishops were sent to 'Atbara and Um Durman; Metropolitan Bishoy, "Revival of the Egyptian Church Since the Middle of the Nineteenth Century," *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, eds. Habib Badr et al. (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005) 784.

<sup>160</sup> Nabih Kamel, *Tarikh al-Masihiya wa atharuha fi Aswan wa al-Nuba* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Qiddis Murqus li-Dirasat al-Tarikh al-Qibti, 2003), 114; Nabih Kamel, *Tarikh lil-Masihiya wa atharuha fi Abrushiyati Naqada wa*

The migrations that attended the new political arrangements were at least in part naturalized within existing "local" contexts, so that while many Copts and others of the *Sa'id* migrated to the growing entrepôt of Aswan, others went further afield.<sup>161</sup>

This was the environment in which the scribes along the administrative networks existed. In isolation, questions of administration can overwhelm and conceal a complex that already extended southward before Mehmet 'Ali ever contemplated a conquest. The presence of "Coptic scribes" dispersed along administrative circuits throughout the regions of *Bilad al-Sudan* was certainly an innovation. But this is a modern inscription on the palimpsest of a "southern story." In 1836, one of the many unnamed "Coptic scribes" was stationed in the eastern territories, working in the service of Shaykh Rajab of the Hammada bedouin. The disaffected shaykh sought the assistance of Kinfu, the ruler of an Abyssinian border territory who was in Gondar at that time. The witness who recounted the episode explained that the shaykh reached out to Kinfu "under the influence of his clerk, a Copt" who was eventually hanged for treachery.<sup>162</sup> Such a parenthetical remark suggests an inclination on the part of a nameless Coptic clerk to delve into the abstruse political terrains of *Bilad al-Habasha*. Yet his propensity to be so engaged, and the knowledge that he demonstrated about affairs in these "alien" lands is a historical fragment that is not exactly at home in any historiography. It had been several years since the previous *abun* had died, and *Bilad al-Habasha* had not yet obtained a successor from the Alexandrian patriarch. Even so, an anonymous scribe in the lands of *al-Sudan* was interested in the political circumstances in territories that, so the story has gone, were linked with "Coptic Egypt" only by the most tenuous of ecclesiastical threads.

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*Qus*), 219; al-Masri, *Qissat al-kanisat*, 4:150. The Coptic community in *al-Sudan* came to be known informally as "al-Naqada;" Zahir Riyad, *al-Sudan al-Ma'asr Mundhu al-Fath al-Misri Hata al-Istiqlal 1821-1953* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglo-Misriya, 1966), 242.

<sup>161</sup> Kamil, *Tarikh al-Masihya*, 114-15.

<sup>162</sup> Hill, *On the Frontiers*, 15.

Incidentally, less than 20 years later Salama III, the "Egyptian" *abun*, would crown Kinfu's nephew as Emperor Tewodros II, an event that peasants and priests in "Egypt" followed closely, supposing that he might be the quasi-messianic Tewodros of popular lore. All of this bespeaks a kind of historical continuity that could cast a cleric's gaze, or a scribe's, across unlikely territorial reaches. And for peasants also, the "far-off" lands could have a certain imminence. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, Winifred Blackman found a conviction "among some, if not all, of those Copts belonging to the *fellahin* class that the Abyssinians will one day conquer Egypt." <sup>163</sup>

But some *fellahin* did more than gaze toward the southern horizons. In 1828/9, a wave of peasants fled their villages in the "Egyptian" *Sa'id* and arrived at Dongola where the levies were less severe. <sup>164</sup> This is not unlike a contemporaneous administrative "problem" in *Bilad al-Sudan*, where 'Ali Khurshid struggled to deal with the time-honored peasant recourse to flee to the Abyssinian marches in times of distress. In an Egyptian nationalist imaginary, the *fellahin* would become fixtures of the countryside as rooted and timeless as the lands they tilled. But this too has a genealogy, which surely includes the diminished latitude for unmediated movement. In the episode of 1828/9, a sharply worded message was promptly issued from Cairo dictating that the fugitives must be apprehended and returned to their villages of origin. <sup>165</sup> Movement of peoples would persist, but it would be increasingly mediated by the "center." This is illustrated in Mehmet 'Ali's 1825 decree that 48 shaykhs, and 70 other individuals, including *fellahin*, were to be dispatched to *Bilad al-Sudan* for the purpose of diffusing their specialized knowledge throughout the country to "accustom [its] people to farming." <sup>166</sup> We thus resume our inquiries into matters of administration and administrative service with the qualification that this is a point

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<sup>163</sup> Blackman, *The Fellahin*, 54.

<sup>164</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 50.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>166</sup> Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil*, 2:320. This decree was issued March 1, 1825.



of entry into an elaborate network, an exploration of one dimension of a complex in transition.

When 'Uthman Bey Jarkas arrived as commander-in-chief of Sennar in 1824, he sent a communication to Mehmet 'Ali recommending the restructure of the tax system. In the letter, he spoke of the adverse consequences of al-Tawil's unjust arrangements, with assurances that he had personally consulted with the native tax-farmers about appropriate adjustments. The *wali* gave his consent, but admonished the commander-in-chief to follow the counsel of "those who knew" before interfering with prevailing practices.<sup>167</sup> 'Uthman Bey died a year later, and in 1826 'Ali Khurshid succeeded him, during whose tenure *al-Mu'allim* 'Mikha'il abu al-'Ubayd took over for al-Tawil, becoming the chief scribe in 'Ali Khurshid's service. In Al-Zubayr b. Dawwah's recension of the Funj chronicles, 'Ali Khurshid is said to have done nothing without consulting with his *mu'awin* (literally 'assistants') or with Mikha'il abu al-'Ubayd, whom he explained "were men long in the viceroy's service, and possessed expert knowledge."<sup>168</sup>

'Ali Khurshid's 12-year rule saw the growth and refinement of the bureaucracy, and increasing numbers of Coptic scribes and accountants were distributed at key nodes along the circuits of power in the burgeoning bureaucracy. Throughout these years and beyond, a succession of chief scribes or *mubashirs* appear in the sources, and their circumstances bear characteristics quite like those prevailing in what we have been calling an "ancien regime." The case of *al-Mu'allim* al-Tawil exemplified a condition in which positions of distinction were admixed with shades of suspicion, and the prospect of a fall from grace was virtually intrinsic to the conferral of robes of honor. The case of his second successor attests to this. *Al-Mu'allim* Bishara al-Buluti had not long since assumed *al-Mu'allim* Mikha'il's place when certain unspecified misdeeds were discovered. 'Ali Khurshid not only terminated his service, but

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<sup>167</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 20.

<sup>168</sup> Holt, ed., *The Sudan*, 129.

according to the Funj Chronicle's ominous if obscure relation of the episode, had him arrested and sent "to the dockyard as a warning to others against the commission of improprieties." <sup>169</sup>

A European surveying these upper Nile territories in 1833 described a reigning system in Dongola that enabled the diffusion of receipts. All along the chains of command, so the witness explained, "roguery" prevailed as *ma'murs*, *qa'immaqams*, *kashefs*, and soldiers siphoned revenues. But the Copts he singled out for special censure:

... the mallums, or Coptic accountants ... not only cheat the ignorant Turks, who generally cannot read their accounts, but often trade with the money of the treasury, and incur losses which they are unable to repay. <sup>170</sup>

These observations were made after the governor, Ibrahim *Effendi*, had suppressed a local uprising in the environs of Dongola. Fearing that the episode might have jeopardized his assignment, he spared no effort to quell the disturbances. At the culmination of the crisis, the Coptic scribes and treasurers were conspicuously relieved. Hoskins, no doubt infusing a degree of orientalist embellishment, accounted for their singular alarm:

[They conceive] perhaps with some reason, that, besides their office, and having the character of being individually rich, their obnoxious titles of Christian dogs and tax-gatherers would have ensured to them, had the citadel been taken, being the first to have their throats cut. <sup>171</sup>

An anonymous European officer who was employed by the government in the late 1830s also offered an account of the influence of the Coptic scribes. When reporting official items to their superiors, these unscrupulous attendants often would go so far as to "read something other than what is written." He continued:

The governors, from the lowest to the highest, are obliged to rely on their Coptic

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* The incident occurs in two recensions of the Funj Chronicle. That of the Katib al-Shuna Ahmad b. al-Hajj Abu 'Ali occurs on page 100, and al-Zubayr w. Dawwah on 131-32.

<sup>170</sup> George Hoskins, *Travels in Ethiopia, Above the Second Cataract of the Nile: Exhibiting the State of that Country, And Its Various Inhabitants, Under the Dominion of Mohammed Ali, And Illustrating the Antiquities, Arts, and History of the Ancient Kingdom of Meroe* (London: Longman, 1835), 231-32.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

scribes who, knowing the weaknesses of their chiefs, take advantage of them and use them for their own ends ... these scribes are secretaries, advisors, administrators, legislators and accountants, more feared than the pasha as can be seen from the dire effects of their revenge. Men have been imprisoned, loaded with chains and not released until they had bought their freedom dearly. Others have been despoiled of their property, others sentenced to death for alienating some of their number.<sup>172</sup>

The author's unconcealed disdain for the Copts suffuses the text. But caricatures and exaggerations notwithstanding, these descriptions reveal the singular influence enjoyed by Coptic specialists. In a superficial sense, they would seem to indicate a prodigious diffusion of a kind of interstitial "Coptic power" that we have discussed; this feature of an *ancien regime* order was apparently alive and well. And the confessional presence in these "redeemed" lands even found formal expression as churches were built and a succession of bishops ultimately arrived. But appearances can be deceptive. Before elaborating on this southern "expansion," we return to the state of bureaucracy and reform in the lands of *Misr*.

In his landmark 1931 history of modern Egypt, Henry Dodwell's sympathies were patent as he described an exasperated Mehmet 'Ali wringing his hands at the mystifying labyrinth of Coptic power. In fact, Dodwell was reminded of Britain's own confrontations with the relics of unreason in India:

The Copts, who had long monopolized the business of public accountancy, had developed accounts as complicated as those of the Brahmans at the Poona Daftar ... The feddan, like the Indian bigha, did not mean the same area of land in different districts, or even in different parts of the same district. The practice of keeping officials in arrears of pay gave them an excuse (for what perhaps they would have done in any case) to impose and levy extra dues which, as in India, were when discovered ... at once replaced by additional impositions. Mehmet 'Ali resolved to cut his way through this forest of abuses.<sup>173</sup>

In narratives of modern Egypt, the "Copts" have often been held up as the stubborn stalwarts of

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<sup>172</sup> This is taken from an anonymous Italian manuscript, translated and published in full in Hill, *On the Frontiers*, 48-49.

<sup>173</sup> Dodwell, *The Founder*, 31-32.

regression. We have encountered some of these ideas as they were coming into vogue in European discourses in the last years of the eighteenth century. But during the late 1820s and especially into the 1830s, there was an upsurge in European attention to questions of Copts and the administration. Whatever faults would be imputed to Mehmet 'Ali, his struggle against obscurantism was a favorable sign in the metanarrative of reason as he took up the gauntlet that had slipped from the hands of the French in 1801. Already in 1829, the French consul at Alexandria noted the efforts to reform the bookkeeping methods that, "thanks to old routines and deceits of Copts," were "worse than anywhere in the world." The "loose papers are removed," he reported with satisfaction, and the records were now "required to be on double entry."<sup>174</sup>

But these commendable offensives were insufficient to eradicate the problem. In 1837 and 1838 John Bowring, a prominent British liberal, was in the country to study the state of Egypt for Her Majesty's government. In the course of his January, 1838 report, Bowring addressed Mehmet 'Ali's finances:

the finance accounts are all kept by Copts, who, in fact, are the only people in the country capable of doing it; but they are universally rogues and thieves, and their accounts are kept in such a way, that, although Mahomet Ali has a positive conviction that he is cheated by them, still he cannot discover in what manner.<sup>175</sup>

Several years later, a French orientalist offered similar observations:

All organization capable of simplifying a service of administration is repulsed by Coptic scribes; they live in disorder and by disorder; they are the powerful enemies that Mehemet-Ali has placed near to him.<sup>176</sup>

The "Copts" are caught standing in the way of rational methods, as antagonists and bogeymen along modernity's march, disembodied "enemies" here, "rogues and thieves" there,

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<sup>174</sup> Mimaut to Comte Portalis (July 22, 1829) in Georges Douin, *L'Egypte de 1828-1830, Correspondance des Consuls de France en Egypte* (Cairo: la Reale societ  di geografia d'Egitto, 1935), 128.

<sup>175</sup> "Report of Colonel Campbell," Appendix A in Bowring, "Report," 189. Campbell's report is dated January 18, 1838.

<sup>176</sup> Hamont, *Egypte*, 1:343.

consistently guarding the forest of their abuses against the onslaught of progress.

Here, Europeans were more than mere observers, purveying gross stereotypes and oversimplifications for Western audiences and governments. In the pursuit of modern methods, Mehmet 'Ali was only too eager to enlist the services of foreign experts in all fields, and during the 1830s he sought out European specialists to assist in his bureaucratic reforms. On the question of these reforms, he turned to his top advisor, the minister of foreign affairs. This leading man of state was not a Copt as in the days of the al-Gawhari brothers or even of *al-Mu'allim* Ghali, but rather the Armenian Boghos Bey who contracted the services of a French expert to devise a new bureaucratic structure.<sup>177</sup> In this ominous turn, Armenian and European agents were enlisted in a task with unmistakable echoes of the role that al-Tawil and his subordinates had served 20 years earlier in *al-Sudan*. The Frenchman in question was Edme-François Jomard, previously the superintendent of the first educational mission that Mehmet 'Ali sent to France. Jomard later recalled that his preparations for the bureaucracy were modeled after European methods, with the scribes "established roughly as in France, under the command of the khazandar," while the departmental heads were placed "under the direct charge of the mudir."<sup>178</sup> Other tentative steps were taken, including the establishment of an accounting school in the capital to prepare students for service in the civilian and military bureaucracies.<sup>179</sup>

After a short while, Bowring would undertake his thoroughgoing study of the country. The very breadth of concerns that he addressed is an unmistakable indication of Europe's expanding interest in the region. In fact, it was at this time that he and two of his countrymen became the

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<sup>177</sup> Dodwell, *The Founder*, 207-208.

<sup>178</sup> Edme-François Jomard, *Coup d'oeil Impartial sur l'état présent de l'Égypte, comparé a sa situation antérieure* (Paris: Imprimerie de Béthune et Plon, 1836), 23.

<sup>179</sup> Shibeika, *Tarikh*, 381.

first Europeans to broach the subject of the Sudan slave trade.<sup>180</sup> In so doing, he helped to throw a spotlight on an issue that was to have a consuming - and distorting - influence over diplomatic, political, humanitarian, and indeed civilizational and historical discourses. Turning to the bureaucracy, Bowring noted that while strides had been made, particularly in the implementation of double-entry bookkeeping in the core ledgers, serious breaches existed between these records of the *khazandar* and those of his subalterns. These breaches allowed for the dispersion of revenues, which were "appropriated to different objects, independent of the inspection of the central authority." He then made a case for the humanitarianism of centralized control, suggesting to the pasha that the "sufferings of the people were increased by the want of that control which a good accountancy would bring with it."

Bowring was promptly commissioned to assist in the overhaul of the system of accounts. Mehmet 'Ali called a *diwan* which was headed by his grandson 'Abbas and included the majority of ministers. The government books were all gathered for Bowring's inspection. The accounts were entirely in the hands of "Coptic Christian functionaries" who were themselves under the direction of Basilius Bey, the accountant general and son of the late *al-Mu'allim* Ghali. Bowring aimed to arrive at a comprehensive budget of revenues and expenditures at the start of each fiscal year, and to ensure that the total revenues were deposited into the central treasury in order to preempt occasion for fraud and abuse. Finally, he resolved to sever the fiscal positions of payments and receipts, and to place the disbursement of funds in all departments under the direct authority of the finance minister.<sup>181</sup>

Although the privileged position of Copts in the secretarial positions would erode during the course of the century, this was a gradual process that by no means had a uniform effect

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<sup>180</sup> Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad Ali, *The British*, 7.

<sup>181</sup> Bowring, "Report," 62.

everywhere. Even in the 1890s, Stanley Lane-Poole found that in the provincial law courts the "Coptic clerk is indeed practically judge of first instance, for it depends upon his favour whether the peasant's suit ever reaches the governor's or judge's ears." Likewise, the Copts would remain heavily represented in the fields of tax collection, and some of the emerging class of large landowners owed their holdings at least in part to the power they wielded in these positions.<sup>182</sup> These details underscore the nature of the process, and contradict clean breaks or dramatic ruptures, despite the ambitions of restless rulers and reformers. But this does not gainsay the general trajectory. In his study of modern Egyptian bureaucracy, Robert Hunter has noted that despite the political vicissitudes across the nineteenth century, the hierarchical bureaucracy that was begun under Mehmet 'Ali was never dismantled, and the effects of novel structures and methods became apparent, if gradually.<sup>183</sup> Basilius Bey might have retained significant influence in the financial machinery, but it does not appear that his prominence matched that of his own father, whose influence in turn faded in the shadows of the al-Gawhari brothers before him.

Meanwhile, the projects of "reform" eroded the substructure of specialized roles. In the years immediately after Jomard and Bowring's interventions had been solicited, the observation could be made that while previous to Mehmet 'Ali's reign, the Copts alone supplied the "multitude of scribes for accounting in the divers administrations," now they shared them with

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<sup>182</sup> Raouf Abbas and Assem al-Dessouky, *The Large Landowning Class and the Peasantry, 1837-1952*, trans. Amer Mohsen (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 72-73. Abbas and al-Dessouky provide a masterful study of the factors that gradually coalesced in the emergence of the class of large landowners. Among the many contributions of the study is the authors' insistence on studying the constituents of the class together. In their own words, the groups of the emerging class - the house of Mehmet 'Ali, the 'ayan, and "the Bedouin, shaykhs, the Copts and the European groups" had seldom been "associated with one another in contemporary scholarship." For our purposes, the work is of particular note for the profound integration of Copts within their analysis.

<sup>183</sup> Robert Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives, 1805-1879* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 180. The bureaucratic structure, together with the Nizam Jadid army remained the linchpin of the state, notwithstanding a historical literature that characterized the "middle decades" of the nineteenth century as a period of "reaction"; Toledano, *State and Society*, 15. 'Abbas' reign was notable for, among other things, the creation of a camel corps which was aimed at improving "internal security" capacities, particularly on the desert frontiers; John Dunn, *Khedive Ismail's Army* (London: Routledge, 2005), 16.

Muslims.<sup>184</sup> Copts were scarcely present in the upper echelons of bureaucracy, and particularly after 1849 they were largely restricted to medial and low-level positions.<sup>185</sup>

In fact, 1849 was a critical year along the historical trajectory we have adumbrated. It will be recalled that when Mehmet 'Ali convoked the *diwan* in which the financial ledgers were placed before Bowring, 'Abbas sat at the head of the convocation. The young 'Abbas looked on as a European "expert" - who regarded the Copts as "universally rogues and thieves" - struggled to sort through the muddled field of abuses. This episode was part of 'Abbas' formation, and it may have been at least in the recesses of his mind when he triggered a crisis in Coptic circles almost immediately after he became Mehmet 'Ali's second successor in 1849.<sup>186</sup>

Lieder of the Church Missionary Society was close to the unfolding events and provided a description:

[ 'Abbas ] threatened to dismiss all the Christians, and especially the Copts who were engaged as scribes and accountants from the government service, and nine hundred mostly fathers of families were actually dismissed and left to starve. These men knew no other business and could not labour therefore at any craft ... several of them in short time turned Mahometans knowing this to be the surest way to gain their former employments.

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<sup>184</sup> Hamont, *Egypte*, 1:343. Innumerable illustrations attest to this process. One instance can be glimpsed at Terana, the site of the storehouse for the famous natron trade in the environs of Wadi al-Natrun. CMS missionary Kruse visited the site, where he only discovered two Coptic clerks for the depot. There had been more, he noted, but "latterly Mohammedans have been trained as clerks, and have displaced the Copts from the divans; not merely here but in several other places, which we have visited. This in a great measure accounts for the poverty we at present find among the Copts." See Kruse to Coates CMS C M/O/45/165 (received August 2, 1845).

<sup>185</sup> Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives*, 99. From the 1820s, the Coptic scribes in the bureaucracy began receiving regularized monthly wages; *Ibid.* 18. At that time, Felix Mengin commented on the reduced fortunes of the Copts who under the ancien regime had been charged with administering finances, collecting revenues, and holding accounts of all incomes and expenditures for the Mamluks. Now, he observed, "these same men are reduced to simple scribal functions, and receive simple stipends from the government, that employs them." Felix Mengin, *Histoire de l'Égypte sous le gouvernement de Mohammed-Aly, ou Récit des événements politiques et militaires qui ont eu lieu depuis le départ des Français jusqu'en 1823* (Paris, 1823), 2:282-83.

<sup>186</sup> Ironically, 'Abbas Pasha's tumultuous five-year rule entered history as a quintessential retreat from modernity, as he closed government schools and famously exiled educational reformist Rifa'at al-Tahtawi to *al-Sudan*. In a revisionist volume on the Egypt's "middle years" in the nineteenth century, Toledano has argued that 'Abbas' negative image owed much to the politically motivated charges both of Turco-Egyptians and Europeans whose interests were threatened by his governance; *State and Society*, especially 41-7; 108-48. 'Abbas' motivation for turning out these Copts is unclear. But whatever the cause, it is likely that this summary dismissal was made possible by adaptations and reforms of the preceding years and decades.



Such a sweeping action would probably not have been feasible without seeds that were sown over decades; by now, 900 Coptic scribes were deemed to be expendable. But the episode also highlights how intimately entwined Europeans had become in the affairs of the country, and in the life of the Copts and their confession. Patriarch Butrus VII brought news of the dilemma to Lieder and entreated his intervention to "help [these Copts] with the government."<sup>187</sup>

Generations of Europeans had presented themselves before patriarchs, soliciting their good offices for letters of recommendation. In a cruel turn of history, a patriarch now laid a petition at the feet of a guest of his own see.<sup>188</sup> To be sure, the menace of modern methods and the looming specter of Europe went hand in hand.

Despite his efforts, Lieder was unable to obtain the reinstatement of the Copts to their "traditional" positions. But the viceroy `finally satisfied them with grants of land, "by the cultivation of which they might gain an honest livelihood." Here, we are reminded of the fate of many bedouin tribes as Mehmet 'Ali pursued policies aimed at bringing these semi-independent entities under control. These methods included the granting of lands - mainly to shaykhs and others of high rank - to encourage sedentarization.<sup>189</sup> Evidently sedentarization was a policy that could be deployed against the wild denizens of deserts and bureaucracies alike.<sup>190</sup>

The dismantlement of a system of secrets and specialized knowledge involved the gradual deracination of elaborately ramified roots, the destabilization of age-old patrimonies and a

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<sup>187</sup> Lieder to Secretaries, CMS, C M/O 48/126 (February 25, 1850). 'Abbas even threatened to expel many of these Copts to Sennar and Darfur, and he requested a fatwa from the shaykh al-Azhar to this effect, which the shaykh refused to issue; Tariq al-Bishri, *al-Muslimun*, 40; Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:166-67.

<sup>188</sup> Six years later, another patriarch would seek British Consul Bruce's intervention to reverse a decision that extended the conscription to include the Copts. Lieder reappeared, reporting that "our interference on behalf of the Copts" was successful, and they would no longer be conscripted. see William Nassau Senior, *Conversations and Journals in Egypt and Malta* (London, 1882), 1:76, 153.

<sup>189</sup> Aharon, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 72.

<sup>190</sup> Amid the deluge of reforms and measures proposed or enacted across many decades, one could perhaps find numerous subtle threads that would contribute to the emergence of the dominant class landowners later in the century. The granting of lands to high - and middle rank - officials became a noticeable feature of rule from the "middle years" of the nineteenth century (during the reigns of 'Abbas and Sa'id), which served as the early foundations for the rise of large landowning; Toledano, *State and Society*, 15; 65.

forfeiture of the security that came with them. It is within this context that we recall the seemingly discordant story of "restoration" in the Sudan. We have already qualified the narrative of "return" by indicating aspects of connectivity that faded beneath modern inscriptions. Van Doorn Harder has pointed out that in his modern bureaucracies, Mehmet 'Ali designed to work with institutional agents, which had the effect of strengthening the patriarch vis-a-vis the *arakhina*.<sup>191</sup> But more than this, we can say that the very nature of the institution in these arrangements was transformed. Rather than the patriarch gaining power at the expense of the laity, the foundations for a modern institutionalization of this stark dichotomy were being laid.

And it might be conjectured that the categorical verdict of restoration is anchored in a modern understanding of the institutional church as it was inscribed into the system of the modern bureaucratic state. This is not to say that the appearance of Coptic churches and even bishops in these lands was not momentous, but to suggest rather the possibility that other expressions of presence were becoming less recognizable. At this time Darfur was still an independent sultanate, and here we might find a contrasting expression of presence. At mid-century, French physician Charles Cuny accompanied a caravan to Darfur and discovered that the "richest and most respectable trader of Egypt" was Suryan Shenuda, an Asyuti Copt. The Sultan's esteem for the House of Shenuda was so great that he even forwarded a request to *al-Mu'allim* Suryan to send one of its sons to the kingdom. The sultan not only promised "full freedom of worship," but also authorized him to "bring with him his idols [sic] and ministers of faith."<sup>192</sup> While *al-Mu'allim* Suryan turned down the entreaty, these relations hint at a kind of connectivity outside the confines of Cairo's expansive bureaucratic structure.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Guirguis and Van Doorn-Harder, *Emergence*, 65.

<sup>192</sup> Cuny, "Notice sur le Dar-Four," 94-95.

<sup>193</sup> In the aftermath of land reforms, houses that were involved in the southern trade (like the Shenuda family) invested heavily in agriculture and eventually became part of a new class of large landowners. This may or may not

Here we turn to the administration in *Bilad al-Sudan* in light the lurching efforts of reform and the contracting spaces for specialized roles to the north. The aspirations for reform were by no means isolated to *Bilad Misr*. When 'Ali Khurshid Pasha received official commendation for his services in "organizing the administration of the aqalim al-Sudan," the communication concluded portentously: "may it be like *Misr*." <sup>194</sup> Already in 1833, the Coptic scribes at Dongola were said to have disliked the governor who "examined rigidly their accounts" and did not tolerate them "to trade and speculate with the public money." <sup>195</sup> Later in the decade, Mehmet 'Ali commissioned an Austrian mining specialist to undertake an advanced mineralogical survey in *Bilad al-Sudan*, and the following year the aging viceroy personally visited these lands accompanied by a team of European engineers. Though the persistent quest for gold and other minerals was his principal object, the viceroy also attended to administrative problems and matters of public complaint. At Khartoum, he called on the leading shaykhs, heard the protestations of his subjects and brought swift action against officials who were derelict in their duties. For Kurdufan alone, the proceedings ultimately led to the removal of the governor and nine officers and Coptic intendants. <sup>196</sup> In another case, a shaykh who had abandoned his post was hanged in the public square alongside his Coptic clerk who, although promised a pardon if he embrace Islam, opted for the gallows. <sup>197</sup>

It is not insignificant that these efforts took place at roughly the same time that Bowring

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be described as a form of large-scale sedentarization. Walz, *Trade*, 114-15. The Asyuti Wissa family - which incidentally was converted to Protestantism in the 1860s - is a prominent example of the transition from the Sudan trade to large-scale investment in agricultural land. Their story is recounted, if in a somewhat hagiographic style, in Hanna Wissa, Assiout: *The Saga of an Egyptian Family* (England: The Book Guild, 1994); See also 'Abbas, *The Landowning Class*, 75.

<sup>194</sup> This khedival order (July 25, 1835) is published in Sami, *Taqwim al-nil*, 2:440.

<sup>195</sup> Hoskins, *Travels*, 176.

<sup>196</sup> Pallme, *Travels*, 42.

<sup>197</sup> Hill, *On the Frontiers*, 195. This is from a translation of an unattributed French manuscript. These judgments did not exactly represent a breakthrough in governance, and in some cases officials may have been found guilty of embezzlements several times greater than what had been committed. Werne, *Expedition*, 37-38.

and Jomard were serving as the expert witnesses of rationalization in Cairo. Yet according to Pallme's telling, when the viceroy withdrew "the former arbitrary system prevailed."<sup>198</sup> The example of *al-Mu'allim* Hariyun, the head (*bashkatib*) of the coterie of scribes who travelled to *Bilad al-Sudan* with Mehmet 'Ali in 1839, would seem to corroborate the contention. Hariyun went on to become a leading figure in the province of Kurdufan, and at some point in the 1840s he even became a bey, and later a pasha. An eyewitness offered a derisive appraisal of this figure, noting that Hariyun Pasha "afflicted the region most of whose inhabitants fled to Dar Fur and elsewhere." He continued:

When Hariyun got to know that someone was rich he wrote to him asking for the loan of a sum of money. In order not to invite misfortune the recipient sent him what he wanted. The loan was never returned to him and he did not dare to ask for it back. It was the same as if he saw a handsome slave ... [or] a beautiful horse.

Such abuses he claimed were "committed in every mudiriya" and never redressed by the governors who shared in the profits.

But the case of Ahmad Pasha Abu Widan, who served as *hukumdar* between 1838 and 1843, introduces a caveat to the narrative. He quickly earned a reputation for his stringent offensives against corruption in his endeavor to gain mastery over the mechanisms of government.<sup>199</sup> In fact his assiduous efforts to curb the diffusion of funds were in part responsible for his ascendancy. When 'Ali Khurshid Pasha left *Bilad al-Sudan* for reasons of health, Ahmad Pasha immediately impounded all accounting records. He summoned officials from a regiment who had been schooled in bookkeeping and set before them the task of examining the books. This led to the arrest of many Copts and others in the administration, and facilitated the remittance of four thousand purses to Cairo, which in turn convinced Mehmet 'Ali

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<sup>198</sup> Pallme, *Travels*, 42.

<sup>199</sup> Hill, ed., *On the Frontiers*, 49-50.

to install him as governor-general.<sup>200</sup>

During his five-years in office, Ahmad Pasha's efforts to bridle the administration were unrelenting. In these years, Hermann Puckler-Muskau travelled to Dongola, and singled it out for singular reproach in the course of his admiring study of the modern regime in Egypt. After praising Mehmet 'Ali for sparing "no expense" to effectuate the "better education of the rising generation" which was the only remedy for abuses, the author painted a grim picture of what the prophets of good government were up against:

At Dongola, a rich merchant of the place, and a Coptic officer of the governor's, who, with a salary of some 1000 piastres, spends twenty times as much, had, when I was at Dongola, already purchased all the government stores at the fixed price. When any person required a supply, he was dismissed under this pretext, and desired to wait till fresh supplies came in. Being urged by necessity, which would not allow them to wait, the people were forced to purchase privately what they required from these two individuals, at double or triple the price, and they shared their profits with the mudir.

Whether or not this was an accurate portrayal, Dongola was a site of the macabre dramatics that followed Ahmad Pasha's allegations of misconduct. Arriving at Dongola, he took the *mudir's mubashir* into custody and ordered an investigation of the ledgers. Many irregularities were purportedly found, and peasants were produced to testify to a range of misdeeds. The unfolding story savors of tactics that we have already witnessed in the first chapter, during which officials sought to extract the interstitial secrets from obdurate scribes of the *Sa'id* some 20 years earlier. In Dongola, Ahmad Pasha followed a severe course, convinced that the *mubashir* possessed a hidden store of treasure:

The flogging failed to make him reveal anything, so they took his son, aged about fifteen years, and for some days made him to suffer the bastinado, father and son alike. As this also did not succeed, Ahmad Pasha condemned both of them to be hanged ... the pair were led to the gallows and the rope was put round their necks, the son having the halter put on first. At the sight of this the father broke his heart and suddenly fell dead ...

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

The pasha proceeded to continue his inspections at al-Matamma and Wad Midani (on the eastern frontiers of his jurisdiction), and here too he discovered accounting inconsistencies that occasioned the hanging of their respective *mubashirs*.<sup>201</sup>

One finds in Ahmed Pasha's vision for *Bilad al-Sudan* a provincial parallel to what was gradually planned and implemented at *Misr* and its lands. However, his vigorous efforts and increasing power may have contributed to his own undoing. Rumors began circulating that he was preparing to make *Bilad al-Sudan* independent of *Misr* and it was even suggested that he was seeking to increase his resources toward these ends. Mehmet 'Ali recalled him to *Misr*, and receiving no reply he sent a letter-bearing *cawass* who died under suspicious circumstances not long after arriving to the *hukumdar*.<sup>202</sup> The case convinced the viceroy that the extensive powers of his office should be decentralized, and the government of *Bilad al-Sudan* was divided into six provinces.<sup>203</sup> Additional adjustments followed, including the strengthening of the administrative personnel, which in effect increased the influence of Coptic clerks and scribes.<sup>204</sup>

We might guardedly speculate that the unique circumstances in *Bilad al-Sudan* restricted certain administrative changes and reforms that were being undertaken closer to the "center." Here, some interesting questions arise about which we can only speculate. Certain distinctive approaches to governance between *Bilad al-Sudan* and *Bilad Misr*, or between *Wajh al-Bahri* and *Wajh al-Qibli*, can perhaps be discerned that correspond with the temporal ruptures coming

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<sup>201</sup> In the events at Dongola, the executioner was moved to pity, and was able to obtain a pardon for the boy through the mediation of the *mudir*. But the pasha, convinced that he had knowledge of where his father had hidden a store of gold, persisted. The boy's life was finally spared when crowds of people entreated the *mudir* to spare him. The officer who recounted the events summarized it this way: "the life of a Christian was saved by Muslims by means of a pardon extracted with difficulty from the cruel tyrant who imagined that everybody had accumulated riches." See Hill, ed., *On the Frontiers*, 108-109.

<sup>202</sup> Journals 1844-1850, Hekekyan Papers, BL Add. Mss. 37450, (1846), 3: f.184-5. This entry provides significant details on the career and downfall of Ahmad Pasha.

<sup>203</sup> Journals 1841-1844, Hekekyan Papers, BL Add. Mss. 37449, (September 24, 1843), 2: f.211.

<sup>204</sup> Bjorkelo, *Prelude*, 37.

into increasing relief in the discourse. And they may provide another clue to the contemporaneous experience of restoration and loss in the ecclesiastical chronicle. Trout Powell has noted that for "Egyptian soldiers" the Sudan came to represent opportunities for promotion in a military organization in which the higher-ranking positions were largely reserved for Turco-Circassians.<sup>205</sup> If the Sudan offered avenues for military advancement that did not exist in "Egypt," it may have also provided opportunities for the practice of specialized skills that were becoming superannuated or subordinated more quickly in the lands closer to Cairo. This pattern may be extended to include the more provincial territories within what would become the boundaries of Egypt, which only underscores the importance of specialized sub-regional studies, and perhaps especially the Egyptian *Sa'id*.<sup>206</sup>

Leaving aside speculation, there is no question that many Coptic Christians were drawn to *Bilad al-Sudan* in the decades prior to the rise of the Mahdiya. By 1842, an Italian merchant would estimate that there were 200 Copts at Khartoum alone, most of whom were employed in government service, although others were solely occupied in trade and commerce.<sup>207</sup> To the west at al-Ubayyid, Pallme described the integral role that the Copts served in the bureaucracy there. The governor's house and its surroundings was the administrative center of Kurdufan, and adjacent to this large residence was the *diwan* in which public affairs were transacted and "the visits [were] received of foreigners and natives." An auxiliary *diwan* was nearby that attended to "less important matters, or ... disputes or more trifling affairs." The Coptic secretaries were established in close proximity to these two *diwans*, and were engaged in the business of running the bureaucracy. The private Coptic secretary of the illiterate governor was responsible for

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<sup>205</sup> Although her reference was to the later period of Isma'il's reign (1863-1879), the dynamic is possibly pertinent here. Trout-Powell, *A Different Shade*, 106.

<sup>206</sup> 'Abbas and Desouky suggest the persistence of certain specialized positions in the provinces into the late nineteenth century in *The Large Landowning Class*, 73.

<sup>207</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 75 n. 2.

reading to him all communications from Cairo, stopping at sensitive or secretive materials to continue the communications in the governor's private quarters.<sup>208</sup> Meanwhile at the *suq* in al-Ubayyid, Coptic scribes could be seen sitting with Turkish officers and foreign traders discussing news from "deep in the interior of Africa." Pallme marveled that although they were established in a remote territory, rumors and intelligence would circulate about the affairs at *Misr* and indeed from "the most distant parts of the world." In other words, by virtue of the regular course of traffic passing through this locale, our Coptic scribes would be acquainted with news from Cairo and locations as far afield as Timbuktu.<sup>209</sup>

In the early 1850s Petherick gave a description of the capital of the "Turco-Egyptian" Sudan, with its two large and well-provisioned markets, its capacious and centrally located mosque, and its Coptic church, which was located on the western limits of the town. He noted that its members were "all originally from Egypt," and were employed as accountants and scribes for the Egyptian government, "by whose authority they have been expatriated."<sup>210</sup> At this time, no less than 13 Coptic parishes had been established around *Bilad al-Sudan*.<sup>211</sup> A superficial survey suggests that the regional life of the Alexandrian communion was in a strong position. The proliferation of Coptic parishes, the prominence of Copts in the administration and the presence of Coptic traders would seemingly attest to this in *Bilad al-Sudan*. And in 1849, we even find the *abun* for *Bilad al-Habasha* writing to the patriarch and communicating his own vision for a revivification of the southern territories of the patriarchal see. He also recommended a specific monk for episcopal appointment at Khartoum.<sup>212</sup> *Abuna* Salama predicted that a

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<sup>208</sup> Pallme, *Travels*, 264-5.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 272, 277.

<sup>210</sup> Petherick, *Egypt*, 132.

<sup>211</sup> Vantini, *Christianity*, 233.

<sup>212</sup> The letter from Salama to Butrus VII, dated 13 Jan. 1849, is preserved in the Coptic Patriarchate. The text of the letter is reproduced in Sven Rubenson, ed., *Acta Aethiopica, vol. I: Correspondence and Treaties 1800-1854* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 154-56; Samuel Rubenson, "The Interaction Between the



bishop in Khartoum would be able to facilitate more direct communication between *Bilad al-Habasha* and Cairo along the Nile, and later, he would even dispatch his own religious instructors to serve in *Bilad al-Sudan*. There was indeed an apparent consolidation and fortification of the networks of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion.

At a more profound level however, tensions were mounting. The regime's expanding territorial designs were an ongoing cause of concern in the regions of *al-Habasha*, and the identification of Copts of "Egypt" with the regime was cause for growing tensions and shared suspicions among followers of the communion. Another source of strain on the regional life of the Alexandrian communion stemmed from the increasing numbers of European actors and powers in the various patriarchal territories. We have already witnessed the role of Europeans in the projects of administrative reform, with all the grim consequences that they engendered for the communion. But the penetrations were expressed in myriad other ways. After the dismantlement of government monopolies, economic penetration accelerated as European and Greek traders, investors and commercial houses inundated the Nile Valley. At the time of the French Campaign, Coptic *arakhina* held the keys to the public coffers.<sup>213</sup> Twenty year later, when Mehmet 'Ali prepared for the "opening" of *Bilad al-Sudan*, he relied upon the Coptic *arkhon al-Mu'allim* Hanna al-Tawil for an advance loan to subsidize the venture. By contrast, in the 1840s, when the viceroy was in need of short-term loans for various projects of state or for

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Missionaries and the Orthodox: the Case of Abune Selama," in *Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*, eds. Haile et al. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 81.

<sup>213</sup> In fact, the French diplomatic service eventually contended with claims that France had never reimbursed the "Coptic nation" for a loan that had amounted to one million Francs. The matter is discussed in a letter from Roussel to Duc de Richelieu (August 3, 1818), and includes an enclosure of two letters from Boghos Yusuf on the topic. These materials can be found in Edouard Driault, *La Formation de l'Empire de Mohamed Aly de l'Arabie au Soudan 1814-1823* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1927), 109-14.

tributes to the Porte, he was inclined to turn rather to Greek commercial houses.<sup>214</sup>

Meanwhile, the clerical hierarchy was drifting into the disagreeable position of seeking the assistances of various European agents while simultaneously struggling to defend its sovereign position against their encroachments. The profound entanglement of European missionaries is conspicuous in the case of *Bilad al-Habasha's* procurement of a cleric to fill the vacancy in its abunate in 1841. Political circumstances were such that the grandee of Tigre dispatched a Catholic Vincentian as head of a delegation to Patriarch Butrus VII to present the request for a new *abun*. In turn, the monk whom the patriarch consecrated was a young man who had received a "modern" education at the hands of Protestant missionaries. And during the celebrated moment of "restoration," as a bishop was preparing to begin the journey to *Bilad al-Sudan*, even here the missionary specter loomed. Before his departure for the new diocese, the bishop for Sennar accompanied Patriarch Butrus on a visit to Lieder at the CMS mission house where Coptic children were instructed in the new education. Describing the visit, Lieder exuberantly declared that this was the "first bishop again ordained for that once Christian country since the fourteenth century."<sup>215</sup> The irony is that these sentimental words were expressed by the very missionary whose interventions with the authorities the patriarch would soon be forced to solicit.

This is something of the wider context in which the lands of *Bilad al-Sudan* were "reclaimed." And just as Europeans of various stripes were infiltrating *Bilad al-Habasha* and *Bilad Misr*, *Bilad al-Sudan* was no exception. Of course, Europeans had long been in the employ of the *hukumdariya* in various capacities, and by 1846 Catholic missionaries arrived in Khartoum with the intention of opening a mission school. The resident Christians were contented with these

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<sup>214</sup> Barnett to Aberdeen, NA UK FO/78/451 (Dec. 18, 1841), f. 212. When the pasha sent a \$250,000 tribute to the Porte in 1841, Col. Barnet informed the Foreign Office that this amount was forwarded to him "by three Greek commercial houses." See Barnett to Aberdeen, NA UK FO/78/451 (September 18, 1841), f. 174.

<sup>215</sup> Lieder to Secretaries, CMS, C M/O 48/121 (March 14, 1845). The bishop in question was Dumianus.

developments, with the notable exception of the Coptic community that had objected to the incursion.<sup>216</sup> But such vigilance failed to change the tide. After the 1838 Treaty of Balta Liman and the curtailment of Mehmet 'Ali's monopolies, for a time the viceroy focused his energies on *Bilad al-Sudan*. He argued that it was not included in the terms of the treaty, a position that roiled European consular agents.<sup>217</sup> But this resistance proved ephemeral, and traders from Europe were a dominant force along the White Nile in the following decade.

Another challenge related to the Sudan administration, which was so unwieldy that Sa'id Pasha even briefly considered abandoning the troublesome territories. But a creeping pessimism among the Copts themselves is also evident, at least by the early 1860s. Andrew Watson of the American Evangelical Mission described a group of dejected Coptic scribes who were positioned in a boat not far from Esna, prepared for their imminent departure to *al-Sudan*. Later, they celebrated the "good news" (which turned out to be false) that the assignment was aborted and they were allowed to return to Asyut. It would seem that they looked to *al-Sudan* as a kind of exile, and in one sense the church hierarchy seems to have shared this orientation. When a Coptic scribe joined a Protestant mission church, the patriarch solicited the intervention of the government. One official avowed that the "best way to get rid of this old man" was for the locals to submit a formal petition that would "induce the government to include his name in the list of scribes to be sent to the White Nile." The patriarch urged the Copts of the town to testify that the scribe, Fam Stephanos, had been guilty of corrupting "public morals" so that the viceroy would

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<sup>216</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 79.

<sup>217</sup> Paul Santi and Richard Hill, eds. *The Europeans in the Sudan, 1834-1878, Some Manuscripts, Mostly Unpublished, Written by Traders, Christian Missionaries, Officials and Others* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 13. It is surely no accident that it was in the immediate aftermath of this treaty that he undertook his first and only personal tour of *Bilad al-Sudan*. In the early 1840s, the Foreign Office was exercised by this issue, calling attention for example to privileges that specific merchants in the cotton trade obtained from the regime. See Draft of Colonel Barnett to Foreign Office, NA UK FO/78/451 (August 26, 1841), ff. 94-95.

have him "banished to the White Nile." <sup>218</sup>

In this late account, several tensions can be discerned. A Coptic clerical hierarchy took a defensive posture against both missionary interlopers and its own recalcitrant flock. But the tension that is most germane here is the one between the home country and the "White Nile" as object of exile. To explain this development we can suggest, in addition to some of the factors mentioned above, the profound changes in governance over the preceding decades and the projections of novel forms of power into and across the deserts. The "White Nile" or *al-Sudan* was indeed coming into view as place of exile, but this was the result of long and complex processes wherein historical relationships and sites of connectivity were ordered in new ways. The neglect of this elaborate backstory can help to perpetuate the myths of an abiding "distance" between "Egypt" and "the south." The persistence of this conceptual barrier is an enduring monument to an old conjuring trick that first called Egypt out of Africa.

### **Conclusion, and Looking Forward**

As "*al-Sudan*" was increasingly inscribed as a site of exile, discourses of civilization were everywhere to be found. Khedive Isma'il's transitory dream of an African Empire nearly coincided with the European powers' scramble for Africa. Enlightenment and civilization were the linchpins of the great commission, and Cairo would need to compete with Europe on these grounds. Indeed temporal ruptures were implicit in this mission civilisatrice; but the emerging discourses that carried the imprints of civilizational distance did not reject time-honored historical intimacies; rather these were subsumed and reemployed. Coptic ecclesiastical and lay institutions gradually joined the chorus, and later, we will see how elements of intimacy and

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<sup>218</sup> Andrew Watson, *The American Mission in Egypt 1854 to 1896* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1904), 212-13.

distance were blended in a turn of the century volume on "*al-Habasha*," written by a "modern" Copt at the time of an educational mission to Addis Ababa. These same propensities apply to *al-Sudan*, the legacy of which can be found in the works of Zahir Riyad, A Coptic contemporary of Murad Kamil who also wrote extensively on the southern dimensions of the Alexandrian communion. He emphasized the ancient ecclesiastical legacy in *al-Sudan* while characteristically noting that the Copts were "the real representatives of Egyptian civilization in these backward regions."<sup>219</sup> But if agents of modernity have operated within common civilizational frames, the field of maneuver was not level - Europe was in a dominant position. It is therefore not surprising that Copts and Coptic leaders are not remembered so much for educational missions and the spread of enlightenment as they are for less edifying pursuits. The temporal distance that opened with "the south" acted as a kind of severance, and others came in to bridge the gulf. Insofar as the Copts of Egypt are remembered for reaching across that chasm, it is occasionally as ecclesiastical imperialists, and often as deceitful functionaries, or as slavers and eunuch surgeons, against which the forces of enlightenment - missionaries, charitable societies, governments - have been memorably arrayed.

But lest we overstate these ruptures, it is worth recalling that even well into the twentieth century profound ambiguities persisted, the effects of ancient and modern modes of connectivity. We have alluded to one manifestation of this, over and above the high-flown discourses, as "Egyptian" peasants could be disposed to follow the lead of a professed Mahdi out of the south after the suppression of the 'Urabi rebellion. And it is from amidst the maelstrom of that sweeping movement that we discover Yusuf Mikha'il Malika, a "Sudanese" Copt who in his old age wrote an autobiography. In concluding the present chapter, we turn briefly to his story.

Yusuf *al-Mu'allim* Mikha'il and his brothers Malika and Gurgiyus were the sons of Malika

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<sup>219</sup> Zahir Riyad, *Kanisat al-Iskandariya*, 185; 187.

Mikha'il, who had been among the cohort of Coptic scribes that was dispatched there in 1839 under the superintendence of *al-Mu'allim* Hariyun.<sup>220</sup> Malika Mikha'il was assigned to the *mudiriya* of Kurdufan, where Yusuf was born in or around 1865. Yusuf received his primary education from a succession of Coptic teachers in a school that contained more than 50 students.<sup>221</sup> Thereafter, he relocated to al-Ubayyid where he entered the *diwan* and began his training under Tadrus Mina, a *mu'allim* from whom he learned scribal and accounting methods in preparation for a career in the bureaucracy. In his memoirs, he recalled the opportunities that the students had for material gain, including the bribes that various local officials would routinely offer them for altering accounts.<sup>222</sup> But Yusuf acknowledged the injustice of the system, affirming that the "people of Kurdufan were terribly mistreated under the corrupt system." He recalled that the refrain of "where is the Mahdi?" was ever on their lips, and in a dramatic and sympathetic tone he answered the question: "then he appeared."

Muhammad Ahmad emerged, claiming to be the awaited figure, and "people everywhere followed [this] Mahdi" who preached against "the kafirs, the Turks."<sup>223</sup> His appearance and the spread of the movement from region to region in the early 1880s arrested Yusuf's career plans, but he and his brothers (who had been stationed at Barra) were granted protection by the Mahdi. Yusuf's subsequent ascendancy was remarkable, and he was eventually elected as the head of the Coptic community in the territories of the Mahdiya, in addition to serving as the private secretary (*katim al-asrar*) to al-Mahdi's successor, 'Abdallahi al-Ta'ayshi. The *khalifa*'s affection for Yusuf was such that he once told him, "My son, I consider you like a shaykh al-din" (a shaykh of the

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<sup>220</sup> Yusuf Mikha'il, *Mudhakirat Yusuf Mikha'il: al-Turkiya wa al-Mahdiya wa al-hukm al-thuna'i fi al-Sudan* (Um Durman: Markaz 'Abd al-Karim Mirghani al-Thaqafi, 2004), 3.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 44; 49.

faith.)<sup>224</sup> In turn, Yusuf wrote with unconcealed respect for the ethical rigors of the much-maligned regime, recalling an illustrative episode during the army's invasion of *Bilad al-Habasha*. In Gondar, they came across four priests who were holding sacred books in their hands. When the company's leader noticed that they were priests, he declared: "It is not permissible to fight them. Send them away and take nothing from their homes or churches. These are *Ahl al-Kitab*, and it is *haram* (forbidden) to kill them."<sup>225</sup>

Years later, after the "Anglo-Egyptian" re-conquest of the Sudan in 1898 and the destruction of the Mahdiya, Yusuf corresponded with the Patriarch, assuring him of the health of the Copts in the Sudan who "only lost one during the Mahdiya."<sup>226</sup> He then traveled to Cairo, which was now under the colossal weight of British control. During his stay, Yusuf made his way to the war ministry to greet his "brothers" of the Sudan. This was the scene of a confrontation that cannot but startle and provoke the imagination. Arriving at the ministry, the Copt overheard three men, sons of the Sudan serving the "Anglo-Egyptian" regime who "were cursing the Khalifa 'Abdallahi." An incensed Yusuf interrupted their conversation and started to lecture them harshly:

Do you not fear God? Whether he was oppressive or just ... this man revealed the feelings of the sons of the country and made you into divisions after you were servile ... he made a model of the sons of the countryside. He said 'there is none upright like they are.' Now you curse him, regardless of whether he is living or deceased. Defaming the deceased is *haram*!

They began shouting back and forth until several beys were alerted. An interlocutor of Yusuf's pleaded their case, explaining that while they were cursing Khalifa 'Abdallahi, "Yusuf al-Qibti of the Mahdiya" came to his defense. Amin, one of the beys, rebuked them, reminding them that

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<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-64.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 235. Although some Copts left during the unrest of the early 1880s, at the time of the fall of the Mahdiya, even a most irregular reckoning of the Coptic population accounted for 77 families, which did not include those residing at Dongola, Suakin and some other localities; Fuller, *Egypt*, 204.

this was their king of whose bread and salt they had eaten. He spat in their faces and declared, "God knows that the light which is on the face of Yusuf is not in you." He then asked Yusuf what he had known of "the man who said 'I am the Mahdi.'" The Copt responded, "O bey, the affairs of this man are known only to God. Whether there arose in the Sudan a voice of wrath or of mercy, God alone knows." The bey persisted, "But you Christians, what do you say about it?" Yusuf answered, "he was the voice of anger of the people of the Sudan who were tyrannized and oppressed." Further on he declared of Khalifa 'Abdallahi, "he was truly our king."<sup>227</sup>

The life and career of "Yusuf the Copt" straddle multiple breaches of mind and strike jarring notes to the familiar score. The Copts would become so identified with the Egyptian nation-state that their presence beyond its borders could possibly be taken as a kind of estrangement. Yet here, a Coptic son of "Egyptian" parentage conveyed a profound identification with the natives of Kurdufan, and if a shadow of alienation was cast, it was over his travels in "Egypt."<sup>228</sup> Meanwhile, the anonymous figure of the "corrupt Copt" looms in a certain imaginary as an emblem of "Turco-Egyptian" misrule in the Sudan. Yet here, one of those characters emerges from the staged tableau, writing with passion about the injustices of the "Turkiya." And in the profusion of war propaganda, the movement was routinely portrayed as a bigoted and irrational expression of Islamic fanaticism.<sup>229</sup> Here again, we discover a Coptic Christian professing that the Khalifat al-Mahdi "was truly our king."

From one perspective, the account that Yusuf left behind is a historical curiosity. But it is only a curiosity if we neglect the profound ambiguities of the age, which have been concealed

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-40.

<sup>228</sup> *Qumus* Filutha'us Farag has pointed out that Yusuf Mikha'il is recognized as "the first to boast of being Sudanese and Copt." Filutha'us Farag, *al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya lil-Sudaniyin al-Aqbat al-Urthudhuks* (Khartoum: al-Jam'aiya al-Qibtiya, 2004), 7.

<sup>229</sup> The irrationalism was sometimes attributed to the movement's origins in the networks of Sufi *turuq* that had a strong presence in these lands. Sufism was ascribed to the category of "low" or "folk" religion in a modern binary, and contrasted with "high" or "orthodox" religion.



beneath the whitewash of normalizing projects after the "moment of maneuver" had closed. Here was an erstwhile Coptic scribe defending a movement that was to enter the nationalist imaginary as the inaugural moment of Sudanese nationalism, while his antagonists were none other than "native" sons of the Sudan. These very ambiguities speak to the profound challenges confronting the peoples of the lands of Egypt and the Sudan in any resistance movement against British occupation during what Heather Sharkey has called the "fiction of Anglo-Egyptian partnership."<sup>230</sup> And they also lay bare the contingency of modern nations, revealing discrepant fragments from which any number of political communities might have been imagined.

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<sup>230</sup> Heather Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5. Mekki Shibeika, the prominent Sudanese historian, acknowledges that "all the authority was in the hands of the British," in the Egyptian army and in "all the major bureaucracies;" *Tarikh*, 775.

## Chapter Four

### “Ancient Ties, Modern Strains”

The fourth chapter complements the third, covering approximately the same five decades of the nineteenth century, with attention to the effects of novel intrusions and emerging discourses and practices on the regional life and relationships of the Alexandrian see and its following. But here, attention will be directed to the lands of *al-Habasha*, or the "Ethiopia connection" of the wider Alexandrian communion. In Chapter Three, the question of administrative service was accentuated as one "point of entry" into an elaborate complex. The present chapter seeks to pursue a somewhat different set of entry points, which may be described guardedly as ecclesiastical ones. The chapter begins and ends respectively with a consideration of succeeding *abuns* whose careers (with a long interregnum) span the momentous half century from 1816 to 1867.

We commence in 1816 when a newly consecrated *abun*, Kirulus III (1816-1829) arrived in *Bilad al-Habasha*, where he would seek to assert the authority of his office in the kaleidoscopic politics of the country. He struggled to claim these traditional prerogatives, but his stormy tenure ultimately ended in failure and *Bilad al-Habasha* would wait nearly 13 years for another *abun*. By contrast, the biography of his successor, *Abuna Salama III*, illustrates the profound changes that were taking place as the century progressed. Before analyzing his career, we will first consider some of these changes from the perspective of Jerusalem, where the phenomenon of "intra-communal" conflicts illuminates a range of unprecedented challenges, from the increasing intrusion of "Great Power" politics to various structural and conceptual adjustments and transformations. This will prepare us to turn to *Abuna Salama*, in whose career multiple threads

coalesce, from his "modern" education at the hands CMS missionaries and his subsequent struggle to defend his archdiocese against foreign encroachment, to his relationship with Emperor Tewodros II, who is often identified as the "inaugurator" of modern Ethiopia. As we shall see, this figure was left standing astride breaches in the Alexandrian communion that would prefigure subsequent estrangements.

### **Between Tradition and Change: The Case of a Failed *Abun***

During the *Zemene Mesafint*, the foundations of the Solomonic kingdom had been undermined, and provincial heads competed for ascendancy in an order that resembled the "household politics" of Ottoman *Misr*.<sup>1</sup> Not unlike the Ottoman governor of *Misr*, the Gondarine monarch had largely become a figurehead as power was diffused among rival factions. At the end of the eighteenth century, the emperor relied on Muslim soldiers under the leadership of Ali I of Yejju, who later converted to Christianity and became the *ras-bitwoded* (the figure whose responsibility it was to protect the emperor.) The Amhara nobles resented the political influence of his Yejju clan, and the clerical class was skeptical about the authenticity of his conversion. With his death in 1788, a period of bitter conflict followed that was finally suppressed by the emergence of *Ras* Gugsa of Yejju, whose rule extended from 1803 until 1825, and whose severity spared none as he set about to control all aspects of government.

Here, *Ras* Gugsa's aims were seriously challenged by *Ras* Wolde Sellassie of Tigre, who sought to reduce the power of the Yejju upstarts, to reassert the "traditional" Solomonic

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<sup>1</sup> For a revisionist perspective on the *Zemene Mesafint*, see Shiferaw Bekele, "The State in the Zamana Masafent (1786-1853)," in *Kasa and Kasa: Papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV (1855-1889)*, eds. Taddese Beyene et al. (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1990), 25-68. Although the institutional monarchy was degraded during the period, Bekele argues that a state continued to exist, which was ruled by Yejju suzerains in place of the traditional monarchs. In calling into question a "decline" thesis in Ethiopian historiography, his intervention is not dissimilar to revisionist work on the late Ottoman Empire.

leadership and to eliminate the centrifugal forces that operated in the Christian kingdom. He exerted efforts to obtain an *abun* in order to fortify his plans to confront the Yejju and their confederates, both Muslim and Christian.<sup>2</sup> Finally in 1815 he was able to make the necessary measures to fill the vacancy.<sup>3</sup> He directed the heads of the villages and towns within his territories to raise a levy that would cover the expenses of a delegation to Cairo. When this was accomplished, a company of priests and Muslims set out with the required sum of money, in addition to 14 slaves that were to be gifted to Mehmet 'Ali.<sup>4</sup> At the mission's arrival, Patriarch Butrus VII was away, and a group of bedouin was sent to inform him of the request. He nominated a monk by the name of Mina, who was escorted to Cairo and consecrated "before a large crowd." Mina, now *Abuna* Kirulus III, was equipped for the journey and "priests, monks, deacons and scribes" were appointed to accompany him to his new archbishopric.<sup>5</sup>

To consider the early career of the new *abun*, we will rely heavily on the account of a British agent who was close to the events. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt, the British government was anxious to find means of safeguarding the route to India. For a time, Abyssinia was thought to be of strategic value to that object, and as a potentially lucrative field for commerce. While little came of these early plans, contacts were established in Tigre, led by Henry Salt, who was later installed at Cairo as consul-general for Britain. When Salt departed from Tigre, he retained an agent in the country for several years. This agent was Nathaniel Pearce, who produced a detailed narrative of his stay.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Abir, *Ethiopia*, 31-32; Marcus, *A History*, 52-53.

<sup>3</sup> Eight years earlier, a delegation of 50 persons had set out for Cairo with the same object, and they returned to Abyssinia with one *Abuna* Kirulus who died of an acute illness shortly after his arrival. The party, which included the brother of the deceased prelate, returned to Cairo to request his replacement, but to no avail; Salt, *A Voyage*, 218.

<sup>4</sup> Pearce, *Life and Adventures*, 2:51; Valentia, *Voyages*, 86; Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 1:51.

<sup>5</sup> In the early twentieth century, Iskarius discovered this account in a note on the making of the *meirun*, and he published it in its entirety in *Nawabigh*, 1:66-67.

<sup>6</sup> Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*, 219; Dodwell, *Founder*, 56-57.

During the episcopal vacancy, mere rumor of an *abun*'s arrival could provoke widespread enthusiasm, as Pearce discovered during his travels in the region of Semen where an itinerant monk had circulated a false report that the long-awaited cleric was at hand. Salt described Pearce's startling reception:

The inhabitants, men, women, children and even the priests came out to receive him, presenting him, as he passed with a portion of the best thing that the country had afforded. Among the rest, the wife of an old priest brought out her daughter to receive his blessing, an old man of 70 fell down and kissed his feet with transport at his arrival. Mr. Pearce felt, as may be well conceived, exceedingly distressed at the situation into which he had been drawn, and assured the good people, though in vain, that they were mistaken.<sup>7</sup>

When the legitimate *abun* arrived some time later, he met an even more dramatic response. Along the road, "many thousands" were said to have congregated to glimpse the *abun* and to receive his blessing. Kirulus' procession to the center of the Tigrean government was a resplendent affair. He rode on a mule astride many monks, numerous chiefs with their armies, and other orders of people, each with its own distinctive costumes and regalia. An awestruck Pearce acknowledged that he had "never before beheld such a multitude of people assembled."

The authority of Kirulus' office was revealed during the course of an early conflict between himself and Wolde Sellassie. Many priests had the temerity to warn the *ras* about the "curse of the *abun*," and the dire consequences of disobeying his orders. The ruler, whose military forces numbered in the thousands, at last yielded to the threats of "priests from all parts of the country."<sup>8</sup> A great deal can be extrapolated both from the nature of the conflict and from Kirulus' apparent imperiousness in handling the affairs. The dispute began with the *abun*'s

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<sup>7</sup> Salt, *A Voyage*, 283. In 1834, during another lengthy vacancy to the *abun*ate, the Protestant missionary (and later the first Anglican bishop of Jerusalem) encountered the same thing. A group of Abyssinians approached him, wishing to "fall down before the abuna and to receive his blessing;" Samuel Gobat, *Journal of Three Year's Residence in Abyssinia* (London, 1834), ix; During the same interregnum, CMS missionary Wolff was also mistaken as a newly arrived *abun*, attracting large crowds of people who had heard a rumor to this effect; Isenburg to Coates, CMS, C M/O 35/14 (July 11, 1836).

<sup>8</sup> Pearce, *Life and Adventures*, 2:60; 2:75.

discovery that a "Feringee" ("Frank" or foreigner) - namely, Nathaniel Pearce - possessed a very nice house and garden at Chelicut (Cheleqot), a region in eastern Tigre.<sup>9</sup> The *abun* ordered him to turn Pearce out of the residence so that it could be consecrated in preparation for his own reception. The chief was distressed, and argued that he "could not attempt to turn a [Christian] out of his own premises, which had been completed at his own expense and labour." The *abun* fired back that Pearce was "no Christian, but a "Feringee, an enemy to the Blessed Virgin." He threatened to excommunicate the chief if the order was not obeyed, and at one point became so angry that he beat a courier with his episcopal cross until it broke. He finally decreed that all churches in Wolde Sellassie's territories were to be closed, no sacraments were to be dispensed and priests were not to inter the dead until the order was executed.<sup>10</sup> In the end, he prevailed.

Pearce could only suppose that the prelate had come unhinged. He concluded that this desert monk, who "had been obliged to dig the earth and climb the lofty date-trees for his subsistence" was suddenly "honoured by millions of people," a reversal of fortune which had "completely turned his brain."<sup>11</sup> Our embittered informant did not entertain the possibility that there was a rational cause for his behavior. The involvement of Jesuit missionaries in *Bilad al-Habasha* had contributed to centuries of Christological conflict, and the guardians of the church still looked with circumspection on foreign sects that would meddle in their jurisdiction.<sup>12</sup> The problem of doctrinal conflict persisted, occupying succeeding *abuns* as well as generations of patriarchs at Cairo, including the reigning Butrus VII. It is not unlikely that Kirulus was instructed at Cairo to deal resolutely in these matters, which would surely have encompassed the

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<sup>9</sup> Wolde Sellassie commissioned the building of a church at Chelicut which remains one of the notable landmarks from the late *Zemene Mesafint*. For details of the history of this church, see Fanta, "Cheleqot Holy Trinity Church," 39-45.

<sup>10</sup> Pearce, *Life and Adventures*, 2:55-57.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of this vigilance are abundant. In the mid-eighteenth century, Niebuhr asked about the books of the patriarchal residence. Members of the household promptly accused him of seeking material from which to "impress the Europeans with false notions of [the Copts.]" Niebuhr, *Description*, 78.

trespasses of interlopers. It is revealing that at the beginning of his episcopate, he proclaimed that "no man in Abyssinia be considered a priest ... who did not take an oath to the Copti [sic] religion." He insisted that "no sacrament was to be administered in any of their churches, till they had solemnly sworn to renounce all their belief in the Greek and Catholic faith." To punctuate the order's gravity, he added that those who did not adhere to his religion were "not entitled to his blessing and protection, but should be allowed to live among them as outcast people." <sup>13</sup>

Other causes for his belligerence may be suggested. In the course of one of his skirmishes with the "Feringees," he asked angrily, "how can I forgive the wretches, who used to flog and salt the backs of my countrymen when they had power" at *Misr*? <sup>14</sup> Here, long before narrations of "Coptic cooperation" during the Napoleonic campaign, or of the significance of that interim to the "national awakening," the trauma of the time was disclosed. The *abun* used this experience to translate the designs of the "Feringees" in his archdiocese, asserting very early that Pearce was "a spy sent to find out a road to conduct an army into the country of [his] children and overthrow them." <sup>15</sup> And there is also the possibility that he was responding to a wider state of alarm. At one point, after receiving a letter from *Misr*, he asked grimly and rhetorically, "does [Mehmet 'Ali] govern Habesh?" <sup>16</sup> The content of the letter was not revealed, but we will recall that the renting effects of the *wali*'s initiatives were beginning to be felt during these years. The cleric had arrived at *Bilad al-Habasha* with a vision for restoring "traditional" prerogatives and order even as signs of new challenges were appearing far beyond his immediate setting.

Despite all of this Kirulus persevered, and on numerous occasions he even confronted the very chief who had secured his appointment. In one meeting, he spoke harshly with this most

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-6.

<sup>14</sup> Pearce, *Life and Adventures*, 2:74.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-13.

powerful grandee, who later conceded that although the sharp words pierced him "to the heart," he was "bound by [his] religion to bear it."<sup>17</sup> Such behavior, which Pearce saw as the indiscriminate caprice of a monk gone mad, was in fact entirely sensible, if not always magnanimous. Kirulus arrived with a conception of "traditional" entitlements and authority. This was not consistent with the situation that he found, and it was his responsibility to resolve the discrepancy. For instance, after the elderly chief died in 1817, Kirulus moved to reclaim fiefs that had belonged to his predecessors.<sup>18</sup> These districts, known as Addi Abun, were under the control of a local governor, Gebre Amlak, who refused to yield. The prelate again invoked the power of his office, prohibiting the inhabitants from eating, drinking or cutting wood until his demands were met. When the people resisted, he closed the churches, placed a moratorium on all sacraments, and ordered that all who cooperated with Gebre Amlak were "no longer to be considered as Christians, but ranked as [Muslims.]" At this the priests "raised a crowd" against the governor. He finally yielded and the villages and towns passed to the *abun* - whose governance soon proved to be disastrous.<sup>19</sup>

Later, he was forced to reissue his demands. Arriving at the principal market, he seized the drum (the sign of governing authority) and beat it in front of thousands of people, declaring:

I desire that none of you buy or sell, take or bring any thing to or from the market, eat or drink, or have any communication with each other, until the drum is beaten by order of [the governor] to proclaim me governor over all the districts called [Addi Abun], consisting of 220 towns and villages; and all the soldiers, native of the said villages, shall be placed under my command.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce related a standard rendition of the origin of these entitlements. According to legend, when Yekunu Amlak founded a "restored" Solomonic empire in 1270, one third of the territories were allocated as a revenue source for the *abun*. During a later reign, this "excessive" provision was modified, and territories in each of the kingdom's provinces were set aside for him. Over the years, further alterations were made to his holdings; Bruce, *Travels* (1790), 2:65.

<sup>19</sup> Pearce, *Life and Adventures*, 2:130-31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:217-20.



Here again, he prevailed. Even in the face of these most unfavorable circumstances, the "alien" prelate proceeded with a seeming familiarity in his new setting, which betrays the vitality of ancient ties and mechanisms, however overlaid they may have been by apparent discontinuities. With singular boldness and sometimes at a moment's notice, he deployed his distinctive faculties to navigate the local terrain. And despite Pearce's grim depiction, his early contributions to the life of his archdiocese were significant. On his first day alone, he consecrated in excess of 1,000 priests for a region suffering from clerical deficiencies after 13 years without a bishop.<sup>21</sup> Later, the death of the Wolde Sellassie sent the province into confusion, which led to battles and skirmishes as various actors vied to fill the political vacuum. *Abuna* Kirulus again marshaled his authority, sending large numbers of priests across the territories with the intention of subduing the conflict. He personally implored the chiefs to return to their own territories, upbraiding them dramatically: "you are ... butchering my poor children, and those who escape the spear are left with their young ones to starve." He passed a number of days sending monks and priests back and forth between the armies. The chiefs at last relented, fearing his terrible excommunication.<sup>22</sup>

During this strained period, Kirulus marched the circumference of the town of Chelicut in front of the clergy from adjacent sectors, and as he consecrated its limits, the area was incorporated within his own endowment. Many people - including criminals - flocked to Chelicut from considerable distances with their belongings in hand, for the lands of the *abun* constituted a legal asylum.<sup>23</sup> The significance to the juridical function of the lands of the *abun* is evident in the throngs of people who availed themselves of the social expedient. This sheds additional light

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:66.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. Bruce addressed this law as it was in effect in the eighteenth century; Bruce, *Travels* (1813), 4:87. In 1837 (during the prolonged interregnum between the reigns of *Abuna* Kirulus and *Abuna* Salama) Arnauld d'Abbadie noted that the law still applied even in the absence of an *abun*, although the "right of asylum is little respected as long as the legate is absent." He added that when an *abun* is in residence, his quarters "attract a population composed of refugees, scholars and students;" Arnauld d'Abbadie, *Douze ans de séjour dans la haute-Éthiopie* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1980), 2:162.

on the "grasping" ways of the *abun*. His insistence on claiming (or reclaiming) personal estates was not a function of idiosyncrasies of his character, for there was a social utility to his "madness." He had at his disposal a vision of order in an environment of apparent social breakdown, and this guided his plan of action. Like the "Coptic scribes" whom we have encountered in previous chapters, he existed in a world in which the "material" and "spiritual" aspects of "religion" had yet to conceptually isolated. <sup>24</sup>

For the *abun*, the very ritual act of consecrating the limits of a town carried "sacred," "political" and "social" significance. Such an arrangement was to become increasingly alien over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as an essentialized and universalized conceptualization of "religion" emerged, constituted by "those representations and practices that should be distinguished by and separated from politics." <sup>25</sup> The outline and trajectory can be likened to the one which began at an earlier date in *Bilad Misr* as Mehmet 'Ali confronted the vested power of the *'ulema*. He first ordered unprecedented tax levies on the *waqf* holdings in 1809 and then confiscated their *waqfs* in 1812. With time, the range of responsibilities and entitlements reserved to the *'ulema* were increasingly confined to narrowly defined roles such as education. <sup>26</sup> Mehmet 'Ali's confrontation with a system of pious endowments (which had repercussions for Coptic and Islamic establishments alike) roughly coincided with *Abuna Kirulus'* arrival in *Bilad al-Habasha* (which perhaps gives added significance to his grim question about the extent of the *wali's* rule.) Various kinds of interventions, including novel forms of mediation in the material/"political" practices of the *'ulema* - and of priests and monks -

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<sup>24</sup> Masuzawa, *The invention*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> The "secular," he continues, is the "essential ground that enables this to be done." See Talal Asad, "Religion, Nation-State, Secularism" in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, eds. Peter Van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 183.

<sup>26</sup> Afaf Loutfi El-Sayed, "The Role of the Ulema in Egypt During the Early Nineteenth Century" in *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt*, ed. P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 277-279; al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign*, 67-70.

would anticipate the discursive revelation of "religion" as a universal, spiritualized phenomenon.

<sup>27</sup> However, for *Bilad al-Habasha*, the correspondences would only become more distinct during the 1850s.

After the death of Wolde Sellassie, *Abuna Kirulus* found an ally in the *Dejazmach Sabagadis*, who had emerged to fill the political void. In 1819, the *abun* made an excursion to Gondar where he sought to terminate the fractious doctrinal feuds by way of an interdiction on all debates about the number of Christ's "births." Though he was invited by the *ras* and obtained the support of the feeble emperor, Iyo'as II, his efforts came to naught, and he so alienated the clerics and wider population that he was ultimately banished to an island monastery on Lake Tana. <sup>28</sup> A number of attempts were made to secure a new *abun*, even while Kirulus was still living. In one effort, the headmen of the Gondar region sent a monk, Wolde Giyorgis, to *Misr* to inquire about a successor, although he was unable to complete the task. <sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, *Dejazmach Sabagadis* also endeavored to obtain a new *abun*, opening friendly communications with Mehmet 'Ali and informing the patriarch of Kirulus' outrages. <sup>30</sup> There was a long history of politically motivated accusations against *abuns*, and Sabagadis' letter

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<sup>27</sup> The evolution of pilgrimage practices and patterns over the course of the century is a primary example of this. The pilgrimage for the *mawlid* of al-Badawi at Tanta was an important event which included vast numbers of pilgrims, including many coming from *Bilad al-Sudan* and elsewhere. In fact, when the prominent Abyssinian merchant Ali Musa wrote a letter to Mehmet 'Ali in 1844, he mentioned his own desire to visit this site. The practices of the pilgrimage included commercial, political, social and religious elements. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Girard estimated that 150,000 people participated in the great event. When J.A. St. John visited in the 1840s, he discovered that the local mosque had been dispossessed of its proceeds, and the responsibilities for covering the costs of the establishment were transferred to pasha's bureaucracy, and those who presided over the event were now on his payroll. See St. John, *Egypt and Nubia*, 93; Raymond, *Artisans*, 1:245. 'Ali Musa's June, 1844 letter is published in Rubenson, ed. *Acta Aethiopica*, 1:102-104.

<sup>28</sup> Abir, *Ethiopia*, 41-42; Archbishop Yesehaq, *The Ethiopian Tewahedo Church: An Integrally African Church*, (New York: Vantage Press, 1989), 67-68; Bairu Tafla, ed., *A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-89)*, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), 87 n. 26.

<sup>29</sup> In an ominous portent for the life of Alexandrian Orthodoxy, he met Samuel Gobat of the CMS mission at *Misr* who employed him as an Amharic instructor. Rubenson, ed., *Acta Aethiopica*, 1:30-31. The letter is included in this edited volume. Gobat seems to have made an impression on Wolde Giyorgis who wrote to him complaining about the Abyssinians. He regretted the blindness of those "creatures of our colour," adding that they "read (scripture in an unknown language)" while the "English interpret it" for them.

<sup>30</sup> The response which was sent to Sabagadis can be found in Sami, *Taqwim al-nil*, 2:317. The answer, dated 10 Jumad al-Awal (1824) was sent along with a variety of ceremonial gifts.

included some familiar tropes.<sup>31</sup> Even so, it is remarkable for its devastating litany of accusations:

He gets drunk by drinking grape wine, 'araqi and honey wine. He does what no [other bishops have] done. After he had bound a slave with his hands behind his back, on the tenth day after he had remained so, he died ... he commits murder ... you sent him that he should say, 'let churches be consecrated and incensed.' He excommunicated that they might not be consecrated. Lest he should be in his house, he rather goes down to the market place. When we say to him, 'eat like the previous bishops; receive what they received,' he excommunicates us saying 'unless I eat what a ras eats.'

He then asked the patriarch, "Is it because you hate Ethiopia that you sent him?"<sup>32</sup>

Sabagadis concluded the missive with a request for a new *abun* who will "reestablish the nation."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the downfall of *Abuna* Kirulus did not indicate a repudiation of his office, but rather was a sign of his failure to navigate the punishing terrain of the *Zemene Mesafint*. The enduring importance of the office can be observed in an encounter between the *dejazmach* of Tigre and William Coffin, one of the "Feringees" who had accompanied Pearce. While Coffin imagined that the importation of armaments was of supreme strategic importance, Sabagadis was much more occupied with the acquisition of a new *abun*, and it was to this end that he sent Coffin as part of a deputation to *Misr*.<sup>34</sup> Sabagadis would never succeed in this object, although the patriarch did send a letter of mild reproach to the *abun* in which he enjoined him to "refine [his] manners" in dealing with people.<sup>35</sup> But by this time, Kirulus' fate was sealed. He would

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<sup>31</sup> Gobat noted that although many things were attributed to him, "his friends and his enemies do not agree, [therefore] it is impossible to know the truth." Gobat, *Journal of Three Year's Residence in Abyssinia*, 349.

<sup>32</sup> The translated document is published in D.L. Appleyard and A.K. Irvine, eds. and trans., *Letters from Ethiopian Rulers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 47-49.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Kugler to Pratt, CMS C M/O 46/2, (October 8, 1827) Sabagadis' secondary requests included materials and craftsmen to repair the church of Saint Mary of Zion at Axum, but there was no mention of armaments. After returning to England, Coffin presented Sabagadis' appeal for firearms, which was his own fabrication. Sven Rubenson, "The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia: Consequences of a Colonial Context," in *Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*, eds. Haile et al. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 60.

<sup>35</sup> The text of Patriarch Butrus' letter, dated 1541 AM (1824 CE) is published in the appendix to Riyad, *Tarikh Itiyubiya*, 253. Riyad incorrectly identifies the letter's recipient as *Abuna* Salama III.

remain in exile until his death at the end of the 1820s, and rumors would persist that he had been murdered. In one narration, he was "poisoned by jealous chiefs" who then "seized upon the properties belonging to the primate."<sup>36</sup> *Abuna* Salama III, his eventual successor, accepted the assassination as a matter of fact. His chronicle begins with a passing reference to Kirulus, recalling that he had "died at the hands of people and became a martyr."<sup>37</sup>

### **Cracks in the Alexandrian Edifice: Jerusalem as Microcosm**

This exhibition of the failed *abun* serves as a prelude to and in some ways a contrast with the eventful 26-year tenure of his successor, *Abuna* Salama III. Before turning to his case, we first look to Jerusalem, which was an important intersection for a range of often conflicting projects and interests, and a field upon which many distinctively nineteenth century battles were waged. As such, it provides a unique perspective from which to address some of the factors - and actors - that had a role to play in a new order of challenges and antagonisms. This in turn will anticipate and lay the groundwork for approaching the fissiparous milieu in which *Abuna* Salama would find himself.

In 1820, even as *Abuna* Kirulus III convened a counsel at Gondar in which he sought to settle the relentless doctrinal conflicts, seeds were being sown elsewhere for new kinds of conflict. During that very year, Mehmet 'Ali launched his expedition to *Bilad al-Sudan*. While the previous chapter has covered this campaign in some detail, we have had less to say of one of its important dimensions - namely the bitter territorial disputes that were engendered between the "Turco-Egyptian" administration and the rulers and tributaries of *Bilad al-Habasha*. Competing

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<sup>36</sup> Rochet d'Hericourt, *Second voyage sur les deux rives de la Mer Rouge, dans le pays des Adels et le Royaume de Choa* (Paris, 1846), 223; Tedeschi, "Ethiopian Prelates -"Ethiopian Prelates - Qerelos II (d. 1828)," CE 4:1032-33.

<sup>37</sup> Donald Crummey and Getatchew Haile, eds., "Abuna Salama: Metropolitan of Ethiopia, 1841-1867, a New Ge'ez Biography," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 17.

parties would dispute over "rightful" claims to various border regions. Novel forms of power and techniques of governance would throw up barriers along the networks of the Alexandrian communion as its followers were drawn into the "centralizing" projects of competing regimes.

In this regard, the year 1820 witnessed something else. Restorations began on *Dayr al-Sultan*, the monastery located on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, which led to a temporary displacement of Abyssinian monks. This is often cited as an inaugural moment in a rancorous - and ongoing - dispute between Copts and Ethiopians over "ownership" of holy sites at Jerusalem. In Chapter Three these two events, the Sudan campaign and the restorations of *Dayr al-Sultan*, were linked in the life of the Coptic *arkhon* Hanna al-Tawil. He helped to obtain the firman that authorized the restorations, and shortly thereafter he set out in company with the Sudan expedition.<sup>38</sup> In what follows, we will notice that the emerging conflict over *Dayr al-Sultan* and the southern boundary disputes have a more fundamental relationship.

The case of *Dayr al-Sultan* in many ways typifies a certain theme in nineteenth century Ottoman history in which ostensibly minor issues were magnified on the stage of "international" politics. The pattern is well attested by the long story of European encroachment of Ottoman territory in which peripheral, "local" issues served as platforms for much larger strategic maneuvers.<sup>39</sup> In the case of the "Holy Land," machinations of European actors - together with rival visions of "centralization" within the region - contributed to the subversion of historical equilibriums. Were it not for the profound shifts in regional and international politics, the temporary displacement of Abyssinian monks during renovations to *Dayr al-Sultan* may have

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<sup>38</sup> Coptic Synaxarium (28 Barmahat) 282; Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 1:71-73. The properties that were renovated also included *Dayr Mari Girgis* (*Dayr al-Khidhr*), as well as a house attached to the monastery and several shops in the vicinity of *Dayr al-Sultan*; Rizq, *Qissat al-Aqbat*, 95.

<sup>39</sup> James de Lorenzi, "Caught in the Storm," 109-110; As the century unfolded, various "communities" within the Ottoman system would be drawn into European political projects. For more on this process, see Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 132-34.

passed into historical oblivion. In 1819, the chief Abyssinian priest explained that the 20 Abyssinians shared the space with Copts, all of whom were supported by their Armenian coreligionists.<sup>40</sup> After the renovations were completed in 1822, this arrangement was restored. Despite this, the events of 1820 remain as fixtures in vexed narratives of communal discord.

In Chapter Three, we addressed an apparent paradox in nineteenth century Coptic history in which alarming symptoms of estrangement coincided with signs of revitalization, including territorial expansions to the south. A comparable - if transient - expression of this phenomenon can be observed during Mehmet 'Ali's ten-year occupation of *Bilad al-Sham*. Ibrahim Pasha, who had led the campaign, invited Patriarch Butrus VII to make the Lenten pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1834. The Synaxarium celebrates the occasion:

The patriarch accepted the invitation, and when he arrived, he was received with honor and reverence, and entered Jerusalem with a great procession and a splendid celebration in which the governor, the rulers and the heads of the different Christian denominations participated."<sup>41</sup>

It was Ibrahim Pasha's desire that Patriarch Butrus VII should lead the Holy Saturday ceremonies at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, an idea that perhaps originated in the regime's aim of fortifying its conquests with the help of the institutional church. Wishing to avoid conflict with the Greek patriarch, Butrus demurred, although he eventually agreed to participate alongside his Greek counterpart. Ibrahim Pasha himself partook in the ceremonies, and it is said that when the traditional "light" burst forth from the Sepulcher, the pasha was terrified, and Butrus supported the "dazed and staggered" guest "until he came to his senses."<sup>42</sup>

In his solicitude not to offend the Greek patriarch, Butrus demonstrated an appreciation for the delicate balance among the confessions of the holy city, and a respect for the equilibrium

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<sup>40</sup> Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*, 463.

<sup>41</sup> *Coptic Synaxarium* (Baramhat 28), 281-83.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, *HPEC* 3:3, 174.

of that sacred ecosystem. Even so, he surely understood the benefits that could accrue to his see by virtue of Mehmet 'Ali's control of its territories. His relationship with the regime is enshrined in the institutional memory of the church, which recalls that the Holy Saturday miracle "increased the reverence and respect of the patriarch before the pasha," which in turn enabled the patriarch to "make many repairs and renovations in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher."<sup>43</sup> In addition to the renovations that were already underway by mid-decade, the confession was given permission to undertake new building projects. In 1837, a tract of land was purchased, and one year and 500,000 piasters later, a caravansary would be built for the use of his flock. While most pilgrims would only stay for the pilgrimage season, others remained for longer periods. According to the testimony of Neophytos, a Cypriot monk, the caravanserais was constructed largely at the hands of the Coptic faithful who "worked out of religious conviction, for bread alone."<sup>44</sup> This is not in itself extraordinary or controversial, for just as the horizons of "Alexandria" naturally extended southward, this northern territory constituted an important archdiocese of the see. Rather, the tensions that arose at this time stemmed from the breach of prevailing conventions, which Neophytos noted as he discussed the effects of the pasha's rule on confessional relations. In addition to his displeasure about the unprecedented building projects of the Copts, he was vexed that Ibrahim's Melkite secretaries purchased lands near *Dayr Mari Girgis* and installed Catholic monks so that "a scandal was thereby added to a scandal."<sup>45</sup>

His passing remark on the advantages accruing to well-placed Catholics suggests another distinguishing feature of the period. It was in fact during the decade-long occupation that *Bilad al-Sham* experienced the significant penetration of Europeans as England, France, Prussia and

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<sup>43</sup> *Coptic Synaxarium* (Baramhat 28), 282-83.

<sup>44</sup> Neophytos of Cyprus, *Annals of Palestine, 1821-1841*, ed. S. N. Spyridon (Jerusalem: Syrian Orphanage Press, 1938), 121-22.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.



Russia all used cultural and religious means to advance their respective positions. Eager as he was to preserve good relations with European powers, and particularly with the British, Mehmet 'Ali allowed consulates and missionary enterprises to be established inland. A scramble had begun, whereby foreign powers sought to gain a foothold in the empire, often with the ostensible aim of "protecting" religious minorities. France and Russia would capitalize on these new circumstances, safeguarding the empire's Catholic and Orthodox Christians, respectively.<sup>46</sup> By contrast, there was no "natural" group for the British to protect, and efforts to resolve this deficit would contribute substantially to dissensions within the Alexandrian Orthodox communion.

In 1838, a British consulate was established at Jerusalem, largely as a defensive maneuver against the Russian position. The increase in European influence at Jerusalem coincided with a turn of fortunes for the Alexandrian see which was forced to withdraw its ambitious plans after the evacuation of Mehmet 'Ali's forces.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, a Protestant episcopate was inaugurated under concerted Anglo-Prussian auspices, although there were scarcely any Protestants for the bishop to serve or for the British to "protect." It was perhaps inevitable that the net should be cast more widely, so that in addition to the Protestants, the consular presence presumed to protect the Jews as well. In one article, Scholch has outlined the cultural-religious background that helped to undergird this policy.<sup>48</sup> However, he fails to mention another "community" that caught the attention of the British, namely the Abyssinians, whose interests were added to the strange bricolage of British care. Even the Anglican Bishopric

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<sup>46</sup> Alexander Scholch, "Britain in Palestine, 1838-1882: The Roots of the Balfour Policy," in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992): 39-41. The blend of diplomatic history, moralistic rhetoric about long-suffering minorities and the obsessions about jurisdictional rights to the Holy Places is classically demonstrated in Harold Temperley's *England and the Near East: The Crimea* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936.)

<sup>47</sup> Otto Meinardus, *The Copts in Jerusalem* (Cairo: Commission on Oecumenical Affairs of the See of Alexandria, 1960), 67.

<sup>48</sup> The late eighteenth century saw a profusion of chiliastic speculations which imagined the restoration of Jews to the "Holy Land" to be a precursor to Christ's return. Scholch, "Britain in Palestine," 45.

of Jerusalem involved an unusual compromise with continental Protestantism, as common cause was made with Prussia in the establishment of a shared "Protestant" project.

John Henry Newman, at the time one of the most prominent Anglican prelates, denounced the initiative while contemplating the implications of Britain's attempt to cover its political enterprises in theological ornamentation:

When our thoughts turn to the East, instead of recollecting that there are Christian Churches there, we leave it to the Russians to take care of the Greeks, and the French to take care of the Romans, and we content ourselves with erecting a Protestant Church at Jerusalem, or with helping the Jews to rebuilt their Temple there, or with becoming the august protectors of Nestorians, Monophysites, and all the heretics we can hear of ... [while] courting an intercommunion with Protestant Prussia.<sup>49</sup>

This case of a "Great Power" in search of minorities to protect demonstrates one of the ways in which foreign powers - and particularly the British - contributed to the institutionalization of the Coptic-Abyssinian controversies.

In 1837 an epidemic struck Jerusalem and entirely wiped out the community of Abyssinian monks. At the instigation of the Armenians, their books and papers were burned, reputedly as a precautionary measure against the spread of contagion. The incident would live on in Ethiopian narratives as the deliberate extirpation of evidence for their historical claims in the Holy City.<sup>50</sup> By 1842, Abyssinians had apparently returned to cohabit *Dayr al-Sultan* with their Coptic coreligionists. This historical moment, like the one in 1820, might have passed with little long-term consequence but for a changing political and conceptual landscape. In 1846 Samuel Gobat, the one-time missionary to *Bilad al-Habasha*, was consecrated to succeed the departing

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<sup>49</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1934), 142. Bishop Gobat, who was elevated to the Bishopric of Jerusalem in 1846, later observed that while the British would not be permitted to "protect officially" the natives of Abyssinia in the territories of the Sublime Porte, their consul would be enjoined to assist them when need arose "as members of a Christian church in spiritual communion with the established Church" of England; see Bishop Gobat to Bunsen (draft), NA UK FO 1/7 (July 10, 1852), f.88. This idea of "spiritual communion" is indicative of the peculiar theological fashions to which Newman took exception.

<sup>50</sup> Antuny Suryal 'Abd al-Sayyid, *Mushkilat Dayr al-Sultan bi al-Quds: dirasa watha'iqiya lil-sira' al-tarikhi bayna al-Aqbat wa al-Athyubiyin 'ala al-dayr* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1991), 12-13.

Anglican bishop of Jerusalem. Together with English Consul Finn, Gobat would vigorously champion the "cause" of the Abyssinian monks who, it was said, were "wary" of the Copts. The following year, a British consul was appointed to *Bilad al-Habasha* in the person of Walter Plowden, who became intimate with *Ras Ali II*, at the time the emperor's regent and the most powerful figure of the central highlands. British agents, ecclesiastics and missionaries were increasingly installed at key points along our "Alexandrian geography," and this had a significant effect on communal developments at Jerusalem which were, in a sense, a reflection in miniature of a more pervasive dynamic.

Disputes about *Dayr al-Sultan* and adjacent properties were marked in the late 1840s, and reached a critical point in 1850. Finn reveals the extent of British involvement in his account of the affair. In early October, Abyssinian monks approached him with the news that Armenians were planning to expropriate their properties, and that Gobat had "advised them to seize the key [to the convent] by a stratagem."<sup>51</sup> The following month, Finn boasted of his success in achieving a provisional reconciliation, before offering a colorful exposition of the persecutions suffered by the Abyssinians, and a still more colorful elaboration of the forces that were arrayed against them. He explained that although the Abyssinians "lay claim to both churches, as well as to the Coptic convent," in addition to possessions in "the great Armenian convent at a distant part of the city," their rights were entirely disregarded. The documents that had verified their claims were burned not simply at the instigation of the Armenians, but "by the Copts under the direction of their patriarch in Cairo." They proceeded to lay hold of "all the keys of the church and the two convents." The Abyssinians were forced to "reside in the dilapidated ruin of their ancient convent" wherein the Copts would lock them each night.

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<sup>51</sup> Finn to Palmerston, NA UK FO 195/292 (November 30, 1850) ff. 729-30.

The molestations grew more intense in 1850 when the "clever and cunning" Armenian patriarch, in league with Patriarch Butrus, "used the poor Abyssinians with great severity, beat them, chained them, and refused them access to the church, except at rare intervals."<sup>52</sup> Later, Gobat elaborated upon the plaintive tale, noting that after the poor monks had died of the plague, it was Ibrahim Pasha himself who had their documents "consigned to the flames." Meanwhile, a Coptic priest (in collusion with the Armenian patriarch) purloined the record book of the Abyssinian convent and chapel. Since then, the Copts and Armenians treated even the honorable Abyssinian pilgrims "like slaves," and the keys for the convent remained in the possession of these "oppressors," who imprisoned the Abyssinians therein "until it pleased their Coptic jailor to open it in the morning."<sup>53</sup>

The prospects for the Abyssinians were grim indeed, but for the propitious assistance of British agents who stood ready not merely to defend "minorities" from the excesses of Turkish overlords, but indeed from one another. Finn was wont to place the initiative for assistance in the hands of those desiring protection, whether they be Jews or Abyssinians. Thus he informed Palmerston that during his travels to Safed and Tiberias, Jews wishing to place themselves under "British protection" had approached him.<sup>54</sup> As for the Abyssinians, Finn emphasized that when Gobat, their old acquaintance, had first arrived at Jerusalem, the community "naturally assumed some degree of hope." They met him at the gates of the city so that, according to Finn's saccharine version, the "first words that his lordship uttered within Jerusalem" were addressed to the Abyssinians, and in their own language.

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<sup>52</sup> Finn to Palmerston, NA UK FO 195/292 (December, 9, 1850) f. 737.

<sup>53</sup> Gobat to Malmesbury, NA UK FO 1/7 (Received July 6, 1852), f. 84.

<sup>54</sup> These Jews gave him the relevant information concerning themselves and their kin. Finn to Palmerston, NA UK FO 195/292 (November 24, 1849), f. 582.

Later, Abyssinian priests had arrived from their country carrying a letter from *Ras Ali* concerning the rights of the Abyssinians in the holy city, and Gobat "repeatedly assured" Finn of *Ras Ali's* desire that his subjects in Jerusalem should be "placed under British political protection." After they raised a grievance, Gobat recommended that the keys to the church be seized, thereby placing "upon the Copts and Armenians the burden of proving their rights to recover it."<sup>55</sup> The matter came before an urban council that included Armenians, Copts and Abyssinians, and in a decision later confirmed by Ottoman authorities, the keys were restored to the Copts.<sup>56</sup> Afterward, the British Government authorized Finn to continue using his "good offices" on behalf of the Abyssinians, although he sensed that this would require great care, for they had "powerful enemies in the rich Armenian community and in the vindictive Copts."<sup>57</sup>

Thus began a pattern that persists until the present day, with contradictory claims to "ownership" occasioning the intermittent disturbance.<sup>58</sup> Numerous studies have attempted to sort through a bewildering array of historical evidence in search of definitive resolutions to these questions. In 1960, Otto Meinardus, the well-known Coptologist, undertook one such study for the Commission on Oecumenical Affairs of the See of Alexandria. In the hope that a historical study of *Dayr al-Sultan* would "help to solve some of the problems with regard to property claims," he surveyed many centuries to show that "the Egyptian or Coptic Church has been represented in the Holy City from time immemorial."<sup>59</sup> However, the very impulse to establish precisely delineated "rights" is a modern one - even if its modernity has been masterfully concealed - and no resolution to the conflict is to be found in the distant past. We have

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<sup>55</sup> Finn to Palmerston, NA UK FO 195/292 (December 9, 1850), f. 737-41.

<sup>56</sup> 'Abd al-Sayyid, *Mushkilat Dayr al-Sultan*, 12-13.

<sup>57</sup> Finn to Malmesbury, NA UK FO 1/7 (August 17, 1852), f. 139.

<sup>58</sup> Particularly intense disturbances erupted in 1863 and 1878.

<sup>59</sup> See Meinardus, *Copts in Jerusalem*, 7.

considered some of the political and social changes that contributed to the emerging conflict.<sup>60</sup> We have now to consider the attending conceptual shifts that were involved in this indelible apparition, which in turn will occasion more general considerations about emerging fractures in the life of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion.

In the presence of Emperor Sahle Dingel and *Dejazmach* Webe, *Ras* Ali wrote a letter to Queen Victoria in which he said "let not my kinsmen be disinherited in your reign. As Samuel Gobat is (my) protector, I implore you, let me not be disinherited of my *rist*." According to Consul Plowden's interpretation, this constituted a request for the "British bishopric's protection of the Abyssinian interests in Jerusalem," although there was ample room for discrepancy between his precise intentions and their interpretation by British authorities. *Ras* Ali continued:

Why, whilst you live, have I been disinherited of my *rist*? While everyone (else) resides in his own *rist*, I have been disinherited. See to it now for me that I am not disinherited of my *rist* ... the fortune of Abyssinia. To be disinherited of one's *rist* is a serious thing, for earthly *rist* is heavenly *rist*.<sup>61</sup>

Although the term "*rist*" may be rendered into English as "inherited property," substantially more may be gleaned from the usage. To contemplate the problematic nature of such a simple translation, we borrow insights from the field of land tenure in Ethiopian historiography. Here, the terms "*gult*" and "*rist*" refer to distinctive categories of rights, with "*gult*" generally connoting the grants - that could in principle be withdrawn - which were given by the Solomonic state and which gave the recipient the right to exact and retain tribute. By contrast, *rist* generally

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<sup>60</sup> This calls to mind Ussama Makdisi's insights about the rise of sectarianism in Lebanon. The phenomenon of "sectarianism" emerged out of distinctly *modern* practices and discourses of the nineteenth century - carried on and enacted at the local, imperial and international levels - even as it came to be understood as a "very old thing." See *The Culture of Sectarianism*.

<sup>61</sup> *Ras* Ali's letter to Queen Victoria is published in Appleyard and Irvine, *Letters*, 127-29.

referred to the inherited privileges possessed by those who lived on and farmed the land.<sup>62</sup>

Donald Donham elucidates the subject further:

The rist, as well as gult, was a relationship to other persons rather than to the land itself ... the fields that a person farmed at any one moment represented, therefore, only a fraction of those that he could theoretically claim. Each land tract was subject to overlapping and contradictory rights and successful men were often able to increase their 'hereditary' rist lands through a variety of political stratagems.<sup>63</sup>

This strikes at the heart of the problem of translation, and offers clues about what the modern period has lost in translation. We presuppose here that *Ras Ali's* usage of "*rist*" in reference to the Jerusalem properties bears some correspondence with the nature of *rist* as Donham explicates it. In fact, a very similar arrangement has been identified in the Ottoman context, in which "landholding did not refer to land as an object, to which single individuals claimed absolute right." Rather, it involved a "multiplicity of possessors and the rights of disposal."<sup>64</sup> These insights open space for a fresh consideration of the problem of the holy places. We will draw on several points that Donham has raised, considering how they apply to the Jerusalem controversies, before widening the scope of their application.

When *Ras Ali* asserted his claims to "*rist*" in Jerusalem, Gobat and others heard a positive claim to identifiable and circumscribed objects. *Ras Ali* was hardly alone in making such bold claims, a situation which baffled the "modern" sensibilities of the foreigners. They heard a cacophony of contradictory claims to property rights, often with invocations of ancient prerogatives. Emperor Sahle Dingel articulated as much in 1848 when he drew on traditions in the *Kebra Nagast* (the fourteenth century foundational account of the Solomonic dynasty) involving Queen Helena's fourth century establishment of Rome and Ethiopia as hereditary

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<sup>62</sup> Crummey, *Land and Society*, 12; Tibehu, *Making of Modern Ethiopia*, 73-83.

<sup>63</sup> Donham, "Old Abyssinia," 16.

<sup>64</sup> Mitchell, *Rule*, 57; Muhammad Hakim, "A Multiplicity of Rights: Rural-Urban Contradictions in Early Nineteenth-Century Egypt Land Ownership," in *Money, Land and Trade: An Economic History of the Muslim Mediterranean*, ed. Nelly Hanna (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 54.

landowners in Jerusalem.<sup>65</sup> In a single day, Consul Finn encountered separate delegations of Abyssinians and Armenians, with their respective and mutually contradictory claims. The Abyssinians lamented the expropriation of their properties, while the Armenians contended that they were claiming a church that "had been well known as [Armenian] property for four hundred years."<sup>66</sup> As for the contestation over *Dayr al-Sultan*, Abyssinians sometimes cited its very name ("the Monastery of the Sultan") as proof that it was built by one of their ancient emperors, for the Copts had never had their own sultan. The Copts answered that it was constructed by one of their own during the reign and at the sufferance of the third 'Abbasid caliph.<sup>67</sup>

In his essay, Donham notes that scions of a "legendary ancestor" who had originally received *rist* title could deploy various strategies to increase their claims to a portion of these lands.<sup>68</sup> Here, we can begin to see appeals to the fourth or eighth or fifteenth centuries as strategies distinctive to a fluid regime of "overlapping" rights. A range of these strategic deployments are detectible in a collection of letters that Emperor Sahle Dingel sent to the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-Majid as well as to the Latin, Greek and Armenian patriarchs of Jerusalem, respecting his inheritances. To the Ottoman Sultan, he invoked the 1200 years in which Muslim rule has overseen Abyssinian rights, before asking why there was silence concerning the trespasses of the Greeks ("al-Rum") "when there is a king" like 'Abd al-Majid. To the Armenian patriarch, his assertions were not so bold. Although he maintained that the Armenians were "holding our place, our site," his immediate concern was more practical. He simply asked why they had "taken away" from his monks the "food which they had had of old up

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<sup>65</sup> He made this claim in a letter to Latin Bishop Velerga of Jerusalem, published in Appleyard and Irvine, *Letters*, 109.

<sup>66</sup> Finn to Palmerston, NA UK 195/292, (November 30, 1850), f. 729.

<sup>67</sup> Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:165; Iskarius, *Nawabigh* 1:124-126.

<sup>68</sup> Donham, "Old Abyssinia," 16. The specific observation about the "legendary figure" is made by Allen Hoben, whom Donham cites; see also *Land Tenure Among the Amhara of Ethiopia: The Dynamic of Cognatic Descent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 12.



to the present." To the Greek bishop, he asked why they "remain silent" as the "Copts and Muslims" were wronging his people, while in his letter to the Catholics, the malefactors were the "Armenians and Copts." In this last letter, he recalled for the bishop that Queen Helena had established "Rome and Ethiopia as hereditary landowners in Jerusalem." <sup>69</sup> Foreign observers often read such claims not as maneuvers that were intrinsic to the logic of a distinctive order or regime of rights, but as symptoms of a reigning disorder that was ill-equipped to uphold legitimate claims. These very maneuvers were often construed in moral terms, thereby revealing the degeneracies of the respective parties - one need only recall Finn pointing a consular finger of censure at the "vindictive Copts." <sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, the failure to appreciate distinctive features of this order has sometimes engendered historical anomalies for later generations of scholars. When Meinardus discovered an early-1830s reference to a small chapel that was shared by the Copts and Abyssinians, he could only surmise that the claim was inaccurate due to the "difficulties between the communities." <sup>71</sup> His conclusion may or may not be correct, but we should be careful not to underestimate the possibility for rapprochement after periods of hostility. Well into the century, the successive outbursts of conflict over properties and sacred sites were followed by periods of calm, if not comity. Such was the case after the 1820 disturbances, and again after the conflicts of the succeeding decades. Indeed, following the bitter events of 1850, there was a period of stability which lasted from 1852 until 1862, and during which time the number of monks of *Bilad al-Habasha* at *Dayr al-Sultan* was usually in excess of 100. <sup>72</sup> This is not to minimize the quarrels,

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<sup>69</sup> Appleyard and Irvine, *Letters*, 97-117.

<sup>70</sup> Finn to Malmesbury, NA UK FO 1/7 (August 17, 1852), f. 139.

<sup>71</sup> Meinardus, *Copts in Jerusalem*, 41.

<sup>72</sup> 'Abd al-Sayyid, *Mushkilat Dayr al-Sultan*, 18.

but rather to suggest that even with the introduction of novel concepts and techniques of order, older patterns were not so easily undone.

These dynamics at Jerusalem, like the *rist* of *Bilad al-Habasha*, involved relationships to "other persons" rather than simply to the land and the divers properties on it. Over centuries, as monks and other faithful arrived to the "Holy Land," the experience of the "land" was not a sterile one rooted in individualistic claims to circumscribed sites or plots of land. In fact, the historical record is not even clear about what exactly the boundaries of *Dayr al-Sultan* were, and what was included and not included in this denominated "object."<sup>73</sup> Rather, the encounter with the "land" existed within an intricate, and inherently fluid web of relationships. These relationships included the Alexandrian communion, which was a powerful and richly constituted idea, as we have tried to demonstrate in the course of these chapters. The faithful who followed the Alexandrian see were brought together by virtue of - speaking most generally - a common worldview, and it was only in the modern period that secondary features, including "national" or "regional" peculiarities would overshadow more profound bonds.

But we have also tried to show that the relationships which gave form to this idea were manifold and richly layered, which included both confessional and extra-confessional individuals and collectivities. With this in mind, we can more easily approach the bewildering state that our British interlocutors discovered in Jerusalem, with its ever shifting relational matrix of persons, places, things and ideas. The relationship of the Copts and Abyssinians to the sacred sites did not exist apart from the *idea* of a shared belonging to the see of Saint Mark. But this did not preclude other kinds of relationships, such as the affiliation of churches sharing the Anti-Chalcedonian

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<sup>73</sup> Meinardus, *Copts in Jerusalem*, 49.

Orthodox creed.<sup>74</sup> These bonds were likewise governed by particular conventions, and bound up within a web of rights and obligations. Thus, in his letter to the Armenians, *Ras Ali* was not concerned with an object to which they both held claim. Rather, he requested the restoration of a proper *relationship*, which included food rations to which Abyssinian monks were entitled.

In this intricate web, the nature of a relationship could change based on perspective and circumstances. When the Armenian patriarch referred to himself as the "parent of both Copts and Abyssinians," he did so within a very specific context.<sup>75</sup> His words may have referred to the comparative wealth and numerical strength of the Armenians in Jerusalem. But they may have also reflected the position of the Armenian hierarchy before the sultan, which in turn suggests another facet in the vast world of relationships - namely, the Ottoman state. The Porte recognized the Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople as the preeminent representative of the anti-Chalcedonian communion of churches. When the officials at Istanbul cast their gaze beyond the vaguely defined custodianship of the Armenian "father," what did they make of the Alexandrian branches of Anti-Chalcedonian Orthodoxy's elaborate confessional tree? Here, we may find a feeble clue in the words of a frustrated Consul Finn, who was dismayed that the "Turkish government" should recognize the Copts and Abyssinians as "practically one nation."<sup>76</sup> From this perspective, the fine points governing the relationships of the Alexandrian see mattered little; at least from a juridical standpoint, its followers were virtually identical.

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<sup>74</sup> The identification of this wider communion of churches was long established. For instance, during the Fatimid period they were mentioned together in the ecclesiastical chronicle; Many had gathered in the patriarch's cell, and confessed "the soundness of the agreement among the Copts (*al-Aqbat*), Armenians (*al-Arman*), Syrians (*al-Suryan*), Ethiopians (*al-Habasha*) and Nubians (*al-Nuba*) in the correct and upright Orthodox faith;" *HPEC* 2:3, 220. This anti-Chalcedonian "communal" ethos persisted across the centuries, and was expressed and reinforced in many ways, including pilgrimage. One early nineteenth century traveler to Jerusalem noted the "Copts, Armenians and Abyssinians" proceeding in a group to the Jordan River as part of the itinerary of their Easter pilgrimage; Giovanni Finati, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Giovanni Finati* (London: John Murray, 1830), 2:226.

<sup>75</sup> Finn to Palmerston, NA UK FO 195/292 (December 9, 1850), f. 739-40.

<sup>76</sup> He surmised from this that perhaps "some day the helpless Abyssinians will have to succumb to the Copts." Finn to Bulwer, NA UK FO 1/12 (March 11, 1862), f. 79. In 1866, the consul at Beirut expressed the same exasperation with the Turkish officials whose insistence upon "treating [Abyssinians] as identical" to the Copts was unwavering; A. Jackson to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/17 (January 20, 1866), f. 61.

All of this calls to mind an order that would be taxed by a profusion of modern demands - whether of foreign or "domestic" provenance.<sup>77</sup> In the "Holy Land," as we have seen, a regime of multiple claims was strained by the demands of foreign powers that ferreted about in search of terra firma on which to anchor their respective claims, and those of "centralizing" bureaucracies that were also ill-disposed to such a regime.<sup>78</sup> A transformation was underway that would strain a condition of contingent claims, and the effects of this process extended far beyond the contested topography of Jerusalem, including to the sprawling territories of the African horn. We have noted that a single stretch of territory could at times pay tribute to Gondar, at other times to Sennar, and sometimes to both. In other words, it was possible for multiple "centers" to maintain a theoretical claim to the same territory.<sup>79</sup> The latitude for this kind of arrangement would narrow in the decades following Mehmet 'Ali's "opening" of *Bilad al-Sudan* and the subsequent projection of modern techniques of power onto ever-expanding "peripheries." The hostilities along the frontier that led to the disastrous Egyptian-Ethiopian wars of 1875-1876 were in a sense successor conflicts to an order that was going into eclipse, an order in which claims to land (or more precisely, to the exaction of tribute and other forms of benefit from land) were not limited to what was exploitable at any given time.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Many variations on the theme can be found. For example, the rise of an Egyptian cash crop economy introduced unprecedented demand for the extraction of the whole crop, which a system of "multiple claims" was ill-equipped to do. This led to the gradual abrogation of a complex system of rights, and its replacement with "modern" concepts of ownership; see Mitchell, *Rule*, 59-60.

<sup>78</sup> In 1862, the British government sought to have the Ottoman authorities recognize the Abyssinians as "non-ra'aya" of the Porte, so that they could be more easily "protected" by the English; see Finn to Bulwer, NA UK FO 1/12 (March 11, 1862), f. 79.

<sup>79</sup> At mid-century, such arrangements remained. For example, prior to 1855, Metemma was a tributary to both the Ethiopian and Turco-Egyptian regimes; see Tesema Ta'a, "Prologue to the Ethio-Sudanese Frontier" in *Kasa and Kasa*, eds. Tadesse Beyene et. al. (Addis Abeba: Book Centre of Addis Ababa University, 1990), 274. Many similar examples can be cited. For example, on the African side of the Red Sea littoral, claimants included local confederations existing in a delicate balance which included emperors and regional grandees of the highlands and the Ottoman officials.

<sup>80</sup> Such conflicts marked the later period of Khurshid Pasha's rule. He was involved in a series of skirmishes with Kinfu (the ruler of the Abyssinian border region of Qwara.) Tigrean *Dejazmach* Webe sent a letter to Queen Victoria regarding the matter - although the letter may in fact have been written at the instigation of Antoine d'Abbadie. From

One can clearly observe how this condition of "rights," when grafted onto a modern understanding of ownership or rights of possession, has contributed to the clashes of irreconcilable territorial irredentisms. Before becoming emperor, Kasa (later Tewodros II) sought to seize the border region of Gallabat from "Egyptian" control, and in the long run to conquer Sennar, which he claimed had been in the possession of his ancestors.<sup>81</sup> During a subsequent diplomatic dispute with the British, the emperor informed their liaison that not only did Jerusalem belong to him, but because he was a "descendant of Constantine and Alexander the Great," he held a rightful claim to Arabia and India as well.<sup>82</sup> Ten years later, during negotiations after the Egyptian-Ethiopian wars, Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889) would list among his demands a number of hereditary claims: "I want retrocession of Metemma, Changallas, Bogos, cession of Zula and Amphilia (ports)." But his concessions are even more interesting. He acknowledged that while it was within his rights to "claim Dongola, Berber, Nubia" as well as Sennar, he would abstain.<sup>83</sup> Like Tewodros II, he was reaching into the twilight of history and beyond the horizons of the lowland marches, toward those shadowy lands to which he could make a claim. But it must not be presumed that these emperors were unconsciously clinging to "antiquated" concepts. Standing as they were at the nexus of distinctive orders, it is arguable that they deployed "traditional" apprehensions of "possession" in novel ways, staking their own precarious claims on a modern stage of international politics.

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1837, the British Foreign Office gave rather considerable attention to these border disputes; see for instance Cambell to Palmerston, NA UK FO 1/3 (October 23, 1837), f. 13-14;. See also Campbell to Coffin, NA UK FO 1/3 (December 8, 1837 - copy), f. 25. Here he cautioned the Abyssinian government against "intemperance of conduct" in the border regions. Tensions increased further with the troop build-up after Mehmet 'Ali's tour in 1839, and Abu Widan's subsequent capture of the frontier region of Taka, where he founded a capital at Kassala.

<sup>81</sup> Georges Douin, *Histoire du Regne du Khedive Ismail: l'Empire Africain* (Cairo: l'Institut Française d'archeologie orientale du Caire, 1936), 3:53.

<sup>82</sup> Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia: With Some Account of the Late Emperor Theodore, his Country and People* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1868), 177.

<sup>83</sup> He also demanded "an abouna, and a sum of money." Malet to the Marquis of Salisbury, NA UK FO 407/14, ff. 51-55.

And here we return once more to Jerusalem, the great city that Tewodros had the temerity to claim for his own. In the article cited above, Scholch has placed the Zionist movement as "only one of many European movements which were dedicated to the 'reclamation' and colonization of Palestine." Seeking to avoid the historiographical bias for "successful movements," he situates Zionism within a constellation of comparable exploits. This context, he emphasizes, is important for understanding the origins of a conflict that "did not arise from the region itself but was planted there from outside."<sup>84</sup> There is no question that the conflict and its catastrophic effects on the indigenous population was of European provenance; But if Europe can lay claim to a certain dynamic which spawned disaster, the "Holy Land" was organically linked with its wider region over many centuries. While a confluence of factors ignited novel kinds of European interest in the "Holy Land," the wider region was not unresponsive to the changing circumstances. The regional ties to the "Holy Land" were elaborate and layered, and the nineteenth century witnessed particularly creative engagements, though they have largely been concealed within the recesses of the grand narratives of Europe.

Two expressions of this "regional" context can be mentioned, one from the direction of *Bilad Misr*, and the other from *Bilad al-Habasha*. When Mehmet 'Ali's forces entered *Bilad al-Sham* in the 1830s, certain material benefits and privileges accrued to the Alexandrian see and its following. Although many of these advantages proved to be transitory, the coming decades would occasion other opportunities for fresh engagements along these northern territorial reaches. During the 1850s, Patriarch Kirulus IV selected a "reformist" monk of *Dayr Antonius* to be the archbishop for Jerusalem. Archbishop Basilius' 43-year career would, in the words of a turn of the twentieth century Coptic historian, elevate the status of Copts in *Bilad al-Sham* from "its lowliness." He built large quarters for himself, and engaged in other restoration and building

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<sup>84</sup> Scholch, "Britain in Palestine," 39-40.

projects. His tenure coincided with the new land laws, which surely facilitated acquisitions in the hinterlands of Jerusalem, and notably at the coastal town of Jaffa, an important port of call for one of the pilgrimage routes. Discovering that many poor pilgrims slept outside for lack of means, he set out to remedy the situation.<sup>85</sup> Over two years, Basilus made payments on land that he had purchased near the orange groves, and on which he built a large Coptic monastery.<sup>86</sup>

During this same period, the "Holy Land" was a lively topic of reflection in *Bilad al-Habasha* as well, and one on which Tewodros capitalized. He also seized upon something else - the coming of "Tewodros II," the just monarch who was to restore proper order and recover Jerusalem from Muslim control. There was a widespread belief in this apocalyptic tradition, and one prominent historian of Tewodros' reign has even speculated that Tewodros and others may have believed that a capture of this "center of the world" was a realistic expectation.<sup>87</sup> Lejean, briefly the French consul at Masawa, remarked derogatorily of a proposition that the emperor reputedly made to the Russians whereby they would orchestrate a march on the Holy City, "and split between them the Muslim world."<sup>88</sup> For Lejean, this was evidence of the monarch's "illusions of grandeur." Yet, in light of the exceptional circumstances of the period, it was not exactly outlandish for the monarch to suppose that such a fantastic prophecy might come to pass. The disparities of power notwithstanding, his vision for control over these territories was no more fanciful than the ragbag of schemes that were being bandied about in Europe.

Suffice it to say that the question of Jerusalem was far from a provincial or isolated affair. In appraising the various kinds of contestation over the "Holy Land," we have discerned the dim outlines of modern "boundaried objects" as they began to come into view. We have addressed

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<sup>85</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:203; 2:208; 2:228.

<sup>86</sup> al-Masri, *Qissat al-kanisat*, 4:352-3; Rizq, *Qissat al-Aqbat*, 104.

<sup>87</sup> Sven Rubenson, *King of Kings* (Addis Ababa: Haile Sellassie University, 1966), 60.

<sup>88</sup> LeJean, *Theodore II*, 52.

some of the agencies and processes that conjured these apparitions, and that helped to enervate a fluid regime of "overlapping and contradictory" rights.<sup>89</sup> We have observed this trend at two distinctive degrees; as it was brought to bear on more expansive territorial questions, and as it played out in the localized setting of Jerusalem and its environs. Insofar as this "Holy Land" was becoming an object of modern discourses of "possession," it took on particular significance in the nineteenth century - and not only among Europeans. For the Alexandrian Orthodox communion, this process led to strains in time-honored relationships. The rise of Tewodros may have initially captured the imagination of faithful as far away as Cairo and beyond, but in time, it would become clear that sections of the see of Alexandria's following were sometimes working at cross purposes. Meanwhile, the monument to Alexandrian Orthodoxy that Basilius built at Jaffa became his refuge during periods of intra-communal strife in Jerusalem.<sup>90</sup>

When the modernity of this condition is overlooked, then primeval explanations become tempting answers to modern riddles. This orientalist approach to the Coptic-Ethiopian dispute is not unlike the obscurantist, primordialist explanations that are sometimes offered for the indigenous population's hostility toward Zionism. Meanwhile, a dynamism which encouraged the faithful across many centuries to make their way to Jerusalem, and which impelled "modern" departures on the part of Tewodros or Basilius and others of the "East," fades into a timeless setting. Against the backdrop of a dusty and lifeless condition, the Western movements appear all the more vital. This backdrop must include petulant monks, modernity's picturesque foils, fastidiously guarding every inch of their edifices, which have been frozen in stone and in time by a conceptual framework inherited from the nineteenth century; that of a "status quo" governing

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<sup>89</sup> Donham, "Old Abyssinia," 16.

<sup>90</sup> At the turn of the Twentieth Century, the archbishop resided primarily at Jaffa. A contemporary observer speculated that this was because of the poverty and "scanty accommodation" of the communion at Jerusalem; see Ada Goodrich-Freer, *Inner Jerusalem* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1904), 123.



the Holy Sites.<sup>91</sup> As for that erstwhile sign of communal vigor, the monastery at Jaffa, it has fallen into a state of desuetude, sitting as a bleak monument to a historical torpor upon which modern Zionist mythologies would be written.<sup>92</sup>

### **"No One Better Qualified": An *Abun* is Found**

In the first two sections, we have looked at historical relationships existing within the Alexandrian Orthodox communion from southern and northern extremities respectively. *Abuna Kirulus III* confronted a set of challenges, from the presence of "Feringees" to the breakdown of an established order. While he had some small successes, he passed his final years in exile, overwhelmed by the currents of the time. We then directed the lens to Jerusalem, which revealed a range of transformations that will help to contextualize the environment in which *Abuna Salama III* was formed, and within which his career unfolded. A basic line of continuity extends across the decades that were the focus of these first two sections. Despite all the strains and trials, the church hierarchy remained closely interested in the archdiocese of *al-Habash*, while Abyssinian parties maintained contact with *Misr* and the patriarch, even during the lengthy

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<sup>91</sup> Jerusalem was a "battlefield" for Great Power rivalries in the region, and by 1852 the outbreak of war appeared to be imminent. In a fruitless attempt to prevent this eventuality, Sultan 'Abd al-Majid promulgated a decree that froze ownership rights to the Holy Places, which came to be known as the "status quo." In 1878, the Treaty of Berlin confirmed the decree, and the British, and later the Israeli authorities inherited this nineteenth century convention. See Marlen Eordegian, "British and Israeli Maintenance of the Status Quo in the Holy Places of Christendom," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 2 (2003): 307-308. Eordegian addresses the politicized nature of the Israeli approach to the "status quo." They have interpreted it according to the strategic interests of the Zionist state. This is exemplified in the Israeli authorities' decision to transfer the keys of *Dayr al-Sultan* to the Ethiopians on April 25, 1970, despite Israel's claims of maintaining the "Status Quo." According to one Coptic Church source, this was done as retribution for the "courageous nationalist position" of the Coptic archbishop of Jerusalem during the Egyptian-Israeli tensions at the time; see Antunius al-Antuni, *Wataniyat al-Kanizat al-Qibtiya* (Cairo: Sharika al-Taba'a al-Misriya, 2002), 3:207. For an overview of the monastery's history and the dispute through the early 1990s, see Stefan Wimmer, "Le Monastère Deir es-Sultan a Jérusalem," *Le Monde Copte* 23 (1993), 59-68. See also Prouty, *Empress Taytu and Menelik II*, 247-56.

<sup>92</sup> Mark LeVine has shown the importance of Jaffa as the "traditional" point of reference with which to contrast the self-consciously "modern" creation of Tel Aviv; See *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). In 1993, only a single monk lived at the monastery, in addition to some Coptic families; See Amba Abraham, "Le Patriarcat Copte Orthodoxe et le Saint-Siège de Jérusalem e du Proche-Orient: Lieux et activités religieuses, sociales et pastorales," *Le Monde Copte* 23 (1993), 77.

interregnum in the *abunate*. This can be observed in 1830 as the leading priest of Tigre, in the absence of an *abun*, set out for *Misr* to request the patriarch's excommunication of a "heterodox" figure. In his response, Patriarch Butrus treated the matter with caution and attentiveness, refusing to excommunicate the cleric, while recommending that the "heterodox" party should be persuaded by argumentation rather than severe judgment.<sup>93</sup> The scene at *Misr* recalls a historical relationship that persisted, despite a litany of troubles. If the first two sections lingered on the extremities of the territorial reaches, here we begin at the "heart" of the see, in *Bilad Misr*.

In his path-breaking study of educational reform in modern Egypt, Sedra establishes the important role that the Church Missionary Society served as an early exponent of the "enlightenment" of the Coptic Church and community. For these missionaries, the eradication of "superstition" was particularly urgent because, as Sedra argues, they would be unable to "capture the Copt" and "grasp control of the individual" so long as superstition reigned, for this was a "region to which the missionary had no access." He demonstrates the enmeshment of the CMS in the life of the Coptic community, and the influences of their educational plans, including on the career of the monk Da'ud (later Patriarch Kirulus IV - 1854-1862), who is remembered as the "Father of Reform." He was mentioned in CMS mission reports as an alumnus of their school, and his priorities as patriarch were aimed at redressing many of the "problems" that the missionaries had also identified, particularly the host of practices which were becoming the paraphernalia of superstition and disorder.<sup>94</sup> While Da'ud's direct connection with the school is a contested point, the connection of another monk, Andra'us (the future *Abuna* Salama III) is well

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<sup>93</sup> Gobat, *Journal of Three Year's Residence*, ix.

<sup>94</sup> Sedra, "Textbook Maneuvers," 95, 206. The prominent role that Protestant missions played in the life of Alexandrian Orthodoxy during the nineteenth century is well established. Salama Musa made the point in his characteristically modernist idiom, asserting that while "many Copts are resentful of the spread of Protestantism in Egypt ... in my opinion our Orthodox Church would not yet have risen from its medieval slumber but for the proddings of Protestantism"; Salama Musa, *The Education of Salama Musa* (*Tarbiyat Salama Musa*), trans. L.O. Schuman (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961), 15.

documented. Sedra cites his case as important documentary evidence linking the ecclesiastical reformers with the CMS.<sup>95</sup> For our purposes, the point of connection assumes a dual significance, for CMS missionaries were not only embedded in the ecclesiastical affairs at *Misr*, but they also had a keen interest in *Bilad al-Habasha*.<sup>96</sup> Their archives allow us to glimpse an important facet of the relationship between *Bilad Misr* and *Bilad al-Habasha* during critical decades of the century.

Although our knowledge of Andra'us' biographical background is limited, we know that he was born into a family of modest means from al-Minya, and that for a time he earned subsistence as a camel-driver.<sup>97</sup> As an adolescent, he was enrolled in the CMS day school, directed by Rev. Kruse. In a letter to the mission secretaries, Kruse recalled that Andra'us was "a clever boy, diligent and quick in learning" and who performed so well that he was later employed as an instructor at the school. However, as soon as he had received a stipend, his father solicited money and a quarrel ensued. The 16 year old made haste to *Dayr Antonius* in the Eastern Desert, which became his refuge. Kruse was gratified to have received several letters from the youth which gave him consolation that his "labour had not been in vain." At the monastery, Andra'us studied the Coptic language assiduously, and he frequently requested books from the mission, which he would circulate among his confreres. While on leave from the monastery, Andra'us met with Kruse on a number of occasions, and these encounters convinced Kruse that "the religious impressions he had received in the seminary were still abiding."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>96</sup> Gobat (the future Protestant Bishop of Jerusalem) was among their number and in 1830 he was the first to succeed in penetrating *Bilad al-Habasha*. The CMS blamed Catholic intrigues for a series of expulsions of the CMS from the country. However, they eventually became more firmly established in the southern region of Shoa; Eugene Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work, in Three Volumes* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 2:350-53.

<sup>97</sup> Archdale King, *The Rites of the Eastern Church* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1947), 1:525; LeJean, *Theodore II*, 41.

<sup>98</sup> Kruse to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 45/100 (May 20, 1841).

By now, *Bilad al-Habasha* had been without an *abun* for 12 years, despite intermittent efforts to obtain one. In the late summer of 1840, there were no less than three competing delegations at *Misir*, each claiming authority and styling the others as pretenders. Because none bore the customary remuneration, they all failed in their objective.<sup>99</sup> Such was the condition of the *Zemene Mesafint*, in which regional and factional parties competed for ascendancy, and for the Solomonic mantle. Indeed, *Dejazmach* Webe Haile Maryam founded the church of Darasge Maryam and bequeathed to it a crown and ceremonial cross, which was engraved with the words Negusa Etyopya - King of Ethiopia. Crummey detects in this a conviction on the part of Webe that the attainment of imperial leadership would involve a struggle for orthodoxy, and that his bequest was "almost certainly part of his campaign to become the king of Ethiopia."<sup>100</sup> The acquisition of an *abun* was crucial to this objective, although the strained relations with Mehmet 'Ali's regime and other factors presented practical obstacles to the dispatch of a high profile delegation. To circumvent the hazards, Webe finally availed himself of the privileged position of Europeans in the region, calling on the head of the Catholic mission in Tigre to lead the delegation. Catholic father Justin de Jacobis proceeded alongside more than 60 Abyssinians to Cairo where they presented 8,000 thalers to the patriarch and four eunuchs to the *wali* as compensation for an episcopal appointment.<sup>101</sup>

In a most unusual development, Patriarch Butrus favored the 21-year old Andra'us to fill the vacancy due to his "religious sentiments" and "progress in his studies." The young monk had informed Kruse the previous year about the patriarch's plans, which only awaited the proper

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<sup>99</sup> They made claims of shipwreck and other fantastic pretenses to account for their inability to remit the customary dues. Kruse to Coates, CMS C M/O 45/89 (September 10, 1840).

<sup>100</sup> Crummey, *Land and Society*, 160-61.

<sup>101</sup> Lordos to d'Abbadie, Correspondence of Antoine d'Abbadie, BN, NAF 22430 (August 14, 1840 - May 5, 1841), f. 396; Kruse to Secretaries, CMS, C M/O 45/100. (May 20, 1841).

arrangements on the part of the rulers of *Bilad al-Habasha*.<sup>102</sup> When Webe's embassy arrived, Andra'us was summoned from the monastery and sequestered in the patriarchate where church dignitaries were assembled. Butrus steadfastly championed the young monk, and the members of the delegation were said to have declared that they "would have no other but him." However, other church leaders thought that his youth was an impediment. The patriarch called a monk from a different convent so that he could pray over both men to discern the will of God. For his part, Kruse was unduly sanguine about the benefits that Andra'us' elevation would present for the CMS. In addition to safeguarding missionaries, Andra'us would surely "keep up a constant correspondence" with his former teacher and "distribute as many books" as he was sent, which would provide a "rich blessing ... to poor Abyssinia!"<sup>103</sup> On May 23, 1841, three days after he wrote these words, Andra'us was consecrated as Salama III, metropolitan of *al-Habash*.<sup>104</sup>

During this time, English and French agents and missionaries were maneuvering for position in the region, each jealously guarding against the advantages of the other. It should come as no surprise then that the selection of Andra'us provoked a flurry of activity among Europeans at *Misir*. A Catholic party was said to have issued a series of demands of the patriarch, and with a letter of support from Webe in hand, they stipulated certain concessions to Catholics in Tigre, although the patriarch insisted that the letter was a forgery. Informing him of their readiness to raise the issue to the pasha, they even alluded to an "armed vessel" that was at their disposal at Masawa. The alarmed patriarch called on Kruse, who recommended a determined stand "against the Catholic intrigues," adding that the solitary French ship was insignificant, for

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<sup>102</sup> Kruse quoted the patriarch as saying that he would be selected "whenever the Abyssinians desired [a bishop]." Of course, there was no want of such desire, so he surely meant that the selection would be made when the proper protocols were met; Kruse to Secretaries, CMS, C M/O 45/100. (May 20, 1841).

<sup>103</sup> Kruse to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 45/100. (May 20, 1841).

<sup>104</sup> Kruse to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 45/102. (June 17, 1841).

the English "had a whole fleet in the neighborhood." He found that this "eased the patriarch's mind," who thanked him for his assistance.

Later Salama summoned the missionary and introduced him to members of the embassy, including priests and Webe's own vizier, all of whom, Kruse noted cheerily, "inquired after Mr. Gobat."<sup>105</sup> And neither should it be surprising that French and English, Catholic and Protestant observers would read the passing events through their own respective lenses. There was a rash of conjectures that placed the *abun* entirely within a Protestant-Catholic framework. One European recalled that although de Jacobis sought a pro-Catholic *abun*, the patriarch chose instead a monk "whose views were more in favor of the Protestants."<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile, after dismissing the autochthonous faith of Salama with the claim that it was "very doubtful," a hostile French consul noted that "most believe him to be a Protestant" because of his links to the CMS and because the British consul "had not been a stranger to his appointment."<sup>107</sup>

Such sources have left an impression in the historiography that Salama was, in the words of Samuel Rubenson, "mostly occupied with foreigners." The reality, Rubenson argues, was that he was principally occupied with domestic concerns, namely the reconciliation of rival factions, and the unification of the kingdom.<sup>108</sup> In light of this important counterpoise to familiar Eurocentric interpretations, how might we reread the selection of *Abuna* Salama, and the first period of his episcopate? Here, it is useful to recall the circumstances of his formation. Van Doorn Harder has noted that one consequence of the "changes in Egypt's government" was that Butrus VII "regained his traditional authority as rightful head of the Coptic community."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Kruse to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 45/102. (June 17, 1841).

<sup>106</sup> According to the source, this was a tactic against his "long-standing adversary, the Church of Rome." Blanc, *A Narrative*, 274-75.

<sup>107</sup> LeJean, *Theodore II*, 43.

<sup>108</sup> Rubenson, "The Interaction," 75-76.

<sup>109</sup> Guirguis and Van Doorn Harder, *Emergence*, 57.

When we acknowledge the problematic nature of this idea of a "return" to traditional roles, we can begin to see the patriarch in a decidedly *modern* context. His was the profound challenge of leading a church that was faced with a novel order of bureaucratization. If his successor would be remembered as the "Father of Reform," such a figure did not rise preternaturally from the proverbial ashes. It was Butrus - whose reign spanned nearly the entirety of Mehmet Ali's career - who faced the revolutionary transformations of that era. At a time when the pasha utilized European agents strategically for many "reform" measures, it is not surprising that Butrus, as head of an institution in transformation, might do the same.

Sedra has demonstrated the involvement of the CMS in the early ecclesiastical engagement with "enlightenment" ideas that would animate later generations of communal reformers (both clerical and lay). During the time of Patriarch Butrus (and *Abuna* Salama) the presence of "Europe" was becoming an incontrovertible reality of "domestic/regional" affairs. They understood this fact only too well and their engagements with missionaries and other foreign actors were located within a constellation of *strategic* encounters.<sup>110</sup> Foreign observers and missionaries often missed the tactical dimension to cooperative measures, so that a particular gesture on the part of Salama could be taken as evidence of his sublimated Protestant convictions. Likewise, when Patriarch Butrus expressed his "sincere love and friendship" for the CMS, this could only inspire the hope that Copts might finally inquire about "the way of salvation."<sup>111</sup> When such gestures are understood in a strategic light, we can appreciate unique encounters as part of a creative engagement on the part of these clerics and others, which followed the contingencies of rapidly changing circumstances.

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<sup>110</sup> This stands in marked contrast with the days of *Abuna* Kirulus who was not disposed to making fine distinctions among "Western" sectarians whom he rather generically described as "Feringees" and whose presence - few in number though they were - warranted unmitigated hostility from the guardians of Orthodoxy.

<sup>111</sup> Kruse to Coates, CMS, C M/O 45/12, (January 20, 1831).

Just as Ibrahim Pasha's occupation of Syria afforded the communion opportunities for creative engagement to the north, the same can be said of the arrival of the CMS to *Bilad Misr*, with their unusual solicitations and initiatives. Their ostensible aim was not the conversion of the Copts, but the regeneration of what they believed to be an enervated ancient communion. Butrus may have perceived in their vision some consonance with the goals of Mehmet 'Ali's regime, and an opportunity for material assistance in the effort to bring the institutions under his care into conformity with the demands of the age. This is the light in which the goodwill that he showed to the missionaries should be viewed, such as when he offered to construct a residence for them in 1831, or when he endorsed Lieder's proposal to found an institution for the "education of Coptic priests."<sup>112</sup> This latter case is particularly instructive. The patriarch made his endorsement only weeks after he and the Alexandrian archbishop of Jerusalem had met with a group of missionaries. At the meeting, Reverend Grimshawe spoke about the condition of the church apropos of the "new order of events in Egypt," and the providential benefits that could redound to it in these circumstances. Egypt had become, he continued, "the theatre of great events [with] arts and sciences ... rapidly advancing," and the Coptic Church was well placed to partake of the "same awaking spirit" which could lead to revival in "Egypt, in Nubia and in Abyssinia." The patriarch said that if a plan were devised whereby "this aid could be satisfactorily offered and accepted, the proposition would meet with his cordial sanction and approbation."<sup>113</sup>

It was during roughly this same period that Butrus would call upon Andra'us to serve as archbishop of *Bilad al-Habasha*. The wizened patriarch affirmed that he could "think of no one better qualified" for the position, a remarkable statement to be made of a monk who had barely

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<sup>112</sup> Kruse to Coates, CMS, C M/O 45/12 (January 20, 1831); "Abstract of a Letter from the Reverend Lieder," CMS C M/O 48/29, (January 18, 1840).

<sup>113</sup> Lieder to Brenner, "Minutes of a Discussion with the Coptic Patriarch at an interview Held at the Patriarchate"; CMS C M/O 48/29, (December 30, 1839).



reached the age of majority and who was hardly five years in monastic life.<sup>114</sup> Andra'us had not obtained these unique qualifications from the "traditional" disciplines of the desert. The deserts were being drawn, literally and figuratively, into that new kind of cultivation by which monks and bedouin alike might be tamed. For monastic life, a subtle reversal was taking place; the wisdom of the desert was re-inscribed as ignorance. If wisdom was to exist in these desert solitudes, it would have to be introduced from outside. William Cornwallis Harris, whose abortive diplomatic mission to Shoa was contemporaneous with these events, offered his own assessment of Salama's significance:

Heretofore the dignity [of the abun] had invariably been conferred on some bigoted old monk, extracted from one of the convents ... where he had passed years of abstinence and mortification, and being duly exalted to the episcopal throne ... he never failed to impart a full share of ignorance and superstition. But the new primate ... proved to be possessed of abilities of a very superior order, whilst his mind had been expanded by a liberal education at Cairo under the Reverend Dr. Lieder.<sup>115</sup>

Although Butrus hardly shared these crude ideas, they speak to a sweeping spirit of the age.

Perhaps Butrus recalled the misadventures of *Abuna* Kirulus III, whom he had elevated 25 years before, and imagined that a more sophisticated prelate would have fared better. It would certainly seem that in selecting Andra'us, he acknowledged that the venerable senior monks were no longer suitable for the task.

### **"Abuna Salama of the Orthodox faith"**

*Abuna* Salama III arrived in his archbishopric in October of 1841. As he traveled the route, he stopped at various churches and monasteries. Many people begged his blessing, and some confessed their sins to him publicly and asked for his forgiveness, which he offered along

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<sup>114</sup> Kruse to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 45/100. (May 20, 1841).

<sup>115</sup> W. Cornwallis Harris, *The Highlands of Aethiopia* (London, 1844), 3:194-95.

with penances.<sup>116</sup> One observer described the popular response at the capital of Tigre, where "rich and poor, priests and soldiers, farmers and townspeople, women, men and infants" filled the streets to greet the prelate who was riding on a richly caparisoned mule.<sup>117</sup> But Salama's episcopal honeymoon did not last long. The border conflicts along the Western frontiers were ongoing, a fact which contributed to Webe's overtures to England and France, and his lenient policy toward Catholic missions in Tigre. To the south, the Harris Mission had arrived in Shoa at the invitation of its ruler, who hoped that the British might help to advance his own designs on Gondar.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile, the internecine struggles among regional grandees continued to rage, with alliances shifting endlessly and no party able to breaking the stalemate. This political state was mirrored in the life of the church, which was still riven by doctrinal controversies.

In 1841, *Dejazmach* Webe's prospects were bright. He had largely united the northern country politically, and his acquisition of an *abun* was of untold strategic and symbolic value for a leader seeking the mantle of legitimacy in the cause of imperial "restoration." It was a significant step toward his goal of wresting Begemder from the control of *Ras 'Ali* II and his powerful mother Manan, a Wello convert to Christianity and wife to the nominal emperor Yohannes III. Webe acted quickly to ingratiate himself with Abuna Salama. Although the ruling party at Begemder was unified by a commitment to the preservation of the Yejju dynasty, Webe styled his designs as a struggle against Islam, and convinced Salama of *Ras 'Ali's* apostasy.<sup>119</sup> At this point Salama had little recourse but to acquiesce in his plans. He accompanied Webe on

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<sup>116</sup> Mansfield Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia: Being Notes Collected During Three Years' Residence and Travels in that Country* (London: John Murray, 1853), 2:121-22.

<sup>117</sup> P.V. Ferret and J. G. Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie dans les provinces du Tigre, de Samen et de l'Ahmara* (Paris, 1847), 2:63-64; 2:67-69.

<sup>118</sup> Although a treaty was signed, it proved to be ineffectual. The ruler was ultimately put off, and even alarmed, by the enormous size of the mission; Crummey, *Priests and Politicians*, 52.

<sup>119</sup> Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), 95.

military adventure, which began with a defeat of *Ras* Ali and ended in Webe's own capture.<sup>120</sup> The responsibility for negotiating his release fell to the young *abun*. It was said that when *Ras* 'Ali requested the *abun*'s blessing after the battle, Salama hesitated, for a Christian priest could not bestow a blessing on an adherent of Islam. When the *ras* responded that he was a faithful Christian, Salama asked that he release Webe from captivity as proof of his sincerity. After some days, not only did *Ras* 'Ali agree to the request, but he also allowed Webe to return to his provinces and resume his rule.<sup>121</sup>

For the next four years, *Abuna* Salama remained under *Ras* 'Ali's control, during which time he sought unsuccessfully to restore Orthodox unity at Gondar, where three doctrinal schools were at loggerheads. His adversaries were formidable, most notably the *echage* Mahsantu and Sahle Sellassie, the *negus* of Shoa, who followed the *echage*'s "heterodox" line. If Salama's position was precarious during these years, by 1846 it had become untenable. Sahle Sellassie requested the lifting of his excommunication, and when Salama refused his house was besieged and *Itege* Manan banished him from Gondar.<sup>122</sup> He returned to Tigre where he soon had a falling out with Webe and, like *Abuna* Kirulus III before him, he was consigned to a monastery refuge. There are, in fact, a number of continuities in the experience of these successive prelates. Like Kirulus, Salama assumed some of his "traditional" prerogatives, including access to land legacies. Also like Kirulus his actions and alliances were largely dictated by the sudden turns of fortune that characterized the *Zemene Mesafint*. And likewise, he was unable to marshal the power of his office or to deal with doctrinal factionalism as long as the territories were so politically disunited. And finally, he remained vigilant against the intrusion of foreigners who

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<sup>120</sup> Webe entered into alliance with the ruler of Gojjam in preparation for the battle; *Ibid.*, 90; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 56-58.

<sup>121</sup> Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, 2:137-38.

<sup>122</sup> Crummey, "Doctrine and Authority," 573-74; 93.

threatened to further weaken the Alexandrian position.

But despite these continuities, Salama's tenure offers clues to a number of distinctly modern departures, which in turn motivated some contemporary Europeans to doubt his authenticity. By this time, an Orientalist framework was in place that ascribed a timeless quality to the "East," and Eastern Christians were situated, alongside Muslims, within this realm of "Eastern inertia." This may explain similarities to the ways in which scholars have treated both a figure like *Abuna* Salama and his Muslim counterparts. In *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, Samira Haj locates "Islamic reformer" Muhammad 'Abduh in the context of Islamic thought and practice as he confronted the renting effects of "colonial modernity" from within an Islamic discursive tradition.<sup>123</sup> She argues that underlying the critiques of 'Abduh and others like him has been the assumption that Islam is not open to change, and therefore any sign of vitality marks a break from an "authentic" tradition. As such, 'Abduh's Western contemporaries, and succeeding generations of scholars have portrayed him as everything from "a liberal humanist" to an "agnostic who cloaked himself in the mantle of religion for political expediency."<sup>124</sup>

This is remarkably similar to the kind of language that has been used to describe *Abuna* Salama III. His "Orthodoxy" was doubted by foreign observers who took any novel departure as a sign of the inauthenticity of his ostensible convictions. For some, he was an occult Protestant or foreign agent. For others, like Consul LeJean, he scarcely believed in anything at all, aside from

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<sup>123</sup> Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 71. Appeals to Islamic and Christian "orthodoxies" at this time share many features in common, and merit further study. As political, economic and cultural vulnerabilities mounted, rulers, educationalists, intellectuals and others deployed and articulated "orthodoxy" in new ways. It served an ideological purpose - as a principle to unify people against foreign threats. It also served a cultural purpose, as "Western" epistemological and conceptual frames were worked out within the living intellectual traditions. For the Ottoman imperial deployment of Islamic orthodoxy, see Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

"money and gross pleasure [while] promoting the most fanatical religious persecutions." <sup>125</sup>

Implicit in these varying assessments was that his "Orthodoxy" was merely a cloak for something else. In what follows, we will deploy the abstraction of "orthodoxy" in a conscious effort to rehabilitate the biographical integrity of this important figure, arguing that however "unorthodox" his exertions or ambitions were, he was consciously defending the cause of "Orthodoxy/orthodoxy" - as he understood it - according to the unique circumstances of the period. In so doing, we recognize that he engaged novel ideas and changing circumstances within the context of a living tradition. <sup>126</sup>

The recent translation and publication of *Abuna Salama's* official Ge'ez chronicle contributes substantially toward this object. The chronicle is a very unusual work, for it is the only known, pre-twentieth century biography for a bishop of the church. Additionally, it is not patterned after the traditional hagiographies of saints, but is written in the style of the royal chronicles. <sup>127</sup> In a sense, it is "traditional" and "modern" at once, for it constitutes a well-established form that was deployed in a new way. In terms of content, it provides a valuable corrective to missionary sources that have portrayed an *abun* who was fixated on the every move and machination of Europeans. The editors of the translation note that it does not make a single reference to missionaries, and thus reveals an *abun* whose paramount concerns related to

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<sup>125</sup> LeJean, *Theodore II*, 42-43.

<sup>126</sup> Within Orientalist discourses, Islam and "Eastern Christianity" shared a number of characteristics, including a common claim that their "reforms" marked a break from "tradition." While this is beyond our purview here, Haj's contribution might provide a model for approaching the intellectual history of "Eastern" Christian "reformers." To what extent, it might be asked, were the novel challenges of the nineteenth century worked out within the context of their own distinctive intellectual traditions. It is worth noting here that Girgis Filuthawus 'Awad, a "progressive" Coptic priest and contemporary of Muhammad 'Abduh, used the writings of the thirteenth century Alexandrian canonist Ibn al-'Assal to legitimize the nineteenth century innovation of a "lay council." See Vivian Ibrahim, "Legitimising Lay and State Authority: Challenging the Coptic Church in Late Nineteenth Century Egypt," in *The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance*, eds. Marilyn Booth and Anthony Gorman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 122.

<sup>127</sup> Crummey and Haile, eds. "Abuna Salama," 8-9.

"developments internal to the Ethiopian Church." <sup>128</sup> With this said, we should be careful not to overcompensate for earlier exaggerations by redefining him as a distinctly "local" figure. Salama surely sought to legitimize his undertakings within the traditions of the local church, and so it is understandable that the "local" context was accentuated and his encounters with Europeans omitted. To neglect either of these dimensions - the "local" and the "international" - is to divest his biography of its complexity. And here we add a third dimension, which is by far the most neglected of all - what might be called the "regional" dimension of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion. In the coming pages, we seek to locate him within these three interrelated contexts.

The chronicle begins by recalling *Abuna* Kirulus' frustrated efforts to exercise his authority in doctrinal matters. The parallels between Kirulus' afflictions and Salama's are certainly not lost on the author of the chronicle. The narrative alludes to the many abuses that Kirulus suffered while in Gondar, noting that its clergy "sent him away" and he took refuge in Tigre, eventually dying a martyr. <sup>129</sup> It then recollects Salama's entrance into Begemder alongside Webe, and his own success in reconciling the "two makanent" [*Ras* Ali and Webe] following Webe's defeat. A degree of pomp pervades the description of this historical moment, as "Abuna Salama of the Orthodox faith" arrives to the "seat of his bishopric." There is also a theme of continuity as he makes a show of fraternity with his predecessors. Visiting the episcopal burial site, he uncovered the relics of 12 bishops, including *Abuna* Sinuda [Shenuda - 1671-1699.] He also discovered relics of bishops who were entombed elsewhere, including those of *Abuna* Krestodolos III [1716-1735] at Debre Quesquam and *Abuna* Yusab III [1770-1803.]

The narrative goes on to reveal the injustices that Salama suffered soon thereafter. <sup>130</sup> The "high priests of Gondar and Shoa held council by the order of Ras Ali" and his "Jezebel" of a

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

mother, for whom "excommunication was trivial." When these adversaries "surrounded [his] residence as bees would surround honey," the persecuted *abun* "came out of his own volition, lest people of his household die from the storming." In an evident parallel with the experience of his immediate predecessor, the signs of his authority were assailed as they "robbed him of his scepter." The chronicle had already recalled that the Gondarine clergy had broken Kirulus' "chair and cross" some twenty years earlier. <sup>131</sup>

The account of these first years projects an image of a zealous metropolitan whose Orthodoxy was firmly rooted. When dealing with a Christological dispute, Salama calls upon the authority of Alexandrian patriarchs from Saint Mark to the reigning Butrus VII, and upon the archbishops of *al-Habash* beginning with "Salama the Illuminator." <sup>132</sup> If his chronicle emphasizes the "local" archdiocesan context, this was never an isolated matter. Rather, it had a direct bearing on the entire Alexandrian see, and this wider context would remain significant throughout his career. His cooperation with the CMS was no less strategic than his series of affiliations, first with Webe, then for a time with *Ras Ali*, then with Webe again, and finally with Kasa, whom he would crown as Emperor Tewodros II in 1855. His maneuvers in two theaters - the "local" and the "international" - found their anchor in a third, the regional theater of "Alexandrian Orthodoxy," which was in some sense larger than either of these.

This was the arena in which "Andra'us" from al-Minya could make his indignant stand in the distant locale of Gondar against the intolerable cooperation between Catholic interlopers and his native adversaries. And in this theater, or on this ground of meeting, Salama's view could find echo far to the north at Akhmim, and farther to the north at *Misr*. In 1844 the bishop of Akhmim complained that the faithful of *Bilad al-Habasha* were "continually quarrelling about things non-

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 29.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

essential," before noting with regret that the Catholic menace would persist "as long as Oubea [Webe] finds it in his interest to have the Catholics there."<sup>133</sup> And at *Misir*, Patriarch Butrus frequently discussed Catholic intrigues in *Bilad al-Habasha* and his fear that some of his flock would transfer allegiance to Rome.<sup>134</sup> When the bishop of Akhmim, or the patriarch, or indeed Salama, confided such concerns to the English, this implied no partiality to the Protestants. It was a diplomatic response to what they took to be a more urgent menace. By contrast, the strongmen in *Bilad al-Habasha* were competing with one another for supremacy. For them, other concerns were more pressing, and their strategies could involve overtures to Catholics or even to representatives of Mehmet 'Ali's regime.<sup>135</sup>

In this setting, tactical alliances often became the material for accusations or suspicions of disloyalty. Thus, when Webe convinced Salama of *Ras* Ali's apostasy, the latter's strategic overtures to the Muslim party at Gondar probably helped to substantiate the claim. Likewise, Webe's deference to the Catholic party in Tigre provoked Salama's ire, and in turn, rumors of Salama's association with the CMS infuriated Webe.<sup>136</sup> One missionary, seeking to advance the standing of the CMS, declared publicly at the market of Adwa the special relationship between the CMS and Salama.<sup>137</sup> An incensed Webe confronted his bishop: "How is it that I have spent seven thousand dollars [to obtain an *abun*] and this Englishman makes vain all my labour!" After Salama had vindicated himself, he sent a terse letter to the missionary, the Rev. Isenberg:

The people of Adwa have sent to us, and told us that you had spoken publicly before all people, telling them that Aboona Salama was one of your scholars. But

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<sup>133</sup> Kruse to Coastes, "Journal of a Voyage," CMS C M/O 45/164 (May 18, 1844), 25.

<sup>134</sup> Lieder to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 48/121 (March 14, 1845); Rubenson, "The Interaction," 79.

<sup>135</sup> Prior to Webe's invasion of Gondar in 1841, when the *ras* and his mother Manan were in a weak position they likely sought to curry favor with their Muslim supporters. This may have been one of the reasons why they reached out to Ahmad Pasha, the *hukumdar* for *Bilad al-Sudan*. In the letter, they appealed to Islamic themes; Abir, *Ethiopia*, 113.

<sup>136</sup> Salama, Metropolitan of Abyssinia to Lieder, CMS C M/O 48/60b - enclosure in Lieder to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 48/60 (March 19, 1845.)

<sup>137</sup> Lieder to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 48/58, (January 20, 1844).



where do you prove that I am your scholar and friend? And how can I speak in your favour? <sup>138</sup>

A tangle of alliances and collaborations should not obscure an underlying principle, namely that Salama was acting fundamentally in the interest of the Orthodox communion, and his goodwill was extended and withdrawn according to this object. Thus, when another missionary sought authorization to begin a mission to the Falashas, he was given permission, but only on the condition that converts would be baptized into the Orthodox Church. <sup>139</sup>

It was perhaps in the course of his interactions with *Ras Ali* that *Abuna Salama* first encountered the necessity of calculated alliances in the Abyssinian political environment. In an early letter, he affirmed that the people desired to depose the *ras* because it had become clear that he was a Muslim. <sup>140</sup> After Webe declared his intention of sweeping out "the Muslims and their chief *Ras Ali*," Salama excommunicated *Ras Ali* and his mother, cautioning that "all Christians who came to [their] aid" would suffer the same fate. <sup>141</sup> However, when Salama had fallen into the hands of *Ras Ali*, he was able to forge an understanding with this one-time "apostate," and his chronicle even enthused that the "whole world admired the magnanimity of *Ras Ali*." <sup>142</sup>

But during his interactions with *Ras Ali*, Salama also discovered the delicate and potentially destructive nature of the course he was constrained to navigate. This is exemplified in the case of Mikha'il Yusuf Al-Bilyani, a priest who had been his confrere at *Dayr Antonius*. When Andra'us became archbishop, al-Bilyani "spent the whole night in tears," for the two monks were very close. Salama agreed to ordain his companion, alongside three other monks, and they all departed with the delegation to Tigre. According to al-Bilyani's critical reflections,

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<sup>138</sup> Salama's June, 1843 letter to Isenberg is published in Rubenson, ed., *Acta Aethiopica*, 1:84-85.

<sup>139</sup> Rubenson, *Survival*, 178. The "Falashas" are the "Beta Israel" (sometimes called the "Ethiopian Jews") who inhabited the regions of western Tigre.

<sup>140</sup> Kruse to Coates, CMS C M/O 45/111 (May 8, 1842).

<sup>141</sup> d'Abbadie, *Douze ans de séjour*, 2:54.

<sup>142</sup> Crummey and Haile, eds. "Abuna Salama," 28.

Salama became "inextricably mixed up" with "contending chieftains." Later, and against al-Bilyani's advice, Salama reneged on a pledge that he had made to *Ras Ali*, and when he faced the consequences of this deed, he cast the blame on his old comrade. Their relationship was permanently dissolved, and when al-Bilyani was eventually granted permission to return to *Bilad Misr*, a disgruntled Salama sent him in chains to Masawa in the custody of Turkish soldiers.<sup>143</sup>

This serves as a bitter commentary on the pursuit of "Orthodoxy" during the *Zemene Mesafint* in which even a most intimate bond of friendship that was first forged in the desert cloister could be poisoned. To add insult to injury, al-Bilyani later came under the influence of the CMS, and was eventually ordained to the Protestant ministry.<sup>144</sup> In a sense, al-Bilyani's case draws into relief "Orthodoxy's" other great menace, which was revealed in the increasing obtrusions of "the West." When the seriousness of these "local" and "international" challenges is overlooked, Salama can appear to be just another case of a monk gone mad. The "head of the young mutran," according to a stock appraisal, was "turned by the fulsome honors paid him by the superstitious chiefs and tribes."<sup>145</sup> In many European sources, Salama bears some resemblance to what we have observed of the "Coptic scribe." His actions are decontextualized or even fabricated, and what remains is a greedy and rapacious caricature, prone to senseless outbursts and startling enormities. Thus, the French consul at Masawa would remark of him:

[He] is one of the most degraded specimens of this Coptic rite ... arrogant, greedy, messy, splitting his time among usury, political intrigue, commerce and more commerce. He has traded in slaves, and would steal the sacred vessels of the poor churches and ship them in packages to Egypt.<sup>146</sup>

Catholic and "pro-Catholic" sources have done the most to distort Salama's figure in the

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<sup>143</sup> James Brown Scouller, *A Manual of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1751-1881* (Harrisburg, PA: Patriot Publishing Company, 1881), 618-19.

<sup>144</sup> Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 72.

<sup>145</sup> Scouller, *A Manual*, 619.

<sup>146</sup> LeJean, *Theodore II*, 42-43.

historiography. This was in large measure because of the special enmity that characterized his relationship with these sectarians. They represented a particularly acute challenge to Orthodoxy by virtue of their capacity to introduce rival claimants to the episcopacy.<sup>147</sup> In 1849, the French vice consul at Masawa would express a hope - which was hardly lost on Salama - that "if the Catholic mission is victorious over the *Abuna* Salama, the French influence there will be all powerful."<sup>148</sup> In fact, in the untidy succession of events during his first decade in office, his posture toward the Catholic party was one of the more consistent threads. In a very early letter to Patriarch Butrus, Salama vowed a steadfast resistance to the Catholics.<sup>149</sup> When Webe sought to restore his relationship with the *abun* after a bitter estrangement, Salama's "first condition" was the banishment of the Catholic mission. During the expulsions that followed, the French consul at Masawa grumbled that Webe had forgotten "all the rich gifts that he had received from de Jacobis."<sup>150</sup> Indeed by 1852, Bishop de Jacobis would speak of the "ten-year persecution which we have suffered at the hands of ... the dependents of the schismatic patriarchate of Cairo."<sup>151</sup>

During the intervening years, Catholic sources are replete with references to his predations.<sup>152</sup> A letter from the French agent at Jeddah is representative of this body of material. He recounts that after Webe had invaded the lowlands, Salama pillaged [Catholic] churches, seized their goods and expelled or held captive priests and notables. He then waxes optimistic:

This impolitic violence of the *abuna* [sic] will no doubt contribute to the propagation of Catholicism in awaking the sympathies for the victims, for the

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<sup>147</sup> De Jacobis in the north, and Cardinal Massaia the bishop to the "land of the Gallas" in the south.

<sup>148</sup> "Nouvelles de la mission d'Abyssinie," *Revue d'Histoire des Missions*, (September 1841-July 1860), no. 3 (September, 1939): 435.

<sup>149</sup> Kruse to Coates, CMS C M/O 45/108 (February 18, 1842).

<sup>150</sup> "Nouvelles de la mission," *Revue d'Histoire des Missions*, (September 1841-July, 1860), no. 2 (June, 1939), 295.

<sup>151</sup> This is taken from a letter that de Jacobis addressed to the French Vice Consul Le Moyne at Jeddah in December, 1851. The text of the letter can be found in "Nouvelles de la mission d'Abyssinie," *Revue d'Histoire des Missions*, (September 1841-July 1860), no. 4 (December, 1939), 384.

<sup>152</sup> For example, his "persecutions" put to flight a group of Lazarists, who settled in Khartoum - much to the consternation of the Coptic population there. They went on to found a school in that town, as we noted in Chapter Three; Vantini, *Christianity*, 235.

exiled priests' humble and charitable manners contrast with the ... insolent and furious conduct of Abuna Salama.

In a poignant flourish, he seems to have reached into a bag of available tropes and pulled out a gem - only did the *abun* "traffic publicly," but his most reliable revenue "consists in young children whom he makes into eunuchs." <sup>153</sup>

Salama's historical significance, and even the very coherence of his career, has been concealed beneath frantic accounts of ecclesiastical tyranny, bewildering tales of intrigue and shifting alliances. We attempted to recover something of his biographical integrity during the early years of his reign. In the next section, we continue to trace the development of his career, focusing on those creative - and fraught - engagements with "modernity" which marked his career and the careers of the patriarch and others as "Orthodoxy" was imagined into new frames.

### **Possibility and Peril: Alexandrian Orthodoxy at a Crossroads**

At the end of the 1840s, Salama's prospects improved markedly. Although Webe had exiled him, it was the *dejazmach* who ultimately capitulated, seeking reconciliation and offering concessions. <sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, *Ras Ali* moved against the intractable Gondarine clergy, while the princes of Gojjam abducted Salama's most formidable clerical adversary. In 1849 came news of the death of Sahle Sellassie, the ruler of Shoa who had been a supporter of a "heterodox" line, and his successor was better disposed to Salama. *Ras Ali*, keen to strengthen his own precarious position, importuned the *abun* - unsuccessfully - to return to Gondar, while in the western region of Qwara, Kasa, the future Tewodros II, was rising quickly. <sup>155</sup> Apparently seeking to capitalize on the auspicious conjuncture, Salama communicated regularly with the patriarch and other

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<sup>153</sup> The text of the consular letter (February 6, 1849) is published in "Nouvelles de la mission d'Abyssinie," *Revue d'Histoire des Missions*, (September 1841-July 1860), no. 3 (September, 1939), 432.

<sup>154</sup> Rubenson, "The Interaction," 79.

<sup>155</sup> Crummey, "Doctrine and Authority," 575-76.

figures outside of *Bilad al-Habasha*. In early 1848, he wrote a letter to Butrus in which he apprised him of the state of the various provinces and rulers. He noted the deteriorating position of *Ras Ali*, the death of Sahle Sellassie, and the recent victories of Kasa. He also gave a synopsis of the heresies, and requested that the patriarch send another copy of the Orthodox book "The Confession of the Fathers" (*I'tiraf al-Abaa*) without which his archdiocese was "useless as the blind."<sup>156</sup> One year later, he provided another summary, addressing the expulsion of de Jacobis and the "difficulties" that he had caused before his ouster. He wrote optimistically about his prospects for reentering Gondar, at which point he would "select a group of worthy priests and send them to the Galla of the interior to baptize." He also mentioned his contacts with the "*mu'allimin*" in *Bilad al-Sudan*, and commented on ecclesiastical matters there.<sup>157</sup>

The breadth of topics that Salama addressed in these letters to *Misr* reveals something of the creative vision for a "restoration" of the Alexandrian patrimony. But this idea of "restoration" was not simply a "return." It involved a vision for bold and even pioneering initiatives. When he broached the topic of the evangelization of the "Gallas of the interior," he certainly hoped to mitigate Catholic influence, but he also projected a positive vision for the vitality and advance of Orthodoxy. Salama's repeated request for materials can be understood in the context of his ambitions for a strong, doctrinally unified Orthodox establishment which was a necessary antecedent to its propagation. Meanwhile, his allusion to communications with *mu'allimin* across the frontiers suggests that he was alive to the possibilities that the "Egyptian" regime in *Bilad al-Sudan* held out for the further consolidation of the networks of Alexandrian Orthodoxy.

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<sup>156</sup> This letter, dated January 15, 1848 is preserved at the Coptic patriarchate, and published in Rubenson, ed., *Acta Aethiopica*, 1:134-37.

<sup>157</sup> Here, he made a recommendation concerning a vacancy that was caused by the death of death of Bishop Damianus, the metropolitan for *Bilad al-Sudan*. In the letter, he also reiterated the need for books, without which "these stiff-necked [people of *al-Habash*]" could not be answered. The letter is published in Rubenson, ed., *Acta Aethiopica*, 1:154-56.

Here, there is some evidence that his designs found resonance at *Misr*. When the patriarch elevated the second bishop for Sennar, he established him at Khartoum, and this decision was reputedly made in response to the counsels of Salama, who indicated that this would enable more direct intercourse between his own archdiocese and *Misr*.<sup>158</sup> In all of these plans and projections, it is clear that a spirit of innovation impelled Salama. In fact, during this same period he directed letters to Lieder in which he asked that "good schoolmasters" be sent so that he might establish a "school of superior character" in Gondar.<sup>159</sup> This was not a repudiation of "tradition," but part of its engagement as he imagined "Orthodoxy" in new ways. The desire for CMS schoolmasters was not incompatible with a pressing need for venerable works of tradition, without which he and his flock were "blind."

The letters indirectly reveal something more, namely a church hierarchy at *Misr* that was apprised of many details about the "distant" archdiocese. If it is misleading to isolate Salama from the wider patriarchal see, this can also be said of the hierarchy at *Bilad Misr*, for whom the same "modern" engagements with "Orthodoxy" were ongoing. The ideas that had made the young Andra'us the most competent candidate for the episcopacy continued to percolate. The terms of a strange vocabulary, of enlightenment and order, progress and civilization were increasingly on the lips of ecclesiastical and lay leaders alike. And in fact, Salama was not the only ecclesiastic who would attain to the episcopate at a young age. In 1844 the bishop of Tahta was a mere 30 years of age. During his visit to the diocese, Kruse met the bishop, together with Tahta's principal *mu'allim*. The words that the lay figure spoke in the presence of the young bishop suggest a certain spirit of the times, and one suspects that they reflected the prelate's own cast of mind. The Muslims of Tahta, so the *mu'allim* explained, far outnumbered Christians. But

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<sup>158</sup> Lieder to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 48/126, (February 25, 1850).

<sup>159</sup> Lieder to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 48/126, (February 25, 1850). Five years earlier, Lieder noted a similar objective on Salama's part; see Lieder to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 48/58, (January 20, 1844).

this was to the latter's advantage, for they could not "live without" the Muslims. The premise for his assertion sounds conspicuously modern; the Muslims, he continued, "keep us in order."<sup>160</sup>

During this period, Patriarch Butrus set an unusual initiative in motion. He resolved to send a representative to assist Salama in dealing with an array of difficulties. It is not clear whether he was responding to a specific request from the *abun*, although Salama certainly kept Butrus informed about the gravity of the situation, and cautioned that divisions would only increase if they were not repaired.<sup>161</sup> The patriarch avowed that he would have made the journey himself were it not for his advanced age, which itself is highly significant, for this would have marked the first patriarchal visit to *Bilad al-Habasha* in centuries. The ferment of the period was opening inquiries into the very foundations of communion, and this engagement reached to the very extremities of the see. To make the journey on his behalf, Patriarch Butrus selected Da'ud, the head of *Dayr Antonius*, whose profile strikes a familiar chord. This comparatively young monk was known for his interest in "reviving studies" and "spreading knowledge." He had also been the head of the monastery during Andra'us' residency, and one suspects that the printed materials which Andra'us had circulated had some effect on him.<sup>162</sup> When Butrus approached Da'ud about the journey, he told him that he was the most "appropriate person to make this secret mission" by virtue of his "knowledge and wisdom" - the same merits that had attracted him to Salama years earlier. The very fact that he would send these special luminaries to *al-Habash* points to a persistent - and even magnified - significance of that archdiocese in his mind.<sup>163</sup>

And yet, the Coptic Synaxarium relates the mission very simply:

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<sup>160</sup> Kruse to Coates, "Journal of a Voyage," CMS C M/O 45/164, (May 18, 1844), 26.

<sup>161</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:117.

<sup>162</sup> He was also recognized for the enterprise with which he oversaw the monastery and its holdings; Kruse to Secretaries, CMS C M/O 45/100 (May 20, 1841); Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:172.

<sup>163</sup> Da'ud was promised that if he completed this task successfully, he would be elevated to the episcopate. Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 1:124.

When a problem transpired among Ethiopians concerning some doctrinal issues, the Patriarch, Anba Butrus, called upon him to go to Ethiopia to solve these problems. He performed his duty admirably.<sup>164</sup>

Here, the distinctiveness of the moment vanishes as the matter is normalized simply as a "doctrinal" affair.<sup>165</sup> There is no indication of a hierarchy alive to stirring potentialities, and no sense of the prominence of *Bilad al-Habasha* at this remarkable period of "communal" introspection. And importantly, there is no hint of the gravity of the moment. We have emphasized that this historical conjuncture was characterized by possibility and peril. Some sources emphasize that the mission was primarily undertaken with the objective of achieving peace between Salama and his opponents and to prevent Catholic advances in the country. But the question of Jerusalem has also been cited as a priority, and this perhaps more than anything else testifies to the perils facing Alexandrian Orthodoxy. Da'ud was to seek remuneration for the monetary losses that the patriarch had suffered because of the legal proceedings over *Dayr al-Sultan*. He was also to relay details of the significant sums of money that the patriarch had disbursed annually for the travel, provisions and burials of pilgrims from *Bilad al-Habasha*.

Here, we are reminded of a clash of orders. In the second matter, he addressed an order of relationships that had constituted the life of the confession, and which involved an array of rights and responsibilities. But in the first, as patriarch stands against his archdiocese with demands for remuneration, one can discern those faint lines that would increasingly distinguish "Abyssinians" from "Copts," and bring into being a host of irreconcilable claims.<sup>166</sup> If in a certain sense Da'ud's very mission exemplified a fresh kind of intra-communal engagement, it proceeded beneath an

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<sup>164</sup> "Departure of Pope Cyril IV (Kyrillos), 110th Pope of Alexandria" (Tuba 23), *Coptic Synaxarium*, 196.

<sup>165</sup> Zahir Riyad, a leading mid-Twentieth Century Coptic historian and African specialist, described the mission simply as an intervention into the ongoing disputes between the clerics and *Abuna Salama*; see *Tarikh Itiyubiya*, 111 fn. 1.

<sup>166</sup> A former *echage* had undertaken his own mission to Jerusalem at roughly the same time as Da'ud's mission, bearing letters from Webe and *Ras Ali* which included, among other things, the request for Gobat to defend their rights. In other words - and as we have noted - the mechanisms that had regulated and resolved conflict were by degrees disrupted. Rubenson, *Survival*, 134-35;



ominous specter. The very historical conjuncture that enabled - and necessitated - bold initiatives was saturated with elements that were threatening to subvert these very designs.

Although the mission possibly strengthened Salama's position, some Coptic sources described it as a failure, and at least one attributed its lack of success to "the slander of the British consul [Plowden]." <sup>167</sup> Foreign actors had become part of the "domestic" political terrain and Salama, no less than the hierarchs at *Bilad Misr*, proceeded accordingly as they contemplated "Orthodoxy" in a field rife with discordant designs. The challenge is exemplified in Salama's encounters with Capuchin missionaries, who had been active in the south of the country. After Da'ud had departed, Salama sought to neutralize their endeavors with a project of his own, initiating a mission to the southwestern "Galla" (Oromo) region of Enerea under the leadership of a Copt. The effort was unsuccessful, due in large part to the interferences of the Catholic party. <sup>168</sup> Later, an attendant who was carrying money and supplies to the Catholic mission in the "country of the Gallas" defected, and sought refuge with the *abun* at Adwa. <sup>169</sup> In retaliation, two Capuchin priests at Masawa detained Hajj Khayr, a Coptic merchant and friend of *Abuna* Salama, and initiated legal action against him. After Salama forwarded some of the property to Masawa, the *qadi* released Hajj Khayr and allowed him to depart. However, when he arrived at Jedda, he was seized by the French vice consul and held for over a year because, as Salama wrote to Plowden, "we have no agent or other person there interested in us." <sup>170</sup> By 1853, Salama had tendered a request for the British consul at Jedda to act as "legal protector" for the

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<sup>167</sup> Rubenson, "The Interaction," 80; Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:126. This reveals the acute awareness of the dangers of foreign meddling in the communion. Indeed, the suit that had proved so costly for the patriarch was initiated at the suggestion of the British consul at Jerusalem. Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:165.

<sup>168</sup> Crummey, *Priests and Politicians*, 90.

<sup>169</sup> F. Leon of the apostolic mission provided a description of Catholic grievances; see his letter to the French consul general (December 31, 1851) "Nouvelles de la mission d'Abyssinie," *Revue d'Histoire des Missions*, (September 1841-July 1860), no. 4 (December, 1939), 585-86.

<sup>170</sup> In an effort to redress the situation, Salama arranged for the seizure of property belonging to Consul Rocher d'Hericourt; see Salama to Plowden (August, 1852) in Rubenson, ed., *Acta Aethiopica*, 1:205. See also Plowden to Malmesbury, NA UK FO 1/7 (February 15, 1853), ff. 174-75.

effects that he sent regularly to *Bilad Misr*.<sup>171</sup> In other words, he was induced to call on the assistance of this very government that had encouraged intra-communal enmities.

Meanwhile, for Da'ud the departure from *Bilad al-Habasha* provided no respite from controversy. On his return to *Misr*, he learned that the patriarch was dead and the communion was quarrelling over his successor. Some supported Da'ud while others strongly opposed his candidacy and favored the bishop of Akhmim. In trying to assess the situation, Iskarius finds himself at a loss, for "there was no real basis for this disagreement." However, the "apparent cause" he offers is illuminating:

The party of [Da'ud] said that they supported him over the [bishop] because of their knowledge of his interest in reform and the breadth of his vision ... as for the supporters of the bishop, they were of the opinion that it was enough for the head of the confession to be devout and pious."

He adds that the bishop's supporters were unfamiliar with a patriarch who was engaged in anything other than "prayer and some legal decisions."<sup>172</sup> This was the first election of a patriarch in more than 40 years, and the contest was not merely about personalities, but about the very nature of the patriarchate and the institutions of the church.

And here, there is an important convergence between the biographies of Da'ud and Salama. They were formed within the same unsettled milieu that had enabled - and necessitated - the kinds of creative engagements that we have seen. As patriarch, Kirulus IV (Da'ud) would work for the extension of "modern" order, whether it was in the strides he took for the education of a clergy steeped in "ignorance," or in bureaucratic reforms, including the systematic organization of *waqf* records. But his "breadth of vision" included profound deliberations about

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<sup>171</sup> Salama wrote letters to a Capuchin at Masawa, as well as to Consul Plowden, Michel d'Abbadie and even to Queen Victoria regarding what was at first sight a small matter. It was becoming clear that even seemingly insignificant gestures on Salama's part could turn into minor "international" incidents. Plowden to Russell, NA UK FO 1/7 (July 28, 1853), f. 256-57.

<sup>172</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:123-25.

the nature and structures of communion and community, not unlike what we have witnessed of Salama. As patriarch, his engagement with "Orthodoxy" was so thoroughgoing that it could be said that "among his greatest wishes was the union of the Orthodox churches," including the Greek and Russian churches, and he initiated dialogue toward these ends.<sup>173</sup>

As for the Alexandrian communion and its following, the idea of "union" was not so groundbreaking, for it already existed. It is a testament to this legacy and its modern engagement that a critical stage in the rise of the patriarchal "Father of Reform" should have been passed in the great archdiocese of *al-Habash*. And the unfolding story of Da'ud's patriarchal candidacy also attests to this inheritance. The former *echage* Gebre Maryam had originally arrived bearing gifts for 'Abbas Pasha, possibly in order to win his support for the reversal of the ruling on *Dayr al-Sultan*. But the patriarch had already died, and Gebre Maryam was only too willing to enter into the deliberations concerning his successor.<sup>174</sup> He spread many rumors aimed at discrediting Da'ud, and these had some impact on 'Abbas who insisted that another candidate be chosen.<sup>175</sup>

Later, a group of bishops secretly gathered at the cathedral to elect a patriarch, but their opponents uncovered the ploy and hurried to the place of the bishops' gathering. With the aid of "armed Abyssinians," they prevented the election from taking place. After ejecting the bishops from the cathedral, they locked the doors and entrusted the key to "an Abyssinian" at the patriarchal residence who was in company with "other Abyssinians who were on guard."<sup>176</sup> These details reveal "Abyssinians" implicated in the most intimate affairs of confessional politics at *Misr*, some bitterly opposed to Da'ud's candidacy, and others - including these "armed Abyssinians" - acting in his support. Eventually 'Abbas' concerns were allayed, although the

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:183.

<sup>174</sup> Rubenson, *Survival*, 135.

<sup>175</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:126.

<sup>176</sup> Murqus Simaika, "The Awakening of the Coptic Church," in *Contemporary Review* 71 (May 1897), 739. Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:124.

matter remained a rancorous one in the communion. After months of disagreement, the stalemate was resolved in an expedient with echoes of what we have observed at Jerusalem - an Armenian bishop was called to mediate. He recommended that Da'ud should be made a "general metropolitan" for a limited period so that his suitability for the position could be ascertained. The parties agreed, and Da'ud was later elevated to the throne in June 1854.<sup>177</sup>

By this time, Salama was preparing to consecrate Kasa Haylu, a supporter of Kirulus' elevation, as Emperor Tewodros II. We have already commented on the enthusiasm in the lands of *Misr* about the rise of Tewodros II. His career, so the English consul marveled, was followed closely by the "Copts and their priesthood."<sup>178</sup> From one perspective, these were auspicious times, perhaps especially for Salama and Kirulus and a section of the "reformists" among the Alexandrian hierarchy as they contemplated a revived "Orthodoxy" across the lands of *al-Habash*, *al-Sudan*, *Misr* and *al-Sham*. As early as 1849 Kasa was rumored to have been in alliance with *Abuna* Salama, and it was he who oversaw Salama's return to Gondar in 1853.<sup>179</sup> Salama's chronicle colorfully captures the turn of events. It notes the "severe judgment" of God on the "Galla," and recalls in exuberant detail the defeat of *Ras* Ali and others, before drawing the threads together in a narrative of Orthodoxy and divine providence:

God raised Daggazmac Kasa to oppose his enemies, the *makanent*. He appointed him over all the countries ... this happened because of the grief and injustice visited upon Abba Salama of the Orthodox Faith. God helped Abba Salama, and his enemies, the clergy of Gondar, were put to shame. Thus in [1853-1854] Daggazmac Kasa brought Abba Salama of the Orthodox faith ... into Gondar, the residency of his bishopric. The clergy of Gondar received him with songs and hymns.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:127.

<sup>178</sup> Bruce to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/9 (June 30, 1856).

<sup>179</sup> Rubenson, *Survival*, 210; Crummey, "Doctrine," 576.

<sup>180</sup> Crummey and Haile, eds. "Abuna Salama," 33-34.

But as we shall see, the buoyancy of the moment was to be short-lived.<sup>181</sup> The coming challenges were augured during the proceedings of the patriarchal election. Gebre Maryam came before 'Abbas Pasha with the charge that Da'ud's interference in the politics of *Bilad al-Habasha* was "tantamount to treason against the government of *Misr*." This kind of imputation would only become more pronounced as regional relationships strained under modern pressures.<sup>182</sup>

Meanwhile, the interferences of foreign parties in the life of the communion were also on display. After Da'ud's election was blocked, the English consul protested in writing to 'Abbas:

Ras Ali has no more right to meddle with the Coptic Church than the chief of the Maronites in Syria, or the head of any other distant Christian sect and it would be in the highest degree impolitic on the part of His Highness to allow any such authority to the Abyssinians over his subjects the Copts.<sup>183</sup>

Here, a British representative was "meddling" in the affairs of the church even as he claimed that Abyssinians had "no right to meddle" in the affairs of the Coptic Church. His assessment reveals again the gulf that existed between the "Abyssinian" and "Coptic" churches from a particular European perspective - the construction of mind that encouraged and even helped to institutionalize the "Coptic-Abyssinian" conflicts at Jerusalem. In some cases, Britain defended the rights of "Copts," in others the rights of Abyssinians, but the stark dichotomy remained.

However, foreign meddling was only one factor in the divisions of the age, which were increasingly naturalized by a whole range of conceptual and institutional changes. It is a cruel irony of history that just as *Abuna Salama* could envisage the end of the fissiparous *Zemene Mesafint*, new lines of division would darken under his feet.

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<sup>181</sup> When Gebre Maryam arrived at *Misr*, he was bearing letters from *Ras Ali* and *Webe* addressed to Queen Victoria in the hope that these letters would provide Gobat with leverage sufficient to overturn the *Dayr al-Sultan* ruling; Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:155. Although Tewodros and Kirulus were said to have been on good terms, the elements of such conflicts would endure, and even intensify.

<sup>182</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 126.

<sup>183</sup> Green to H.H. Abbas Pasha, "Memorandum for His Highness the Vice Roy concerning the Coptic population of Egypt," NA UK FO 1/7 (April, 1853), ff. 318-19.

## Prophesy Deferred? King, *Abun* and Patriarch and the Clash of Orthodoxies

Kasa's ascent began when he was a minor figure in the household of his uncle Kinfu, the *dejzmach* for the region of Qwara on the frontiers of *Bilad al-Sudan*. Following the death of Kinfu, Kasa maneuvered skillfully and emerged in a strong position. It is significant that the career of this most important figure in the politics of *Bilad al-Habasha* began in the vicinities of "Turco-Egyptian" rule. Some years earlier, as Kinfu was engaged in clashes with Khurshid Pasha, Kasa launched an invasion across the frontiers, advancing to within 100 kilometers of Khartoum. Rubenson notes that it was this unsuccessful campaign, during which some of his forces were massacred, that "influenced him most and shaped his thinking on political and military matters."<sup>184</sup> Years later when he was crowned as emperor, he would choose a most significant regnal name, drawing on the popular expectations of a "Tewodros II" during whose beatific rule "all will march according to the word of a king and a metropolitan."<sup>185</sup> But his appeal to - and perhaps belief in - the apocalyptic tradition should not obscure his engagement with "modern" ideas and methods which were necessary not only for "restoring" the kingdom but for facing the "Turco-Egyptian" adversaries that were arrayed along the frontiers.<sup>186</sup>

After Kasa finally overcame *Ras Ali* in 1853, he went on to suppress other regional opposition. *Abuna Salama* was emboldened by his alliance with Kasa whose ambitions for "restoration" involved the termination of doctrinal divisions and the assertion of Salama's episcopal authority.<sup>187</sup> In July, 1854 Kasa called a church council at Amba Chara where certain positions were condemned, and which was the beginning of a period of relative doctrinal

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<sup>184</sup> Rubenson, *King of Kings*, 17, 39. He witnessed the effectiveness of the "Egyptian" military, and from then on he was interested in military discipline and munitions; Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, 28; John Dunn, "For God, Emperor, and Country! The Evolution of Ethiopia's Nineteenth Century Army," *War In History* 1, no. 3 (1994) 285-86.

<sup>185</sup> Basset, "Fekkare Iyasous," 25-26.

<sup>186</sup> Rubenson, *Survival*, 172.

<sup>187</sup> Donald Crummey, "Tewodros as Reformer and Modernizer," *Journal of African History* 10, no. 3, (1969), 459.

consistency on the part of successive rulers.<sup>188</sup> Meanwhile, Salama now had an ally who might deal a final blow to the Catholics and end the imperative of strategic cooperation with foreigners. Before long, Bishop de Jacobis informed Plowden that he had been "warned to quit the Abyssinian territory," while at Gondar the *abun* imprisoned those who had embraced the Catholic creed.<sup>189</sup> The amity between Salama and Tewodros is celebrated in their respective chronicles. Salama eulogized the early milestone when "Kasa was anointed with regal ointment by the hand of our metropolitan ... [and] became king of kings."<sup>190</sup> In Tewodros' chronicle, the bishop was said to have "showed the king the greatest respect, and great affection," and offered him a towering tribute: "You are truly a son of the faith that the Lord has given me."<sup>191</sup>

For Salama, Tewodros' ascendancy offered the prospect of political and doctrinal unity. However, the very conditions that promised to resolve one set of problems gave rise to still others. The question of "Orthodoxy" clearly had to do more than simply with doctrines. The institutional expression of Alexandrian Orthodoxy was also a profound point of disputation, and Salama was hardly alone in imagining its shape and character. The Christian establishment and traditions were vital to Tewodros' modern project of imperial "reconstruction," and his vision was not always consistent with Salama's.

Here, we find some congruence with developments in *Bilad Misr*. For the house of Mehmet 'Ali, the *'ulema* were significant both as agents of propaganda and as symbols of tradition and continuity. But they generally did so within bureaucratic structures in which they were subordinated. And although the patriarch and clerical hierarchy were said to have

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<sup>188</sup> Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction," 433.

<sup>189</sup> Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/9 (June 27, 1855), f. 153; French consul at Alexandria to Cairo and Massawa - enclosure in Cowley to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/10 (March 20, 1857), f. 42-44; Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/9 (November 29, 1854), f. 23.

<sup>190</sup> Crummey and Haile eds., "Abuna Salama," 37-38.

<sup>191</sup> Walda Maryam, *Chronique de Théodoros II Roi des Rois d'Éthiopie (1853-1868)* d'après un manuscrit original, ed. Casimir Mondon-Vidailhet (1905; reprint, Westmead: Gregg International Pub., 1971), 13.

"regained" their positions of authority from the infringements of the *arakhina*, the institutional church was gradually marginalized even as it was "restored." Like the *'ulema*, ecclesiastical figures enjoyed superficial prestige in the course of the very process that threatened to subvert the foundations of their power and restrict the scope of their influence. In the case of Tewodros, not long after his coronation he placed the affairs of the *liqa kahnat* (the office which supervised the clergy) in the hands of the *abun*. He also asserted the *abun's* primacy over ecclesiastical rivals, and particularly the *echage*.<sup>192</sup> The occasion is memorialized in Salama's chronicle:

[They] quarreled with our metropolitan Salama saying, 'the office of the high priest belongs to us.' The king summoned a conference for them on this issue. At that time, Eccage Walda Maryam and the clergy of Gondar lost by the judgment of the king, that the office of high priest was not their office. Our metropolitan Salama won in accordance with the Fetha Nagast.<sup>193</sup>

As the reference to the *Fetha Nagast* illustrates, the elevation of the *abun's* station was understood as a "restoration" of traditional power, but like with the patriarch's enterprises at *Misir*, the "restoration" was novel and the power was often illusive.

Tewodros' measures can certainly give an impression of clerical vitality. At one point, Plowden commented that Tewodros was "too much influenced by the Coptic aboona and the priesthood."<sup>194</sup> But elsewhere he noted something quite different, namely a monarch who "wishes to discipline his army ... abolish the feudal system, to have paid governors and judges and to disarm the people."<sup>195</sup> There is no question that for Tewodros, the appeal to "tradition" accompanied modern initiatives, among them the penetration of an order of revenue collection in the provinces and the reform of a system in which the sources of wealth were beyond his reach.

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<sup>192</sup> Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction," 433.

<sup>193</sup> Crummey and Haile, eds., "Abuna Salama," 39.

<sup>194</sup> Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/10 (October 5, 1856), f. 13.

<sup>195</sup> Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/9 (April 7, 1855), f. 85.



<sup>196</sup> Here again, parallels with *Bilad Misr* exist. When Mehmet 'Ali came to power, no less than 25% of the land of was alienated in pious endowments, and his "reforms" brought him in conflict with the vested interests of the *'ulema*.<sup>197</sup> Tewodros was also confronted with the problem of a clerical class to which vast tracts of land had been alienated. Only a year and a half into his reign, he assembled their representatives and inveighed against the priests whose *gult* holdings had tied up the kingdom's land. At one point he even asked: "how will I feed myself, and how will I feed my army" if the clergy's concessions are confirmed?

This confrontation marked the beginning of an often stormy relationship between the bishop and an emperor who faced what Crummey calls an "irresolvable dilemma." Christianity, or "Orthodoxy" was central to his modern imperial project, but that very undertaking necessarily provoked a confrontation with the church. He would later carry out vast expropriations of church lands and revenues, including some of the *abun*'s own holdings. In return, he promised a basic income for priests, while allowing them just enough land to provide for their residents.<sup>198</sup> Tewodros' rule was eventually torn asunder by dissention and rebellions, and the resistance of the priesthood appears to have contributed to this. Although his plans were ultimately abortive, his project of "imperial reconstruction" followed a familiar trajectory. The challenge which Salama faced in the undermining of ecclesiastical privileges approximates those which were faced at *Bilad Misr* as *'ulema* and ecclesiastics confronted the symptoms of estrangement.

In this we can also discern a transregional challenge, as ecclesiastical institutions along the Alexandrian geography were gradually drawn into competing projects of "centralization."

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<sup>196</sup> Rubenson, *King of Kings*, 53.

<sup>197</sup> Baer, *Studies*, xv. For a brief, comparative look at the similarities between Mehmet 'Ali's vision and reforms and those of Emperor Tewodros, see Hagai Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 46-52.

<sup>198</sup> Crummey, *Land and Society*, 203-204; LeJean, *Theodore II*, 69; Richard Pankhurst, "Tewodros as an Innovator," in *Kasa and Kasa: Papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV (1855-1899)*, eds. Taddese Beyene et al. (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1990), 138-39.

During the winter of 1856/7, an unusual episode occurred, the details of which encapsulate this emerging dynamic. For the first time in many centuries, a reigning patriarch of Alexandria prepared to visit the archdiocese of *al-Habash* on the occasion of Sa'id Pasha's planned voyage to *Bilad al-Sudan*.<sup>199</sup> When Abu Widan's tenure as *hukumdar* ended in 1845, a period of weak administration endured for the next 20 years.<sup>200</sup> In early 1856 the viceroy's brother Halim Pasha was appointed as the *hukumdar* with the intention of furthering the exploitation of natural resources and advancing trade into the continental interior. He also sought to develop steam travel to the first cataract. After Halim Pasha abandoned the assignment that same year, Sa'id Pasha planned his own voyage to Khartoum with the object of fortifying the regime's southern position.<sup>201</sup> But his challenge was daunting. Aside from administrative woes, an influx of European traders had weakened the position of indigenous traders. Lejean, who spent considerable time in these regions, commented derisively that Khartoum was "nothing today but a nest of slavers in bankruptcy."<sup>202</sup> There was also the persistent problem of "security" along the frontiers, where figures such as Mek Nimr continued their resistance to Turco-Egyptian rule.

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<sup>199</sup> This fact does not minimize the patriarch's authority in the archdiocese which did not derive from his physical presence. As a point of comparison, it is useful to recall that although the province of *Misr* was important to the Ottoman system, no Ottoman sultan traveled to the province between Selim's sixteenth century conquest and 'Abd al-Hamid's late nineteenth-century visit. See Michael Winter, "Ottoman Egypt, 1525-1609," in *The Cambridge History of Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 2:7.

<sup>200</sup> This instability was reflected in the office of *hukumdar*, which changed hands at progressively shorter intervals. Holt, *History* (1988), 68; Hill, *Egypt*, 90.

<sup>201</sup> The trade, in Halim Pasha's own description, had been hindered by the "exactions of the successive governors." As for Sa'id Pasha's objectives, these also included the restoration of Suakin and Masawa to the House of Mehmet 'Ali to serve as ports for the steamers of a proposed Red Sea Company. The Bruce to Clarendon, NA UK FO 78/1222 (January 16, 1856), no. 1; Bruce to Clarendon, NA UK FO 1/9 (June 30, 1856), f. 234-35; Bruce to Clarendon, NA FO 78/1222 (November 4, 1856), no. 52.

<sup>202</sup> LeJean, *Theodore II*, 83.

It was largely this last set of concerns that gave rise to an extraordinary initiative. Sa'id asked Patriarch Kirulus IV to undertake a secretive mission to Emperor Tewodros.<sup>203</sup> What transpired was remarkable, as the spiritual head of the church of *Bilad al-Habasha* prepared to travel to these lands under the auspices of a potentially hostile government. Kirulus was said to have been "exceedingly frightened" at the prospect of coming before the emperor under these circumstances.<sup>204</sup> Despite these misgivings, he undertook the voyage, arriving in *Bilad al-Sudan* in early December. Petherick sent a dispatch from Khartoum in which he reported a rumor that Tewodros had massed a force of 40 thousand soldiers on the frontiers, before concluding the letter with a note about Kirulus:

A distinguished Coptic priest left [Khartoum] for Abyssinia charged on an important mission to [Tewodros] on whose tact and influence much reliance is placed to turn the threatened storm."<sup>205</sup>

The long and frightful procession culminated in a solemn encounter between emperor and patriarch, the former greeting the successor of Saint Mark with a kiss on the hand, and the latter greeting the emperor with a kiss on the head. A lavish ceremony followed, and bells rang out and prayers were offered in churches far and wide. Tewodros certainly realized the value of patriarchal approbation in the face of ongoing resistance to his nascent rule.

But these formal displays veiled a profound disquiet. In the first place, the timing of the visit was inopportune. It came only three months after a bitter feud over church lands between monarch and *abun* that devolved into a controversy about the scope of the sovereign's authority. And now the emperor, whose project of "imperial reconstruction" involved the self-conscious employment of Orthodoxy, found the spiritual head of the Alexandrian communion traveling in

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<sup>203</sup> Opinions varied about the originator of this expedient. Some sources suggested that it was Sultan 'Abd al-Mejid who was concerned about the frequent raids on eastern lowlands that were then under the aegis of the Porte. Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:159, Rufayla, *Kitab*, 317-18.

<sup>204</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:160.

<sup>205</sup> Petherick to Bruce, NA UK FO 141/30, (December 13, 1856).

league with the very government that had cooperated in a war against Orthodox Russia a year earlier.<sup>206</sup> When Kirulus addressed the reasons for his embassy, the emperor asked sarcastically whether it was his "dedication to the Christian cause or obedience to Sa'id Pasha" that motivated the visit.<sup>207</sup> If there was any chance of a successful mission, it was undermined at every turn. Tewodros was dismayed at Kirulus' solicitude on behalf of the Muslims of the interior and his request for the curtailment of provocations along the frontiers. For the ambitious monarch, offensive indeed was the spectacle of a patriarch advocating on behalf of the Muslim government that had "gradually wrested" tributaries from *Bilad al-Habasha*.<sup>208</sup>

A series of events in January of 1857 brought the simmering tensions to a boil. German and English missionaries had gained the monarch's esteem due to their expertise in the fabrication of modern weapons and military methods, and in the words of Sharubim, they used this leverage to spread "the teachings of Martin Luther among the Abyssinians" as they travelled "north, south, east and west."<sup>209</sup> Seeking to restrain these advances, Salama and Kirulus asked the emperor to sign a letter to the viceroy which included a request for (in Plowden's summary) "three Turkish officers to discipline the Abyssinian troops, regimental bands, pioneers, sappers, engineers, bakers, doctors and medicines, cannons and muskets."<sup>210</sup>

Tellingly, the letter was also said to include a request for "all the Coptic soldiers in his service." Earlier in the year, Kirulus had called upon the British consul at Cairo in a state of alarm over the recent extension of military conscription to include the Copts. After a period of consultation and diplomacy, Bruce noted that the viceroy had "returned a favourable answer to the patriarch's petition," and the conscripted Copts were released from service, "with some

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<sup>206</sup> Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction," 434; Rubenson, *Survival*, 183-85.

<sup>207</sup> LeJean, *Theodore II*, 83.

<sup>208</sup> Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:156; Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (November 12, 1856), no. 14.

<sup>209</sup> Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:156.

<sup>210</sup> Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (January 15, 1857), no. 2; Rubenson, *King of Kings*, 70.

insignificant exceptions." <sup>211</sup> Ten months later, one finds the patriarch still engaged in the problem of these "exceptions." There would be some controversy about the exact nature of the request. An infuriated Tewodros believed that it recommended the deployment of Coptic soldiers to *Bilad al-Habasha*, while the patriarch countered that it was simply a request for their release from military service. Whatever was the case, the patriarch was not simply a mouthpiece for the pasha, but a distinct political actor in his own right. If Kirulus' clarification was truthful, then he was leveraging the emperor's standing to resolve what remained of the "crisis." And if Tewodros' reading was accurate, the appeal might simply have been another initiative of this ongoing creative moment, as the patriarch imagined how a "problem" might be reemployed in the wider interest of Alexandrian Orthodoxy.

But in this tinderbox of suspicion and intrigue, Tewodros was inclined to see a prelate working as a foreign agent, aiming at the isolation of his lands and their eventual fealty to the neighboring Muslim power. He was repulsed by the patriarch's interest in military affairs, and as the latter "pressed the king constantly to review his troops," the monarch was increasingly dubious about his stated goals. <sup>212</sup> And then in mid-January, a serious crisis materialized. <sup>213</sup> The emperor's suspicions of the pasha's bellicose intentions were apparently confirmed as certain "frontier Arabs" under his tutelage reported that a large force of "Turkish troops" was preparing for an advance on his territories. They added that the patriarch was complicit in Sa'id's aggressive intentions, and even suggested that he might have the emperor poisoned. According to the chronicler, the monarch became apoplectic and "ordered that the patriarch be burned

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<sup>211</sup> Bruce to Clarendon, NA UK FO 78/1222, (March 9, 1856), no. 8. Whatever temporary measures may have been effected, by the later 1850s, Copts seem to have been routinely conscripted; Toledano, *State and Society*, 187.

<sup>212</sup> Antuny Suryal 'Abd al-Sayyid, *al-'Alaqa al-Misriya al-Athyubiya, 1855-1935* (Cairo: al-Hayat al-Misriya al-'Amma lil-Kitab, 2003), 49; Rubenson, *Survival*, 210-11; Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (January 15, 1857), no. 2.

<sup>213</sup> It is said that Sa'id Pasha had planned for the contingency of the patriarch's mission failing, and he traveled with a large military force in the eventuality of war. 'Abd al-Sayyid, *al-'Alaqa al-Misriya*, 48.

alive." In Plowden's telling, Tewodros proclaimed publicly that Salama "wished to bring soldiers of his nation to usurp his throne," while "the patriarch was a Mahomedan who had engaged to deliver Abyssinia to Seyd Pasha." <sup>214</sup> Patriarch and *abun* were both arrested, placed under guard and most of their retainers were removed. Later, the emperor said that while the English sought his welfare, the patriarch came as "a merchant and ambassador," soliciting "friendship with the Mohammedans" in order to bring his territories under the pasha's control.

Despite the pleadings of many priests and monks, it was finally the emperor's mother who prevailed upon her son. <sup>215</sup> When the bishops were released and tempers cooled, the emperor asked Kirulus to write a letter to Sa'id Pasha requesting that he withdraw his forces from Khartoum, and shortly thereafter word was received that he was returning with his troops to *Misr*. After the resolution, Tewodros again sought to use the patriarch's esteem to his personal advantage, asking that he preside over his coronation as "king of kings." The emperor called on the heads of various territories to attend this second coronation and to pledge their submission. At the crowning, Kirulus expressed his loyalty and solemnly exhorted the monarch: "never forsake the Alexandrian faith - cleave to it and you will be saved by it." <sup>216</sup> The most serious challenge had passed, although it was not the last to beset the visit, which lasted nearly one year.

This historical interval reveals several important dynamics and tensions. It is telling that the ecclesiastical chronicle identifies the English role in provoking hostility:

Some of the English [al-Inkliz] ... maligned [Patriarch Kirulus] to King Tewodros, charging that he was intent on making *al-Habasha* subject to the government of

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<sup>214</sup> Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:163; *HPEC*, 3:3, 165; Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (February 5, 1857), no. 4; Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (January 15, 1857), no. 2.

<sup>215</sup> F.M. Flad, *Notes from the Journal of F.M. Flad, One of Bishop Gobat's Pilgrim Missionaries in Abyssinia*, ed. W. Douglas Veitch (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1860), 47-49; Henry Stern, *Wanderings Among the Falashas in Abyssinia; Together With A Description of the Country and Its Various Inhabitants* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt, 1862), 79.

<sup>216</sup> Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 4:155, 157-59; 'Abd al-Sayyid, *al-'Alaqa*, 49; Flad, *Notes*, 50.

*Misr*, and the armed forces of *Misr* were thus following close behind him.<sup>217</sup>

The often detrimental presence of Europeans was unconcealed. We have seen at Jerusalem the deep involvement of the British in the encouragement of intra-communal antagonisms. At *Bilad al-Sudan*, European traders contributed to the dislocations of Coptic and other native traders, while in *Bilad Misr* the dissolution of monopolies and improved transport were opening the way for European and Greek investors and entrepreneurs to penetrate as far south as Asyut and even Aswan.<sup>218</sup> As European capital was compromising the defenses of the Alexandrian Church and other native institutions, the missionary challenge became especially relevant, for the ground was better prepared for their ideas to take root.

In this context, the "Father of Reform" was well capable of "illiberal" measures. In 1854 al-Bilyani (Salama's one-time comrade) was discovered to have expressed Protestant leanings, and Kirulus warned him that "if he valued his life" he would leave *Misr*. He was later abducted and subjected to the bastinado in the presence of the patriarch's deputy, after which he sought refuge with Gobat in Jerusalem.<sup>219</sup> It is not remarkable then that the menace of the European presence at *Bilad al-Habasha* should enter official ecclesiastical memory of the patriarch's mission. In fact, patriarch and *abun* were acutely aware of the correlation between European technicians and confidantes and the dissemination of heterodox teachings. They were also under no illusion about the wider threats they presented, and Salama even warned Tewodros that the English "only sought for his friendship to undermine his power and conquer his country."

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<sup>217</sup> *HPEC* 3:3, 175. Later Coptic historians attributed the crisis to European intrigues. See for example Zahir Riyad, *Misr wa Ifriqiya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglo al-Misriya, 1976), 152-53.

<sup>218</sup> In early 1856, Consul Green was enthusiastic about the new Alexandria-Cairo railway which facilitated "the transit of British passengers, mails, merchandize, specie through Egypt," and later Consul Bruce wrote of the lines of commerce which had been established directly with proprietors in the "remote provinces," and as far as Aswan. These "local" actors shared in the profits from the "active demand at Alexandria for exportation." Such direct relationships often circumvented the institutions of state; Green to Clarendon, "Commercial Report from Alexandria for 1855," NA UK FO 78/1224 (March 10, 1856), no. 23; Bruce to Clarendon, NA UK FO 78/1313 (February 2, 1857), no. 8; Walz, *Trade*, 248.

<sup>219</sup> Scouller, *A Manual*, 620; Sharkey, *Evangelicals*, 72.

At the end of the patriarchal visit, Plowden expressed surprise at the harsh treatment he had received from one so often eulogized for his enlightenment:

[Patriarch Kirulus] has not shewn that liberal spirit, that might be expected from one bred so near the influence of civilization. [He and Abuna Salama] both strove to impress the king's mind with a jealous fear of all Europeans, wishing that the Copts alone should have access to this country.<sup>220</sup>

But earlier he had conceded that "enlightenment" and illiberality were not incompatible, suggesting that the prelate was "innocent of anything but the ambition of civilizing Abyssinia by himself; thereby to extend the power and limits of his diocese."<sup>221</sup> Here, an aspiring champion of "civilization" simply wishes to fortify his see amid conflicting plans, ambitions and threats. Plowden seems to have grasped why a patriarch who was tolerant of "Inkliz" when they served the interests of his communion should be rather less liberal when their suspected treacheries not only hindered that object but may have had His Holiness cast headlong into the flames.

Plowden's remarks raise another peculiar feature of the historical moment. Although he is reading the dynamic in terms with which he is familiar, his acknowledgment of the patriarch's "ambition of civilizing Abyssinia by himself" is significant. The language of enlightenment and civilization was closely entwined in the projection of modern forms of power, and these were the terms in which actors would compete for the privilege of cultivating the "unlettered" masses and for crossing the chasms of mind that were forming. This was operative in *Bilad Misr* as well where, as Sedra demonstrates, even ecclesiastical and lay leaders would vie with one another for the prerogative of traversing the chasm to reach the commons.<sup>222</sup> But this proceeded within a

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<sup>220</sup> Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (November 22, 1857), no. 22.

<sup>221</sup> Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (January 15, 1857), no. 2.

<sup>222</sup> Sedra notes that in the 1860s, the supposedly "benighted" Patriarch Demetrius was "part of one 'discursive field' with the missionaries and the Khedive, all of whom were motivated by the need to inculcate the peasants with "industry, discipline and order;" see *From Mission to Modernity*, 132; Paul Sedra, "Missionaries, Peasants, and the Protection Problem: Negotiating Coptic Reform in the Nineteenth Century" in *U.S.- Middle East Historical Encounters: A Critical Survey*, eds. Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 79-80, 90-92.



Western-centric framework, so that regimes and agents of the "East" were especially constrained to prove their own civilizational credentials. Here, it is useful to recall Makdisi's contention that "in an age of Western dominated modernity, every nation creates its own orient."<sup>223</sup> We have suggested that *Bilad al-Sudan* was becoming a distinctive oriental backdrop for a regime at *Misr* eager to stake its claims. When Sa'id Pasha went to Khartoum amid a display of pomp and pageantry, it was perhaps not merely a military and political exercise, but a travelling exhibition of its civilizational achievements as well.

As the patriarch departed for his mission to Tewodros and presented offers of military and civilian assistance to replace the Europeans, there is a sense in which these lands were also on their way to becoming extensions of *Misr's* dawning "orient." In fact, from the early 1840s, there are hints that such a discourse existed among some high ranking ecclesiastics. In 1843, *Abuna Salama* remarked that his flock were neither "desirous after knowledge, nor do they love learning," for if they desired "progress and civilization, they would listen to our teaching." Even the Bishop of Akhmim was dismissive of the people of *al-Habash*, telling Kruse that they were "good for nothing," and it would appear that Patriarch Butrus himself could be similarly inclined.

<sup>224</sup> After an ill-fated mission to Shoa, W. C. Harris met the patriarch, before whom he denounced Salama's "spiritual despotism." Butrus was silent for several minutes, and then he rejoined: "Aye, but then you see, Abba Salama has to deal in Abyssinia with a very ignorant set of people."<sup>225</sup>

Thus, one can detect, at least in germ, the opening of a civilizational distance between *Bilad Misr* and the "south," and details of the patriarch's mission can be understood as

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<sup>223</sup> Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 769. A useful reference here is Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery." Deringil contends that Ottoman elites conflated "the ideas of modernity and colonialism, and applied the latter as a means of survival against an increasingly hostile world." As they did this, the peripheries of empire were re-inscribed as sites for Ottoman colonial redemption.

<sup>224</sup> Salama's letter to Isenberg is published in Rubenson, *Acta Aethiopica*, 1:84-85; Kruse to Coastes, "Journal of a Voyage," CMS C M/O 45/164 (May 18, 1844), 25.

<sup>225</sup> This, Harris added, could only be maintained by "subscribing to the prejudices and fanaticisms of the bigoted priesthood, who hold all classes in chains." St. John, *Egypt and Nubia*, 246.

elaborations on the theme.<sup>226</sup> In January of 1857, after Kirulus was accused of conniving with Sa'id Pasha in the planned conquest of the country, he pled that he and Salama only wished to "assist [Tewodros] in civilizing Abyssinia."<sup>227</sup> A short time later he widened the scope, professing that Sa'id Pasha had not come to wage war, but simply to "civilize *al-Sudan* and solve the problems of its people."<sup>228</sup> There would indeed appear to be correspondences in the way that patriarch and pasha conceived of their pursuits, which may be a reflection at the discursive level of the increasing incorporation of the institutional church within the structures of the modern state. When Sa'id Pasha was in *Bilad al-Sudan*, he confronted a grave state of affairs. Sharubim, the nineteenth century Coptic historian, praised him to the skies, quoting his decree regarding the need to "root out oppression and enslavement," and detailing the reforms that he initiated which led to a return of the multitudes who had fled beyond the frontiers. Many of them, according to the paean, "kissed [Sa'id's] feet ... wishing him a long reign and [pledging] their support to his throne." Explaining that prosperity is conditioned on order, the ruler exhorted his subjects to build houses in rows and to delineate village limits, and he looked forward to a day when even those "who live in a state of savagery as brutes" will be "more civilized." He also encouraged the instruction of the locals in "the art of constructing organized buildings and residences," and even anticipated the extension of "telegraph and railway lines from *Misr* to the heart of the Sudan,"

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<sup>226</sup> James de Lorenzi has produced a valuable study of Timoteos Saprighian, an Armenian bishop of Jerusalem, who spent some time in Ethiopia in 1867. Saprighian's writings reveal a distance between him and his "African coreligionists," which De Lorenzi attributes to the "new culture of progress." Using Walter Benjamin's insights on the "debris" left in the wake of a teleological reading of history, de Lorenzi argues that the "historic relationship between these two Ottoman and African communities became Benjamin's debris." See "Caught in the Storm of Progress," 111-13. Also valuable is Ussama Makdisi's "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism and Evangelical Modernity," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (June, 1997): 680-713. In his study of missionary activity in the Levant, he demonstrates a gradual shift away from the "universal" and toward a hierarchy of cultures with a temporal division - European progress versus native backwardness. In our case, as the hierarchy of cultures was appropriated by Coptic elites, a variation on the missionaries' temporal divisions can be identified.

<sup>227</sup> Plowden to Clarendon, NA UK FO 195/375 (November 12, 1856), no. 14.

<sup>228</sup> 'Abd al-Sayyid, *'Alaqa*, 51.

with the aim of making "a *joint civilization* between them." Distance was inscribed in the very language of unity: the civilization that was projected from the north would be a "joint" one.<sup>229</sup>

As for administrative reforms, each of the provinces would now answer directly to Cairo in a reorganization that, in Richard Hill's words, "knit the Sudan to Egypt, and made the two territories a single administrative unit."<sup>230</sup> In many ways, this was a precursor to Khedive Isma'il's extravagant initiative for an African empire, which coincided with his reported declaration that his country was "no longer in Africa."<sup>231</sup> In her political study of this later period, Ghada Talhami shed light on the ramifications of this trajectory on "Egyptian-Ethiopian" relations, in an assessment that is itself firmly set within an enlightenment discourse. She notes that as the Turco-Egyptian regime represented a "single power with the ability to tame the tribes" of the "frontier belt," a confrontation between the two powers became inevitable as the "protective shield" was passing away.<sup>232</sup> The removal of the "protective shield" can be characterized alternatively as the overthrow of that order in which "overlapping and contradictory" claims could coexist. And in this sense, to "tame the tribes" was to bring modern mechanisms to bear on the frontiers, a process which would be justified according to the moral imperatives of the mission civilisatrice. Various agents and powers would compete on these grounds, including successive emperors of the "reconstructed" Solomonic kingdom.

In the course of this, ecclesiastical and lay elites imagined "Orthodoxy/orthodoxy" in new ways. On one level, it was increasingly framed within a conceptual scaffolding marked by a

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<sup>229</sup> Italics added. Sharubim, *al-Kafi*, 160-62; Onofrio Abbate, *De l'Afrique-Centrale ou Voyage de S.A. Mohammed-Said-Pacha dans ses provinces du Soudan* (Paris, 1858), 34, 38, 43. Abbate was a physician who accompanied Sa'id on his journey. His account includes translated texts of the pasha's official orders.

<sup>230</sup> Hill, *Egypt*, 94.

<sup>231</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>232</sup> She means by "frontier belt" the three main fronts separating "Ethiopian" and "Egyptian" territories; namely Gallabat and its environs along the western end of the belt, the regions of Kassala to the north, and the coastal territories opposite Masawa in the east. See Ghada Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa Under Egyptian Rule* (Washington: University Press of America, 1975), 125-26.

vocabulary of ignorance and enlightenment, progress and civilization. But its institutional expression (and location) was also reimagined and reconfigured according to the structures and principles of a modern state. This was certainly coming into view during the reigns of *Abuna Salama III* and Patriarch Kirulus IV. As these pioneering prelates contemplated "Orthodoxy" and detected its expanding horizons, the latitude for its institutional expression would if anything become more restricted.

### **Conclusion, and Looking Forward**

Looming over these creative engagements with "Orthodoxy" was the prospect of further foreign encroachments, the ongoing subversion of historical patrimonies, and the still raw questions about how to address the loss of security that went with them. In all of this, there was an unresolved tension as modern techniques of power engendered division even as new kinds of solidarity would be necessary for confronting the challenges of the age. Actors such as Patriarch Kirulus IV and Emperor Tewodros II identified with distinct state projects while they looked to the horizons for solutions to equal the haunting perils. Tewodros spoke of the scandal of the disunity among believers, wondering why Christians could not call a council of the patriarchates to establish unity. Meanwhile, "among the greatest wishes" of Kirulus was "the unification of the Orthodox churches, including the Greeks and the Russians."<sup>233</sup> This appeal for unity is redolent of the somber exhortations of those late nineteenth century emblems of "Islamic modernity," Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh. To turn back the tide of Europe, Al-Afghani directed his energies toward a pan-Islamic mobilization aimed at transcending the political boundaries dividing the *umma*. As for the theological writings his pupil, Muhammad 'Abduh, "unity" was a prominent theme, particularly in his famous *Risalat al-Tawhid (Treatise on the*

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<sup>233</sup> LeJean, *Theodore II*, 193-94; Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:183.

*Oneness*) in which he reproved schism and the "diversified schools of interpretation" while making the case for temporal unity as a corollary to Divine Oneness.<sup>234</sup>

Meanwhile, a different order of "unity" - that world of relationships which was expressed in a host of "overlapping" rights and obligations - was compromised as competing "centers" and powers scrambled to lay hold the reins of civilization. The contingent claims that had once prevailed were out of place in a new "international" order, as exemplified in Jerusalem where spheres of influence were carved out and relationships carved up. As Tewodros the "modernizer" looked to Jerusalem, he used the language of division even as he was driven by the desire for unity. When he suggested that the Russians should unite with him in a joint campaign on the Holy City, this "Orthodox" proposal was a form of unity in division; the two Orthodox sovereigns would "*split* between them the Muslim world."<sup>235</sup> In Russia, the new impulse was exemplified in the writings of Porfiry Uspensky, a monk who contributed the theoretical groundwork for the unification of Russian and Ethiopian Orthodoxy as a step toward an Orthodox conquest of the World.<sup>236</sup> But these visions for a revitalized and unified Orthodoxy were tethered to modern national or proto-national projects. This unity could only be imagined in the division of the world between Orthodox powers in the one case, or Orthodoxy's conquest under Russian tutelage in the other. In this context, we can see the challenge that Kirulus faced as head of a structure that was woven institutionally into the fabric of a "non-Orthodox" state. Here, the cause of "Orthodoxy" would necessarily take a shape and complexion distinctive from environments in which it could be incorporated within a state ideology.

The fate of three figures that factored so prominently in these pages provides a sense of

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<sup>234</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966), 104.

<sup>235</sup> Italics added. LeJean, *Theodore II*, 52

<sup>236</sup> Joseph Burgess, "Ethiopia's Diplomacy and the Struggle to Preserve Its Independence, 1855-1900," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1980), 179-82.

what loomed ahead. Patriarch Kirulus IV is remembered as the "Father of Reform" and lionized for his contributions to education, administrative rationalization and a host of other initiatives that are hallmarks in the narrative of "awakening." Sedra has observed that the hegemony of this narrative in modern Coptic histories has forestalled "all possible research agendas focused upon questions of power."<sup>237</sup> Here, we might add that the narrative structure has also given an anachronistic clarity and cohesion to Kirulus' vision, obscuring the contingency of his programs while eliding other details that do not plot neatly in the narrative of communal and national awakening. The modern political and confessional "communities" that would emerge are confirmed retroactively, so that the profound questions that he engaged about the idea and expression of Alexandrian Orthodoxy or the wider Orthodox Oecumene become side notes.

Despite all the factors that militated against bold initiatives, Kirulus was inclined to establish contact with representatives of Orthodox churches that were not in communion with his own. He agreed to sell property to the Russians in Jerusalem, and he became close with the Greek patriarch of Alexandria, even assuming responsibility for that communion when the latter was away at Istanbul.<sup>238</sup> During the final year of his reign, Kirulus retreated to a monastery with the heads of the Armenian and Greek churches. He remained there for six months, and was said to be engaged in efforts to forge a kind of coalition.<sup>239</sup> But he was checked by his own government on the one hand, and the connivance of foreign powers on the other.<sup>240</sup> Sharubim claims that the British consul planted the seeds of suspicion in the heart of the pasha, telling him that the meeting was aimed at unifying the Orthodox of *Misr* and placing them under the

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<sup>237</sup> Sedra, *Mission to Modernity*, 10.

<sup>238</sup> Rufayla, *Kitab tarikh al-umma*, 322.

<sup>239</sup> al-Masri, *Qissat al-kanisat* (1975), 337.

<sup>240</sup> Various Coptic sources identify the role of foreign actors in sowing the seeds of suspicion in the mind of Sa'id. Al-Masri has claimed that both the French and British consuls contributed to the patriarch's undoing. The British, she noted, bore a grudge because he had "overcome [British] intrigues in Ethiopia; al-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisat*, 4:337.

protection of a foreign power - namely, Russia.<sup>241</sup> Although the cause of the subsequent events is contested, Coptic sources from Sharubim and Rufayla to al-Masri all agree, implicitly or explicitly, about what happened next. The infuriated pasha sent a delegate to the monastery, and the patriarch died of poisoning, scarcely seven years into his pontificate. When Patriarch Demetrius succeeded to the throne, the pasha was said to have cautioned him: "do not do what your predecessor did."<sup>242</sup> His successors would not attempt anything of the kind again, respecting the institutional limits to the Coptic Orthodox imagination as Coptic identity continued to settle within the modern space reserved for minorities.

As for *Abuna Salama* and Emperor Tewodros, their relationship further deteriorated. By 1862, Tewodros had nearly achieved mastery over all rival claimants, and he took a more aggressive stance toward the frontier regions in an effort to sure up his internal support. He used the struggle against Islam as an ideological pivot for his plans - which was facilitated by the bellicosity of the "Turco-Egyptian" forces. These "boundary disputes" were mirrored at Jerusalem, where Coptic and Abyssinian monks were engaged again in their own turf wars, and it became so heated this time that "bloodshed was only prevented by the interference of the English bishop."<sup>243</sup> When Tewodros was told that Coptic priests had solicited the assistance of the Turkish authorities to carry out a seizure of Abyssinian properties, he was infuriated.<sup>244</sup> Meanwhile, the increasingly paranoid emperor started to suspect that Europeans were also colluding with the "Turks and Egyptians." In 1864, he began imprisoning Europeans, and when *Abuna Salama* raised objections, a "violent dispute" ensued between the two men and Salama

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<sup>241</sup> Sharubim's text is quoted in Iskarius, *Nawabigh*, 2:186.

<sup>242</sup> Rufayla, *Kitab tarikh al-umma*, 323.

<sup>243</sup> Douin, *Histoire du Regne du Khedive Ismail*, 56; Rubenson, *Survival*, 220.

<sup>244</sup> Charles Beke, *The British Captives in Abyssinia* (London, 1867), 129. On the episode at Jerusalem, see Finn to Bulwer, NA UK FO 1/12 (March 11, 1862), f. 77; Finn to Russell, NA UK FO 1/12 (March 7, 1862), ff. 123-27 and Finn to Bulwer, NA UK FO 1/12 (June 3, 1862), ff. 196-97.

joined the Europeans in captivity at the fortress of Magdala.<sup>245</sup>

The final three years of *Abuna Salama's* life would be spent in the fortress prison alongside leading monks and a growing number of European inmates. The case of the captives quickly became a national cause célèbre in Britain. In an effort to secure their release, the government sent a delegation to Tewodros headed by British agent and Ottoman subject Hormuzd Rassam. He carried a letter of advocacy for the captives that a British consul had obtained from Patriarch Demetrius, despite the "inexplicable reluctance on the part of the Copts" to accede to the request.<sup>246</sup> According to Rassam, the government had gravely miscalculated the situation:

... a serious mistake had been made at the outset by our communicating with the patriarch of the Copts and the metropolitan, Abuna Salama; for on the receipt of my letter, the king remarked, with reference to me, 'so, he has already made friends with my enemies, the priests.' Unluckily, when I started for Massowah, it was not known ... that the abuna was in disgrace.<sup>247</sup>

With perils all around, Tewodros struck out at a still powerful clergy, climaxing in his sack of Gondar. In a letter to Queen Victoria, the emperor even hinted at Salama's illegitimacy, referring to him as "the Copt who called himself metropolitan." The sentiments were mutual, as is evidenced in Salama's chronicle:

After a long time, the spirit of Satan changed the heart of the king. He became a lover of women and hater of good things. He set churches on fire. Because of this,

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<sup>245</sup> This was exacerbated by the failure of the queen's government to respond to his entreaties for assistance against *Misr. Beke*, *British Captives*, 93; Crummey, *Priests and Politicians*, 136. At this time, the British government did not want to jeopardize relations with Egypt, a leading source of its imports. For a study of Britain's Abyssinian policy, and the course of events which resulted in the captivity and the diplomatic imbroglio, see Percy Arnold, *Prelude to Magdala: Emperor Theodore of Ethiopia and British Diplomacy*, ed. Richard Pankhurst (London: Bellew Publishing, 1992).

<sup>246</sup> Reade to Russell, NA UK FO 1/14 (June 30, 1864), ff. 245-46. For the translated text of the patriarch's letter, see "Patriarch of the Egyptian Copts to King Theodore of Abyssinia," NA UK FO 1/14 (July 5, 1864), f. 283. Possibly at Britain's behest, in 1867 Khedive Isma'il sent a warning letter to Tewodros about what the British were planning to do if he did not release the captives. "You must be aware," the pasha wrote, "of what England did to India and China with their large populations and lands ... they will inflict terrible things and unspeakable horrors from which you will not be able to escape or win." For the full text of the correspondence, see Isma'il Sarhank, *Haqa'iq al-Akhbar 'an Duwal al-Bihar* (Cairo: Matba'a al-Miriya, 1896), 2:298-300.

<sup>247</sup> Hormuzd Rassam, *The British Mission to Theodore, King of Abyssinia* (London: John Murray, 1869), 1:7.



there developed a quarrel between the king and the metropolitan. He banished our metropolitan to a certain hill called Maqdala, for no crime or blame ... at that time, [Salama] bound the entire army of the king with the pain of excommunication so that they may not obey his words.

In captivity, Salama still tried to exercise his authority. He was now acting at cross-purposes with the harried sovereign, even attempting to establish contacts with rebel chiefs.<sup>248</sup> Long since extinguished was that optimism about Tewodros that had enlivened Salama's hopes and stirred many imaginations even in the lands of *Misr*. Although Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1879) was far from disinterested in the censure of his predecessor, his chronicle recalls the distress that came in the wake of dashed millenarian expectations. This is evident in a discourse that it ascribes to the *abun* immediately prior to his incarceration. The words may be apocryphal, but one suspects that the admixture of desolation and disillusionment that they convey is true to Salama's sentiments:

For twelve years [Tewodros] pretended to be as saintly as all righteous Kings... giving justice to the poor, respecting the clergy and the monks, and sympathizing with the hungry ... we thought that he was like Tewodros the Righteous during whose time love, peace and grace be abundant ... priests, deacons and monks who lived in the cathedrals and monasteries said to me 'anoint and crown him for us so that our eyes might see the illumination of his government.' I thus anointed and crowned him happily under the name of Tewodros the Righteous.<sup>249</sup>

While in prison, *Abuna* Salama's health deteriorated and he died on October 25, 1867. His chronicler's statement on his passing can be taken as a metaphor for the times. The metropolitan, he records solemnly, "departed from the decaying [world] to the not-decaying one." During the very month of his death, the advance team of a British military expedition arrived at Masawa in preparation for an invasion of the mainland. The "humanitarian" campaign to free the captives included an astonishing total of 62,200 men, of whom 13,088 were combat soldiers. Armed with

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<sup>248</sup> Menelik of Shoa was among the chiefs with whom he was in contact. Tewodros to Victoria, NA UK FO 1/17 (January 22, 1866), f. 405; Blanc, *A Narrative*, 284-85.

<sup>249</sup> Tafla, ed. *A Chronicle*, 55-57.

sophisticated weapons, they perpetrated a massacre that left as many as 800 Ethiopians dead.<sup>250</sup> As the bombardment on Magdala intensified, Tewodros dismissed what remained of his forces and committed suicide.

Meanwhile to the north, Kirulus' successor was waging his own frantic battle. In the *Sa'id*, the Protestant mission schools were drawing many students who were attracted by the possibility that they might thereby obtain immunity from the conscription drives. In the spring of 1867, Patriarch Demetrius II undertook a tour up the Nile to defend his menaced flock.<sup>251</sup> As he passed through the towns and villages of the *Sa'id*, some refractory Copts were beaten and others were threatened with banishment to *al-Sudan*.<sup>252</sup> The patriarch was not waging a battle against modern forms of education, but was rather seeking the students' transfer to Coptic schools that followed a curriculum very similar to their missionary counterparts.<sup>253</sup> In his endeavors, the patriarch received the full support of Khedive Isma'il who, like Tewodros, was concerned about external threats to his sovereignty. Like his predecessor, he provided the patriarch with resources to establish Orthodox schools, and in 1867 he furnished him with the steamship, monetary funds and soldiers to undertake his dramatic pastoral tour of the *Sa'id*. All of this is evidence of an institutional church that was tethered ever more firmly to the khedivial state.

Over the coming decades Egypt, the Sudan would succumb to colonial occupations, and Ethiopia would face its own distinctive battle with colonialism. It is not to deny the consequences or ruptures of this subsequent period to suggest that certain changes were already underway that would contribute, at least to some extent, to the eventual appearance of Coptic and

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<sup>250</sup> Volker Matthies, *The Siege of Magdala: The British Empire Against the Emperor of Ethiopia*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2012), xv; 39.

<sup>251</sup> Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity*, 129.

<sup>252</sup> In one episode, when a convert ignored a summons to appear in front of a council headed by the patriarch at Qena, a group of people assailed his house. Watson, *American Mission*, 207-209.

<sup>253</sup> Sedra, *Mission to Modernity*, 126; al-Bishri, *al-Musimun wa al-Aqbat*, 37-38.

Ethiopian churches as "national" institutions. But this outcome must not obscure the creative engagements that have been exemplified for us in the careers of Patriarch Kirulus IV, Emperor Tewodros II and *Abuna* Salama III. Taken together, their endeavors serve as a testament to the richness of the idea of "Orthodoxy/orthodoxy," and the boundless capacity for "tradition" to be engaged and reimagined into new frames. But each of these figures met with a tragic end, which underscores both the structural constraints that they faced, and the terrible reality of the intensifying perils that ultimately overwhelmed them.

## "Anticipating Nations and National Churches: A Conclusion"

### Orthodoxy, Empire and Occupation

In a letter that he sent to Patriarch Kirulus V following the Egyptian-Ethiopian wars of 1875-76, Emperor Yohannes IV affirmed the continuing "bond of friendship," and emphasized that the prevailing disagreements had no basis, aside from "the money worship of those who desire the destruction of the two countries."<sup>1</sup> He left the identity of these sinister actors to the imagination. However, his censure of "money worshippers" found interesting echo from a veteran of the war from across the lines of battle. Ahmed 'Urabi, a future leader of the 1881-2 revolt in the lands of Egypt, would specify "greed" as the "cause of frustration and failure," recalling with bitterness the betrayals of high ranking foreign officers in the stinging defeats.<sup>2</sup> The ill-effects of European political, military and economic power were apparent on both sides of the "Egyptian-Ethiopian" breach. Only seven years earlier, the British had deployed the massive "Abyssinian Expedition," a grand display of imperial might that foreshadowed the apogee of Western empires. When the "hostages" were freed and Tewodros (and 800 other natives) were dead, the expeditionary forces looted the cultural patrimony of the people, spiriting away countless articles that would make their way into British museums and private collections. In 1872, Emperor Yohannes sent letters to Queen Victoria and the foreign secretary in which he asked for a return of the Kebra Nagast, "which contains the law of the whole of Ethiopia, and the

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<sup>1</sup> His July 19, 1876 letter is published in Sven Rubenson, ed., *Acta Aethiopica, vol. 3: Internal Rivalries and Foreign Threats, 1869-1879* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2000), 252. For a military study of the conflict, see Dunn, *Khedive Ismail's Army*, 125-51.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad 'Urabi, *Mudhakhirat al-Za'im Ahmad 'Urabi: Kashef al-Sitar 'an Sir al-Asrar fi al-Nahda al-Misriya al-Mashhura b'il-Thawra al-Urabiya* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 2005), 116-117; 123; 125.

names of the Shums (Chiefs), Churches, and Provinces are in this book." <sup>3</sup> Although Yohannes had cooperated with the expeditionary forces that were advancing against his rival, and although his most immediate concerns involved his domestic and regional adversaries, he was not innocent to the dangers that Europe posed. <sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the Egyptian-Ethiopian wars hastened the bankruptcy of the khedivial regime and the further penetration of Europe in the affairs of the country. About the time of Yohannes' grim allusions to "money worship" in his letter to the patriarch, the fiscal affairs of *Misr* were being handed over to an Anglo-French commission.

Through the still settling clouds of war, Emperor Yohannes was keen to reassure the patriarch that the bonds of Alexandria had survived. This was more than mere sentimentality. An *abun* would be necessary if he was to carry out his plans for imperial "restoration" - in other words, he required the cooperation of the weakened though still standing regime that he had just engaged in war. In a letter to Queen Victoria, he explained that his country had "from the beginning ... taken their bishop from the Copts and from the city of Alexandria," and should Isma'il Pasha prevent the dispatch of a successor, "the religion of [his] kingdom [was] going to be lost." <sup>5</sup> It was a commentary on the prevailing political climate that in place of a traditional gift-bearing embassy, the emperor's "request" for a new metropolitan came in the form of a demand during the post-war negotiations. <sup>6</sup> Despite his efforts, it would be five long years before another Alexandrian bishop would step foot in his lands. But he did receive a formal letter from the patriarch in which Kirulus V strongly condemned sectarian divisions. With this authoritative

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<sup>3</sup> Matthies, *Siege of Magdala*, 135, 138. Fifteen elephants, and almost 200 mules were required to carry the plundered objects; see Richard Pankhurst, "Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk, and the Return of Africa's Cultural Heritage," *African Affairs* 98, no. 387 (1999): 231-32; Edward Ullendorff and Abraham Demoz, "Two Letters from the Emperor Yohannes of Ethiopia to Queen Victoria and Lord Granville," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 32, no. 1 (1969): 138.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of the Fetha Nagast was repatriated, but the more valuable manuscript remained in England; Matthies, *Siege of Magdala*, 138.

<sup>5</sup> Emperor Yuhannis to Queen Victoria, NA UK FO 407/11 (n.d.), ff. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Malet to the Marquis of Salisbury, NA UK FO 407/14, (n.d.) ff. 51-55.

document in hand, Yohannes convened the Council of Boro Meda in 1878, and called for the regional rulers and all the clergy and nobility to attend. There, he invoked an age-old refrain, professing that Saint Mark was his father and Alexandria his mother.<sup>7</sup> This council marked the beginning of a new era for the church, as the condition of doctrinal factionalism that had persisted for 200 years was largely resolved.<sup>8</sup> In November, he informed the patriarch triumphantly that his people had "become one in faith and one in kingdom," and asked the father, "Kirulus in Alexandria ... for absolution [of the repentant heretics.]"<sup>9</sup>

Three years later, he asked the patriarch to consecrate four bishops (an *abun* and three suffragans) for his lands. His chronicler recalled the unprecedented appeal and its answer, which came "six years after he had defeated the Ishmaelites":

[Emperor Yohannes] said 'I beg your holiness to send me four bishops. These bishops shall preach us the Gospel in their respective lots ... for behold, your vast preaching district is the country of the reign which God, your Lord has given me' ... Reading all that was written in it, [Patriarch Kirulus V] was exceedingly happy and quickly sent him in accordance with the request of the king, bishops, chosen in the likeness of four evangelists.<sup>10</sup>

The Council of Boro Meda and the acquisition of four bishops, taken together, marked a milestone in the political and ecclesiastical history of the kingdom. Yohannes was able to station a bishop in four different regions, which contributed not only to the further integration of his kingdom, but also to the institutional expansion of the episcopacy. The "Alexandrian" bonds had indeed survived the war, but it is arguable that developments after the 1878 council gave momentum to a process that would eventually result in calls for autocephaly. In Crummey's words, the "expansion of the episcopacy made it an institution of too great importance to be left

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<sup>7</sup> Bairu Tafla, "The Father of Rivers: the Nile in Ethiopian Literature," *The Nile, History, Cultures, Myths*, eds. Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 162.

<sup>8</sup> Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction," 440-441.

<sup>9</sup> Yohannes' November 26, 1878 letter is reproduced in Rubenson, ed. *Acta Aethiopica*, 3:290.

<sup>10</sup> Tafla, ed., *Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV*, 152-53.

in foreign hands." <sup>11</sup>

The struggles against deviations from "orthodoxy" were not new, but in Chapter Four, we already noticed subtle - and not so subtle - innovations in its pursuit, especially in the clashes between *Abuna* Salama and Emperor Tewodros, the latter seeking its "restoration" while reining in the excessive privileges of the church, and the former bringing certain enlightenment principles to its pursuit. Some of these themes persisted under Emperor Yohannes, who identified a need for the construction and staffing of schools across the kingdom in order to carry out an extensive "Christianization" campaign. If there were no priests competent to the task in a particular locale, then they were to be recruited from elsewhere. <sup>12</sup>

This corresponded with contemporary Ottoman and khedivial efforts to propagate "Islamic orthodoxy," which served as both an ideological framework for imperial cohesion and a distinctive articulation of modernity. <sup>13</sup> In the Sudan, Bjorkelo notes that the "degree of Islamicization" was used as a standard to measure the attainment of civilization - which in practice meant that "only a thin layer of 'orthodox', 'proper' Muslims" was regarded as fully civilized. <sup>14</sup> As Khedive Isma'il pursued his "African empire," the regime funded the construction of various institutions along the far-flung reaches of "empire," while cadres of "enlightened" clerics were dispersed across the lands of *Misr, al-Sudan* and elsewhere. <sup>15</sup> The Christian or

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<sup>11</sup> Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction," 442. The formal calls for autocephaly began in the 1920s, during the rule of Haile Sellassie; Sellassie, *Autobiography*, 168-69. The creation of a more "centralized" bureaucratic infrastructure began in earnest in 1926 when Haile Sellassie inaugurated the synod, and set up a number of committees that were designed to distribute the powers which had previously been in the hands of the *abun*; Haile Mariam Larebo, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Politics in the Twentieth Century: Part II" in *Northeast African Studies* 10, no. 1 (1988), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 240.

<sup>13</sup> On "traveling 'ulema" in the Ottoman Hamidian period and the proliferation of schools across the provinces, see Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 93-99. As many as 10,000 schools were built during the reign of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid (1876-1909); *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>14</sup> Bjorkelo, *Prelude*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> In *al-Sudan*, the Khatmiya Sufi order was strongly promoted as part of an effort to encourage a more "orthodox" Islam. Members of the Khatmiya were sponsored for study at al-Azhar, and some of these were later admitted into official service as *qadis* and teachers. See Gabriel Warburg, "Islam in the Sudan Under the Funj and the Ottomans"

Islamic nature of these institutions was in some sense secondary to the civilizing task that they held in common. In 1870 the "Egyptian" administration of Suakin (on the Red Sea coast) determined that a church should be built to serve the needs of the "many Ethiopians who wandered through." In the report, the proposed church would serve the Ethiopians of the "Coptic *madhhab*" in the same way that the local mosque served the Muslim population. Projects were also undertaken to repair churches, mosques and schools in various localities, including in Masawa, Bughus and Suakin. When some of these government reports were published in the 1960s, the volume's editor noted that the administration's interest in spreading mosques, churches and "men of religion" stemmed from their desire "to control paganism and deplorable and widespread customs" through the advancement of "correct education."<sup>16</sup> Comparable projects were undertaken in regions of *Misir*, where "backward" customs were curbed through the incorporation of institutions of "religion" within formal hierarchical networks.<sup>17</sup>

Here, the case of the Council of Boro Meda and its aftermath provides something of a contrast, for although Emperor Yohannes envisioned the promotion of "orthodoxy" in his own imperial "restoration," this was bound up with a vision for creedal homogeneity across the kingdom. It was not an accident that the council was convened in the Islamic stronghold of Wollo. In its aftermath, Yohannes dealt harshly not only with "heterodox" Christian leaders (at least two of whom had their tongues cut out) but with non-Christian populations as thousands of

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*Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honor of Michael Winter* (London: Routledge, 2006), 212. Gabriel Warburg, *Historical Discord in the Nile Valley* (London: Hurst, 1992), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Shawqi 'Ata Allah al-Jamal, *'Ata Allah, al-Watha'iq al-Tarikhiya li-siyasat Misr fi al-Bahr al-Ahmar, 1863-1879* (Cairo: Matba'at Lajnat al-Bayan al-'Arabi, 196-), 102, 139.

<sup>17</sup> For a survey of this ongoing process in the Egyptian *Sa'id*, see Patrick Gaffney, "Conforming at a Distance: Diffusion of Islamic Bureaucracy in Upper Egypt," *Upper Egypt Identity and Change*, eds. Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 119-40; The formal infrastructure of Alexandrian Orthodoxy saw parallel developments. During latter half of the 1850s, there was a marked increase in the construction and repair of ecclesiastical structures in the *Sa'id*, including the establishment of churches at Aswan, Qena and Luqsur. See Nabih Kamel, *Tarikh lil Masihiya wa al-Rahbana wa Atharhuma fi Abrushiyati Naqada wa Qus*, 261-62; 264; Nabih Kamel, *Tarikh al-Masihiyah wa atharuha fi Aswan wa al-Nuba*, 116.



Muslims, "Falashas" (Beta Israel or "Ethiopian Jews") and others were baptized, sometimes under duress.<sup>18</sup> Yohannes later offered a far-fetched justification for these actions, explaining that after heretical Christian factions were restored to Alexandria,

all the Muslims ... said to themselves, "ah, so we have no authoritative book!" They begged me to baptize and christen them. I said to them, "all right, if you so wish and want, convert to Christianity." All the Muslims ... voluntarily became Christian. Thus I did not do a single thing by force; they converted willingly ...<sup>19</sup>

The appeal to "orthodoxy" was nothing new, and the presence of non-Christian populations in the Ethiopian highlands had been a matter of at least some consternation across the centuries. Nevertheless, during the late nineteenth century, "unity" involved a vision more sweeping than the elimination of schisms within the Orthodox fold; Yohannes' philosophy of governance was encapsulated in his dictum that "different religions in one land only cause difficulties for the ruler."<sup>20</sup> As for Alexandrian Orthodoxy more broadly, we have tried to show that the demands for "unity" contributed to growing strains as this historical idea/formation was drawn into competing and often contradictory projects. In the course of these chapters, we have followed some trends and transformations across the nineteenth century, looking for clues about the processes that have contributed to the development of a contemporary "Alexandrian" condition.

However, we must not minimize the profound effects of later initiatives and forces, even if some of these are elaborations on themes that we have already addressed. During the 1870s, the

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<sup>18</sup> Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction," 441; Theophilus Waldmeier, *The Autobiography of Theophilus Waldmeier, Missionary: Being an Account of Ten Years' Life in Abyssinia: And Sixteen Years in Syria* (London: S.W. Partridge & Co., 1886?), 137; Hastings, *Church in Africa*, 239-40. According to some estimates, he oversaw the forced baptism of as many as 20,000 Muslims; see Mallet to the Marquis of Salisbury, NA UK FO 407/14, (February 20, 1880), f. 58.

<sup>19</sup> For the text of Yohannes' letter, see Yohannis IV to Victoria (November 20, 1879) in Rubenson, ed. *Acta Aethiopica*, 3:332-33.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Caulk, "Religion and the State in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia" in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10, no. 1 (1972): 30. He also suppressed missionary activities. Early in his reign, he voiced concerns about missionaries when he informed Queen Victoria that he had no desire for their activities, explaining that his "Teacher is the Bishop of Alexandria, sitting on the throne of Saint Mark the Teacher of [his] people;" Ullendorff and Demoz, "Two Letters," 138.

khedivial lands were shaken by a series of environmental, political and economic developments. The cotton boom of the 1860s and the renting effects of the subsequent drop in prices were a sobering indication of *Misr's* increasing incorporation within the peripheral zones of the industrial world market. Khedive Isma'il's ambitious projects contributed to a mounting debt crisis and eventual bankruptcy, after which fiscal decision-making was largely taken over by a commission composed of Europeans representing the leading bondholding nations.<sup>21</sup> A system of Mixed Courts was also established to adjudicate conflicts between Egyptians and Europeans. The unprecedented legal conventions gave creditors the right to expropriate the lands of indebted peasants, leading to a significant increase in landlessness.<sup>22</sup> The influx of Europeans also continued unabated, with their numbers approaching 100,000 by the turn of the 1880s. Meanwhile, as native officials were dismissed from government service, they watched as foreigners filled numerous administrative posts, often with conspicuously exorbitant incomes.<sup>23</sup> A confluence of factors contributed to unrest in many regions of *Misr*, which ultimately led to England's 1882 intervention and the commencement of its 70-year occupation of the country.

### **Nationalist Thought and Colonial Modernity**

In anticipating the formal reconfiguration of the Alexandrian Orthodox communion along the lines of modern nation-states, we must acknowledge that it would be inadequate and misleading to do so without attention to the intervening decades during which nationalist thought

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<sup>21</sup> Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 58, 92; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 69.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 44, 66. These ranks included the infamous Greek money-lenders who were a ubiquitous presence in the villages and towns up and down the Nile Valley at the time. The figure of the Greek money-lender was a symbol of the deprivations that the impoverished *fellahin* faced. See Sayyid 'Ashmawi, "Perceptions of the Greek Money-Lender in Egyptian Collective Memory at the Turn of the Twentieth Century" in *Money, Land and Trade: An Economic History of the Muslim Mediterranean*, ed. Nelly Hanna (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 244-78.

<sup>23</sup> Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives*, 208-209.

and practice developed in a wider context of colonial modernity.<sup>24</sup> In his assessment of the basic features of British rule over Egypt, Coptic intellectual and Egyptian nationalist Salama Musa voiced a bitter sentiment prevalent among a rising strata of urban intelligentsia; "The English," he soberly explained,

have relentlessly fought two things in our country. They tried to keep us in the darkness of ignorance and in the humiliation of poverty by preventing the development of education and of industry.<sup>25</sup>

As this period remains outside our purview, we will simply make some general observations, considered mainly from the perspective of Cairo, and in terms of an organic process of contestation over the "nation," drawing considerably on Partha Chatterjee's theoretical insights into the development of non-Western nationalisms. We will also address a number of specific themes, including the problems, possibilities - and estrangements - that attended the translation of the "local" and "regional" life of Alexandrian Orthodoxy into national idiom and practice.

The 25-year period after the British defeat of the 'Urabi revolution and its occupation of Egypt has been described as one of "colonial quiescence" during which the social and proto-

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<sup>24</sup> During the lengthy tenure of Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer) as Consul General in Egypt (1883-1908), a range of policy decisions were taken which had a profound effect on the political, social and economic development of the country. British agents filled the upper-echelons of the military, while British supervisors were placed over various governmental departments. Among the more ignominious features of Cromer's rule was the paltry allowance for education (below 1% of the total budget). This was partly due to the Consul-General's conviction that education gave rise to political dissidence; Donald Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18-19.

The effect of British colonial rule on the Coptic community and developments in communal/minority politics is open to debate. On the "Coptic Question" and British rule, see Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2013), 42-48; Bayly, "Representing Copts." While Cromer had unreserved contempt for the Copts, he believed that their basic skills (in computation, land measurement and the like) was superior to the Muslims, and Copts were significantly overrepresented in the colonial bureaucracy. In 1906, Copts constituted 45% of the native Egyptians serving in government ministries; Hall, *Traditional Egyptian Christianity*, 142. Despite these numbers, some Copts still argued that the practices of British rule were prejudicial against their community; perhaps the most prominent of this number was Coptic journalist and Kyriakos Mikhail, who was sent to London as a representative of the "Coptic press" in 1911 (during a period of "inter-communal tension.") There, he wrote a book on the "Coptic Question" aimed at influencing British policy; see *Copts and Moslems under British Control: A Collection of Facts and a Résumé of Authoritative Opinions on the Coptic Question* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1911).

<sup>25</sup> Musa, *Education*, 27.

nationalist agitation of 1881-82 had apparently disappeared.<sup>26</sup> According to a familiar narrative, nationalist activity only "resumed" in the first decade of the twentieth century as native elites began to form political parties.<sup>27</sup> Recent scholarship has challenged this characterization, focusing on the persistence of "subterranean" resistances across the period, as well as the new spaces and modes of sociability wherein moral, social and communal/national questions were debated and contested.<sup>28</sup> Chatterjee has noted that a critical feature in the articulation of anti-colonial nationalisms is the creation of a "domain of sovereignty within colonial society" which was a precursor to political mobilization. It is here where, in his words, "nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western."<sup>29</sup>

During the "quiescent" 25-year period after 1882, essential features of this domain continued to be articulated and contested in what was called the Egyptian/Arabic *nahda*, or "awakening." This ostensibly "quiet" period has frequently been overlooked by historians who have sought out the "story of nationalism" in the struggle for political power. It was, however, organically linked with the subsequent "moment" of political contestation, insofar as questions of political and moral subjectivity and corporate identity were heavily contested during the period.

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<sup>26</sup> For a wide-ranging study of various forces which converged during the late 1870s and ultimately gave rise to revolution, see Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*; Alexander Scholch's *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-political Crisis in Egypt, 1878-1882* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981) is a good, though somewhat tedious micro-political study of the crisis.

<sup>27</sup> For recent revisionist scholarship on this neglected period in the historiography, see Marilyn Booth and Anthony Gorman, eds. *The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> These included welfare organizations, literary organs, salons and secret societies. Michael Gaspar has examined the rise of a modern "literate intelligentsia" from this period, and their development of an idea of "Egyptian-ness" which included the "*effendiya*" together with the *fellahin* as a corporate whole. As a group, the *effendiya* vied for power, positioning themselves between the "feudalist" Turco-Circassian aristocracy and the peasantry. See *Power of Representation*, 1-3; 7-10. By the interwar years, this "middle" position would become, in Lucie Ryzova's description, not only a conceptual zone between rich and poor, but a "site of the construction of the modern national culture and identity." "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New *Effendiya*'" in *Re-envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, eds. Arthur Goldschmidt et al. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 133.

<sup>29</sup> Chatterjee, "Nation and Its Fragments," 6.

In what follows, we will give particular attention to one literary work which is representative of the intellectual ferment of the time, and which was published at the nexus of two distinct periods of nationalist development - the period of "colonial quiescence" and the succeeding period of political contestation and mobilization.

In 1906, Ramzi Tadrus, a Coptic elite and nationalist, wrote *The Present and Future of Ethiopia (Kitab Hadir al-Habasha wa Mustaqbaliha)* in which he contemplated the potential relevance of "*al-Habasha*" in the life of the nation. In highlighting the "Alexandrian" connection, he arguably sought to accentuate this area of unique "Coptic" interest and influence, and to integrate it within the field of nationalist discourse. In his work, the ecclesiastical and cultural bonds between *Misr* and *al-Habasha* were invested with new meaning and application, which manifests the creative potential of nationalist thought, even as it invites us to consider some of the tensions that were contained in this process of imagining the nation.

Chatterjee has identified three stages that he proposes to be generally characteristic of the development of non-Western nationalisms.<sup>30</sup> These stages are, respectively, the "moment of departure," the "moment of manoeuvre" and the "moment of arrival." Early on, there is a basic recognition of

an essential cultural difference between East and West. Modern European culture, it is thought, possesses attributes which make the European culturally equipped for power and progress. While such attributes are lacking in the 'traditional' cultures of the East ... the nationalist's claim is that this backwardness is not a character which is historically immutable; it can be transformed by the nation acting collectively.

The fundamental dichotomy between East and West is in place, whereby the "superiority of the West lies in the materiality of its culture," while the East's superiority resides in the "spiritual

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<sup>30</sup> He structures this in part after Gramsci's three-stage theory of "passive revolution" - wherein a fledgling bourgeois in pursuit of hegemony is not powerful enough to confront the structures of state, and so it is forced into a "war of position," a kind of political trench warfare," seeking a "molecular transformation of the state." Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought," 45.

aspects of its culture." The advancement of the East would require a "cultural synthesis" - the self-conscious responsibility of an "enlightened" vanguard whose task it would be to redeem a backward and irrational population, suffering as they were from centuries of cultural decay.<sup>31</sup> In a colonial setting in which they are not in position to seize the reins of power, an "elite domain" of nationalist politics would need to mobilize disparate classes and groups in order to confront and finally dislodge the colonial power.<sup>32</sup> Finally at the moment of arrival, the contradictions and contestations endemic to an earlier stage are "glossed over," as the advance guard of modernity in post-colonial states conceals tensions beneath veils of national unity. The nation is now identified with a state project of order and progress, while innumerable "resistances to that normalizing project" become the nation's nagging and scarcely acknowledged "fragments."<sup>33</sup>

Our case differs from the Indian one in some important respects. It was not exposed to formal colonial rule until much later, and de jure independence was achieved sooner. However, in the Middle East and elsewhere, as Juan Cole has noted, "colonies often existed before colonialism." The basic features of the East-West polarity had already been confronted in a condition sometimes called "informal empire," and this gave rise to a range of approaches to cultural synthesis, which produced some distinctive discursive formulations such as what has

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<sup>31</sup> The process of forging this cultural synthesis - which combined the superior (material) qualities of the West with the superior (spiritual) qualities of the East - involved a creative energy and imagination which preceded the appearance of nationalism as a political project; Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought," 50-51. Shaden Tageldin's analysis of 'Ali Mubarak's 1867 novel *'Alam al-Din* provides a fascinating illustration of the appropriation and subversion of the European framework that this entailed. The novel's protagonist, Shaykh 'Alam al-Din, discovers in "pro-Islamic Orientalist scholarship" a denial of the "superiority of imperial Europe." 'Ali Mubarak uses the voice of his English Orientalist character to reestablish the "Arab-Islamic culture as an epistemological universal: the touchstone of the very terms that the British Empire, poised to invade Egypt, would hijack - civilization, progress, modernity." Here, at this moment of cultural synthesis, 'Ali Mubarak's "East" appropriates Western epistemologies and even claims them for its own. See *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 163-64. Examples of this intellectual dynamic are numerous, which was prevalent in the work of Salama Musa. One of his articles, for example was provocatively titled "Misr Asl Hadarat al-'Alem" ("Egypt, Source of World Civilization"); cited in Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 309 fn. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought," 51.

<sup>33</sup> Chatterjee, "Nation and Its Fragments," 13; "Nationalist Thought," 51.

been called the phenomenon of "Ottoman Orientalism" and comparable variations.<sup>34</sup> These differences notwithstanding, much of Chatterjee's analysis is illuminative to our case.

Long before the "Coptic question" became a politically fraught and sublimated "fragment" of the postcolonial Egyptian nation-state, Coptic elite nationalists were part of the creative ferment and lively negotiations that were involved in the emergence of a modern national idea, during which time "many contradictory possibilities" of community existed.<sup>35</sup> Ramzi Tadrus, who had served as an editor of the journal *Misr*, was among the more prominent of this number. In looking to wider bonds that united peoples of the "East," Tadrus was hardly alone. At the time of his writing, *Misr* was still - at least formally - attached to the Ottoman Empire, and many public intellectuals and activists were drawn to Ottoman and Islamic solidarities in their deliberations about modern community.<sup>36</sup> In his appeals to the historical ties linking *Misr* with "*al-Habasha*," Tadrus was arguably infusing the debates about the "nation" with a distinctively "Coptic" dimension, perhaps as a counterweight to discourses that were perceived to threaten the nation's Christian element with marginalization. Tadrus attempted to give contemporary relevance to something that was very real - the bonds that connected the peoples of *Bilad Misr* and *Bilad al-Habasha* in divers ways, ecclesiastically, culturally and otherwise, over many centuries. As he wrote these pages, other projects were underway among the Copts of *Misr*. Some Coptic children were even learning the Amharic language, and the *Maglis al-Milli* and the

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<sup>34</sup> For a good working definition of "informal empire," see Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Chatterjee, "Nation and its Fragments," 13. His intervention came at a time when other "regionally" inflected affinities were articulated in the nationalist/proto-nationalist position against colonial rule. Most prominent among these was the pro-Ottoman position of the Watani Party; see Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> The appeals to Ottomanism only began to recede after the outbreak of World War I, and the declaration of Egypt as a British protectorate in 1914; On the decline of Ottomanism, see Jankowski and Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, 4-10; The Journal *Misr* was a favored organ of many of the lay elites affiliated with the *Maglis al-Milli*, and played a leading role in the propaganda campaign for a "Coptic congress" at Asyut in 1911 which was ostensibly organized to counter exclusivist Islamic political trends; Mustafa el-Feki, *Copts in Egyptian Politics 1919-1952* (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1991), 40.

patriarchate were beginning to plan various (mainly educational) missions to Ethiopia.<sup>37</sup>

In writing *The Present and Future of Ethiopia (al-Habasha)*, Ramzi Tadrus was capitalizing on a unique moment, as Ethiopia was a topic of considerable interest across much of the colonized world. Like Japan, Ethiopia had become an important symbol of the "East," insofar as it was an "Eastern" exception, defying characterizations that were frequently deployed to substantiate "Western" superiority and to legitimate colonial rule.<sup>38</sup> At the high-point of European colonial expansion, Ethiopia had not only maintained its "independence," but its defiance of the colonial tide was dramatically enacted before the eyes of the world in 1896 as Ethiopian forces routed the Italians at the Battle of Adwa - an event which was to become a pivotal moment in the annals of anti-colonial resistance movements.<sup>39</sup>

In the years that followed, a spate of Arabic language books on Ethiopia were printed in Cairo. Among these was Tadrus' volume, the stated purpose of which was to ascertain "how that nation [*umma*] preserved its vitality and its existence, and [to discover] the characteristics of a

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<sup>37</sup> Among the youths who learned Amharic was Naguib Iskander Bey, born in 1887; see Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 31. Copts staffed the initial government school, Menelik II School, and the church was responsible for the educational system for several decades following; Shenk, "The Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 53. The educational missions continued well into the century, although eventually Haile Sellassie began to distance education from the influence of the Coptic clerical and lay establishments; Juzif Ramiz Amin, "Dawr al-Kanisa al-Qibtiya fi Ifriqya," (master's thesis, University of Cairo, 2000), 398. Educational books were initially translated from Arabic to Amharic, but this was discontinued and translations were made directly from European languages. See Murad Kamil, "Translations from Arabic in Ethiopic Literature" in *Bulletin de la Societe d'archeologie copte* 7 (1941), 71. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest a "clean break" in these Alexandrian relationships. For example, in 1944 Haile Sellassie established the first clerical college in his kingdom, and four Egyptian professors were included on its staff; Riyad, *Kanizat Itiyubiya*, 202.

<sup>38</sup> For the symbolic significance of Japan in Ottoman discourses of modernity, see Renée Worringer, "'Sick Man of Europe' or 'Japan of the Near East'?: Constructing Ottoman modernity in the Hamidian and young Turk eras," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004): 207-30.

<sup>39</sup> This was the triumph of a "black African army over a white European one," and in a sense a defeat of white supremacist claims. Ian Spears, "The Ethiopian Crisis and the Emergence of Ethiopia in a Changing State System," in *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact*, ed. G. Bruce Strang (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 34-36. For Adwa's significance in a global context, and particularly as it related to anti-colonial and black nationalist ideologies, see Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia, eds., *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory Against European Colonialism* (New York: Algora, 2006) and Chapter 15 of Isaac, *Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church*, 223-30. The chapter, titled "Ethiopianism – Significance for Africans and Afro-Americans," provides an overview of religious, cultural and political movements that derived inspiration from Ethiopia.



people [who] ... trumped all the nations of the East." <sup>40</sup> Tadrus added that Egyptians needed to "study the circumstances of independent nations" so that they might "walk in their principles." <sup>41</sup> He drew clear national distinctions between the people of *al-Habasha* and those of *Misr*, and indeed he even dropped the "*Bilad*" from "*Bilad al-Habasha*," which reflects a shift toward the conceptualization of a defined territorial object. Yet, throughout the text these distinctions were tempered by his sustained appeal to layers of affinity and points of contact between the two "nations." Aside from bonds of religion - he emphasized that the large majority of their people belonged to the "Coptic *madhhab*" - he also drew on their shared "Semitic" roots, in addition to their common affiliation under the overarching banner of "Eastern" peoples. <sup>42</sup>

At first sight, a degree of ambivalence runs through Tadrus' analysis of Ethiopia. It was unquestionably a great nation, "united by the true Orthodox faith" and by "love and brotherhood," but its people were steeped in "ignorance." <sup>43</sup> Despite the virtues that allowed their "nation" (*watan/umma*) to remain independent, its primitive state remained the "greatest barrier to progress and civilization." However, the people of *al-Habasha* were zealous for learning, and Tadrus predicted that their country would soon produce "great philosophers, scholars and men of the pen because ... independence quickly advances nations to glory and greatness." Here, he sought to tether the Copts of *Misr* to these "independent" coreligionists, with whom they formed a "solid edifice." Ethiopia's intellectual heritage, including their law books and scriptures, all originated with the Copts of *Misr*, and their religious traditions and sayings were identical with those of their Coptic brethren. <sup>44</sup> Just as their history was a shared one, the strength and progress

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<sup>40</sup> Ramzi Tadrus, *Kitab Hadir al-Habasha wa Mustaqbaliha*, (Cairo: Matba'at Misr, 1906), 4. Among the other works on Ethiopia were two books written by officers who had served in the Egyptian army; See Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 86-89.

<sup>41</sup> *Kitab Hadir al-Habasha*. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 81.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11; 36-37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11; 83.

of their peoples would rest on a perpetuation of mutual bonds. The people of "*al-Habasha*" were largely illiterate and lived like "naive savages," a condition that he contrasted with that of "our Egyptian country" and other "more advanced lands."<sup>45</sup>

Implicit here is that, just as in the days of the transference of scriptures, law codes and sacred traditions, there can be a positive role for the sons of *Misr*, and particularly the Copts in the modern Ethiopian awakening. His scheme fits precisely what Chatterjee has identified as the structure of anti-colonial nationalisms, which erects a fundamental distinction between the spiritual and material domains. Although "*al-Habasha*" had proven to be most outstanding in the "spiritual" virtues of the "East" - indeed, it deserved to be emulated - they remained "naive savages" in the material domain. He acknowledged a civilizational distance between *Misr* and *al-Habasha*, but this was by no means irreversible. In chapters three and four, we addressed the emergence of a discursive distance between *Misr* and the "south," and here, we note an important caveat to the discourse. Just as the gulf in the materiality of culture which separated *Misr* from "the West" could be overcome (notwithstanding colonialist claims to the contrary) here the distance which separated *Misr* and its southern peripheries was merely epiphenomenal and not based upon racialist or other immutable distinctions. As Tadrus imagined the "East," he found that *Misr* and the Copts of *Misr* were superior in what was identified as a virtue of the "West," while *al-Habasha* had proven itself to be a paragon of the spiritual virtues of the "East." Their respective conditions thus formed a kind of complementarity, bearing witness to the fecundity of the anti-colonial nationalist imagination, which from the beginning was thinking of "new forms of the modern community."<sup>46</sup>

This elite Copt had contributed a unique vision for an Eastern renaissance, within which

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>46</sup> Chatterjee, "Nation and Its Fragments," 13.

"Copts" and "Ethiopians" were distinctively woven. He celebrated the rise of "the great emperor Menelik" who was now opening "schools of manufacture and war and agriculture and medicine." Indeed, the battle against the Italians had been a temporary detour for Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), who was undertaking a project of imperial expansion to the south (alternatively called "restoration" or "colonialism") that nearly doubled the size of his empire. Although Tadrus added that Menelik's projects were "of no use without the spread of primary education in all the villages to enlighten the *umma*," it is precisely here where the Copts of *Misr* could contribute a positive role.<sup>47</sup> In 1906, the patriarchate sent the first Egyptian educational mission to Ethiopia under the leadership of Hanna Salib, the Coptic minister of interior who would go on to become director of education in the Ethiopian kingdom.<sup>48</sup>

Tadrus' commentary was part of a ferment within an elite domain of nationalist thought, as various agents discussed and debated community, its meaning and constitution, from a vast fund of material and layers of connectivity. However, as Ziad Fahmy has observed, although an intellectual elite developed the "theoretical framework" of nationalism, it would have remained a sterile academic exercise without "the dissemination and the adoption of nationalist ideas by the masses."<sup>49</sup> In recent years, a body of scholarship has emerged which looks to the diffusion of an idea of Egyptian-ness, and the involvement both of elites and non-elites in the ongoing process of identity formation.<sup>50</sup> This is a welcome turn, and constitutes an important elaboration on the

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<sup>47</sup> Tadrus, *Kitab Hadir al-Habasha*, 39; Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 90-91.

<sup>48</sup> Amin, "Dawr al-Kanisa," 397. For details on these efforts into the fourth decade of the century, see Riyad, *Kanisa al-Iskandariya*, 132-4). Menelik's reliance on Copts to staff a new "modern" school was in deference to *Abuna* Matewos, who was adamant in his opposition to European instructors. Prouty, *Empress Taytu and Menilek II*, 296.

<sup>49</sup> Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>50</sup> See for example Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998); Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*; Gerhoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*; Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley: Berkeley University of California Press, 2005); and Michael Gaspar, *Power of Representation*. Gaspar breaks new ground in his analysis of the place of the vast majority of the population (the

still underexplored moment of maneuver that Chatterjee identified some 30 years ago.

An earlier emphasis on elite nationalist or proto-nationalist discourses arguably discouraged inquiry into very different notions of "community" that were concealed beneath modern communal frames of thought. Within the domain of what Chatterjee calls "peasant consciousness," the delimitations of community were not based upon fixed objects like tribe, confession or locality, but instead were flexible and amenable to rapid transformations in constitution.<sup>51</sup> We have alluded previously to two potential "regionally-inflected" expressions of this flexibility. In the one case, Copts were said to have looked to the south, anticipating the possible advent of the prophesied "Tawadros the Righteous."<sup>52</sup> The other involved the very real prospect that *fellahin* of the *Sa'id* would answer the call of the Sudanese "Mahdi," and rise up against the British occupation. Within "peasant consciousness," the same absence of reified boundaries that allowed for "shared" saints and religious festivals also made the spread of a popular resistance movement from beyond the southern horizons a distinct possibility.

For Tadrus and his ilk, the backward customs and superstitions of the *fellahin* would need to be eliminated if the nation was to progress along the path of reason. In other words, they projected a vision of "community" which could transcend confessional, geographic and other divisions even as they assumed the solemn task of eliminating a domain of consciousness within which these did not exist as intransigent barriers. The effort to bridge the chasm between these

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*fellahin*) in the evolving conceptions of the nation. He follows a process in which the *effendiya* - urban educated elites - gradually came to conceive of a "community" which included the peasantry as at once the embodiment of backwardness and the emblem of cultural authenticity. In this emerging idea of national community the peasant was included, as Gaspar has shown, through *representation*; he was at once a "moral subject" and an "object of reform." *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>51</sup> Chatterjee, "Nation and its Fragments," 162-64. Chatterjee's analysis of "consciousness" is informed by Ranajit Guha's seminal essay, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45-86.

<sup>52</sup> At the time of Tadrus' writing, Blackman found a similar expectation. There was a conviction "among some, if not all, of those Copts belonging to the *fellahin* class that the Abyssinians will one day conquer Egypt" at which point the "Copts will ... hold up their hands, thus exposing to view the sign of their religion." Blackman, *The Fellahin*, 54.

domains constituted the elite nationalists' most profound challenge as they sought to reconcile "modes of thought characteristic of a peasant consciousness with the rationalist forms of an 'enlightened' nationalist politics." During the "moment of manoeuvre," the elites needed to "reach" the masses - to involve them in a mass movement as a necessary step toward independence - while keeping them at a distance from the structures of state.<sup>53</sup> In Chatterjee's analysis, Mahatma Gandhi served as a vital bridge between two domains of consciousness. Though Gandhi did not articulate a "peasant ideology," his ideas did not belong to the framework of enlightenment thought of his interlocutors.<sup>54</sup> From his unique location, he was able to "speak" to the unlettered masses with extraordinary effectiveness. Nehru and others recognized the indispensable role that Gandhi served, even as they were utterly baffled by his craft. Their rationalist framework was not equipped to explain the Gandhi phenomenon, and when Nehru tried to do so, he could only resort to a supra-rational vocabulary of mystery and magic.

Although Patriarch Kirulus V did not serve a role in the Egyptian nationalist movement as Gandhi served in the Indian movement, Chatterjee's observations about the Gandhi phenomenon shed light on a number of features of the patriarch's career, including his "relationship" with the "masses," and his location (or perceived location) outside the enlightenment framework of national elites and colonial authorities. During the patriarchal interregnum of 1870-1874, a Coptic communal council (*Maglis al-Milli*) was formed which was an institutional expression for a rising class of landed elites, and a reflection of wider debates about constitutionalism and parliamentary government.<sup>55</sup> From the point of view of many of these elites, the ecclesiastical party was coming into view as an unremitting obstacle standing in

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<sup>53</sup> Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought," 51.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>55</sup> On the Young Turks, the Ottoman constitutionalist movement and its effects in *Misr*, see Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 118-122.

the way of progress, and Patriarch Kirulus V became the embodiment of the problem of benightedness. In fact, he was by no means the anti-modern reactionary that his detractors claimed.<sup>56</sup> His resistance was aimed at the more radical aspects of their vision, which included the practical separation of the community's spiritual and temporal affairs, whereby the civil and fiscal (i.e. material/public) tasks would slip into their illuminated hands, while the ecclesiastics would retain supremacy in spiritual matters.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from a faction of the small - though growing - ranks of Coptic elites and *effendiya*, the patriarch was very popular, and he was able to marshal his "spiritual powers" to effectively undercut the tactics of his pioneering adversaries.<sup>58</sup> In 1892, at the instigation of the *Maglis al-Milli*, the government sentenced the recalcitrant prelate to a desert exile. Before his withdrawal however, the patriarch issued the "parting thunders of excommunication." In Leeder's description, these brought all the ecclesiastical functions to a standstill and produced desolation in the hearts of the "vast majority" of Copts who longed for his restoration.<sup>59</sup> The *Maglis al-Milli* was unable to long withstand the popular pressure, and Kirulus was returned from exile five months later, a capitulation which was also taken as a blow to British prestige.<sup>60</sup>

The popular jubilation at his homecoming was anything but a "communal" phenomenon. One Coptic writer and patriarchal loyalist recalled the striking presence of bedouin along the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibrahim, *Copts of Egypt*, 122-23; Sedra, *Mission to Modernity*, 162-66.

<sup>57</sup> Council member Murqus Simaika testified to this in an anonymous 1897 article. In it, he recalled that the lay council left the "spiritual powers and functions" of the patriarch intact, and only wished to eliminate his control of "the secular affairs of the [Coptic] nation"; Simaika, "Awakening," 743. This clerical-lay tension would long persist, and in fact it was to become a defining feature in narrations of the next 80 years of Coptic history.

<sup>58</sup> For a very important discussion of the emergence and development of the *effendiya* as a social category, see Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity." During the nineteenth century, what had originally been an honorific title became associated with elite, Western educated bureaucrats, and later it assumed nationalist significance. By the interwar period, the term was no longer associated specifically with elites, but signified the burgeoning strata of what Ryzova calls the "articulate but poor urban male." The term or concept of *effendiya*, she stresses, did not describe a class but a cultural condition - connoting both social mobility and "the passage from non-modernity to modernity;" *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>59</sup> Leeder, *Modern Sons*, 260.

<sup>60</sup> Ibrahim, *Copts of Egypt*, 121.

desert road, riding on horses to the right and left of the patriarch as they "sang Arabic hymns" and intermittently fired rifles into the air all along the way, and until the procession arrived at the train station.<sup>61</sup> Simaika conceded that the "whole population, the Muslims foremost, turned out to welcome him with bands of music" in a crowd that was so great that "men mounted on top of trees, on lamp-posts on anything that afforded a footing."<sup>62</sup> If his sacerdotal power and charisma frustrated the efforts of the Coptic lay elite, colonial authorities were equally vexed by this figure whom Lord Cromer was said to have called the "greatest reactionary force in Egypt."<sup>63</sup>

Simaika sought to rationalize the popular enthusiasm through a strategy of representation, suggesting that these faceless multitudes were stirred to pity by the patriarch's severe treatment and were inclined to "forget and forgive his past errors."<sup>64</sup> For Leeder, this wild display was a symptom of the mysterious power of a patriarch who was able to outmaneuver the colonial agents by way of something approaching a conjuring trick. Leeder simply conceded that the "worldly wisdom of the political rulers of Egypt was forced to bow before this subtle priestly influence." He was able to describe, but scarcely to explain, the incredible euphoria that met the patriarch on his homecoming:

Never within memory [had] Cairo been the scene of such a thrilling popular ovation ... crowds held up the city, and the great sea of enthusiasm swept aside every idea but that of passionate rejoicing at the restoration, the Moslem populace celebrating the great event equally with the Copts. The people wept for joy, and sang praises of the exile, as though a god had been brought back to them."

To demonstrate the ubiquity of this "passion of attachment to the patriarch," he described a pastoral journey up the Nile that Kirulus made years later, and which terminated in Khartoum.

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<sup>61</sup> Manqariyus, *al-Qawl al-Yaqin*, 228-29.

<sup>62</sup> Simaika, "Awakening," 745.

<sup>63</sup> Ibrahim, *Copts of Egypt*, 123. In his memoirs, Cromer described the patriarch as the "incarnation of the most stolid form of conservatism;" Earl of Cromer (Evelyn Baring), *Modern Egypt* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1908), 2:212

<sup>64</sup> Simaika, "Awakening," 746.

All along the way, in every town and village of call "scenes like those of Cairo were re-enacted," and Leeder found that "there was something almost barbaric in the abandon of the simple folk, both Moslem and Copt, of the remoter towns." <sup>65</sup>

The trope of a modern nation overcoming sectarian distinctions obstructs our view of a much different dynamic. Here, Muslims celebrated the triumphal return of the very figure whom many enlightened Copts found so exasperating. An archetype of "reaction" was capable of electrifying the very irrational throngs that the national elites would seek to represent and later to mobilize. <sup>66</sup> Although we do not attempt to do so here, it is clear that the story of nationalist development must account for the complex process of negotiation that accompanied the meeting of very different domains of consciousness.

### **Nations and National Churches**

At the end of World War I, a delegation of wealthy elites, led by former government minister Sa'ad Zaghlul, sought permission to present Egypt's case for independence at the Paris Peace Conference. After London rejected the appeal, the nationalist movement began to organize mass demonstrations. The popular agitation mounted, particularly after the British authorities arrested Zaghlul, as urban and rural, elite and non-elite populations joined in a mass revolt. <sup>67</sup> Churches and mosques became important meeting places during this historic moment, and they continued to serve as sites for nationalist gatherings through the mid-1920s. <sup>68</sup> These were not the exclusive clubs and salons where elites would debate questions of political community and

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<sup>65</sup> Leeder, *Modern Sons*, 261.

<sup>66</sup> When a "nation-wide" revolt erupted in 1918/1919, pictures of the patriarch were among the paraphernalia that was often carried in the public demonstrations. B.L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 62.

<sup>67</sup> M.W. Daly, "The British Occupation 1882-1922," *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:247-250.

<sup>68</sup> Carter, *Copts in Egyptian Politics*, 62.



the nation. They were venues and meeting points for elites and non-elites, urbanites as well as the *fellahin* who were increasingly migrating to the cities. In some cases, Copts preached from the pulpits of mosques and Muslims sermonized behind church lecterns, a phenomenon which was an innovation of the 1919 revolution. But if startling new bridges were being thrown up, they were arguably across domains of consciousness as much as they were across confessional lines. These were important moments in a widespread mobilization which was both galvanized and articulated "inside;" in the privileged inner sanctums of the nation where colonial powers were neutralized. The Coptic intellectual and elite nationalist Salama Musa later acknowledged this in his autobiography; "Our movement in Egypt in 1919 was only successful," he recalled, "in so far as it was carried on by religious momentum."<sup>69</sup> Like Nehru, Musa recognized that purely materialist frames were not sufficient to sustain an anti-colonial mass movement. And it is at least a fascinating footnote to the "connected world of empires" that Musa later corresponded with Gandhi about nationalist resistance, and even authored a book about him in 1934.<sup>70</sup>

If cries such as "long live the crescent with the cross" were novel, they were not simply expressions that nationalist elites contrived to artificially unite Muslims and Copts beneath a single banner. Rather, they were a modern articulation of kinds of solidarity that were hardly alien to a popular consciousness. In a similar vein, we can approach other proposed "imagined communities" which drew on cultural, geographic and religious sensibilities, and which included the much derided idea of a "unity of the Nile Valley" linking Egypt and the Sudan as a single national and political entity.<sup>71</sup> All of this proceeded beneath a heavy yoke as colonial agents

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<sup>69</sup> Musa, *Education*, 184.

<sup>70</sup> Salama Musa, *Gandhi wa al-Harakat al-Hindiya* (Cairo: Salama Musa lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1962). The phrase is taken from the title of Fawaz and Bayly's introduction to *Modernity and Culture*. On the popular interest in Gandhi that arose during these years, see Chapter Three ("Gandhi: Hero of Egypt") in Noor-Aiman Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 111-128.

<sup>71</sup> On the discourses of "Nile Unity" in the 1930s, see Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 110-11.

marshaled their powers to thwart the emergence of solidarities.<sup>72</sup> We have already alluded to this "divide and rule" strategy as it related to *al-Sudan*, where "pro-Egyptian" and "anti-Egyptian" factions existed in nationalist circles. The British colonial agents were aware of the potential for common cause, particularly during and after the events of 1919, and encouraged a distinctive Sudanese national idea to offset coordinated struggle against occupation.<sup>73</sup> *Qumus* Sergius, the Coptic priest who in 1919 famously preached against the occupation daily, and for many weeks at al-Azhar, expressed as much after he was exiled to *al-Sudan* by the colonial authorities. "Whether I am in Sudan or in Egypt," he defiantly declared, "I am in my country. I will not stop telling the people to protest against you until we free our country from your presence."<sup>74</sup>

By 1922, Egypt had joined Ethiopia in "independence." The British were forced - after much resistance - to capitulate to the demands that had been articulated by Zaghlul and the Wafd, and unilaterally declared Egyptian "independence." However, the declaration included a set of conditions that in practice gave the British free rein to operate in the country. The turbulent decades of the 1930s and 1940s would throw into relief the chimerical nature of Egyptian "independence," even as it exposed the continuing colonial threats to "independent" Ethiopia. Beginning in the early 1930s, Italy used its position in Eritrea as a base from which to foment rebellions in the Ethiopian provinces in order to weaken the central government. This policy finally gave way to Fascist Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and the commencement of the Ethiopian

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<sup>72</sup> This included the alleged provocations of Muslim-Christian antagonisms on the part of Sir Eldon Gorst (Cromer's successor as consul general). Salama Musa cited a number of examples of this "typically colonialist" strategem; e.g. the government would publish, without any apparent reason, statistics "showing the respective numbers of Coptic and Muslim officials, with the result that congresses were convened on each side at which demands were put forward to have the positions redressed of the groups that believed their interests to be harmed." Musa, *Education*, 48.

<sup>73</sup> 'Afaf 'Abdel Majid Abu Hasabu, *Factional Conflict in the Sudanese Nationalist Movement 1918-1948* (Khartoum: University of Khartoum, 1985), 35, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Ibrahim, *Copts of Egypt*, 64.

crisis of 1935-6.<sup>75</sup> Haile Sellassie attempted to rally support for Ethiopia, during which he sent emissaries to Cairo in a futile attempt to coordinate with the Sanusi resistance against Italy in Libya. Although Egyptian nationalists were largely sympathetic to the Ethiopian plight and a Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia was even set up, they were more occupied with matters closer to home.<sup>76</sup>

This fraught international climate also had an effect on the regional life of Alexandrian Orthodoxy. In 1929, Sellassie had realized an important advance in his ambition for an autocephalous church when the *abun* consecrated five Ethiopian monks as suffragan bishops.<sup>77</sup> In 1937, as the *abun* was on leave at Cairo, the Italian authorities seized the opportunity to sever the Alexandrian ecclesiastical ties and install a native Ethiopian as head of the church. They were mainly motivated by geopolitical considerations, although *Abuna* Kirulus IV's determined stand against the invaders hardly endeared him to the invaders. In 1936, he stated publicly that the Italians had come to enslave the country and that anyone who gave them support was excommunicated and cursed.<sup>78</sup> When the Italian occupation ended in 1941 and the emperor returned to his country, he reversed the measure that the Italians had implemented, although he would continue to pursue autocephaly for the next 18 years.

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<sup>75</sup> G. Bruce Strang, "'Places in the Sun': Social Darwinism, Demographics and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia," in *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact*, ed. G. Bruce Strang (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 20-22.

<sup>76</sup> Haggai Erlich, "Egypt, Ethiopia, and 'The Abyssinian Crisis, 1935-1936'" in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths*, eds. Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 184-85.

<sup>77</sup> This departure from custom was initially opposed by some of the Ethiopian clergy; Sellassie, *Autobiography*, 169; Nicolas, *Church's Revival*, 16. It came five years after Haile Sellassie's celebrated visit to Cairo, during which he received a warm welcome from Coptic lay and church officials. On the visit, he addressed a number of outstanding issues. These included the right of Ethiopia to ordain bishops and the return of the keys to *Dayr* al-Sultan. However, his dialogue with the *Maglis al-Milli* regarding *Dayr* al-Sultan grew quite tense. The committee emphasized their willingness to continue receiving Ethiopians as guests, but nothing more. Later, their general assembly resolved that the *dayr* should remain "an Egyptian property;" see Haggai Erlich, "Ethiopia and Egypt - *Ras* Tafari in Cairo, 1924" *Aethiopica International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1 (1998), 72.

<sup>78</sup> Shenk, "Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church," 81. Ethiopian nationalist historiography, however, has tended to present *Abuna* Kirulus as less strident in his resistance to the Italian occupation. According to Ephraim Isaac, he only "parted company with the Italians when they pressured him on questions of the status of the Ethiopian Church, in relation to independence from Alexandria," *Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church*, 112.

Meanwhile, the years during and immediately following World War II had exposed the frailty of Egypt's "liberal experiment," while laying bare the corruption of the monarchy and the nationalist elites who controlled the Wafd and other parties. A new generation of *effendiya* was radicalized by the impotence or indifference of the old guard in the face of social and economic inequalities. Peasant revolts were becoming pervasive in the countryside, and urban discontent resulted in the burning of Cairo in early 1952. In July, a group of army officers engineered a coup d'état that effectively terminated the monarchy and ushered in a new era in Egyptian political history.<sup>79</sup> The revolution itself was an outgrowth of the social changes over the previous decades - nearly all of the men serving on the Revolutionary Command Council belonged to the lower middle class. The first years of the republic (instituted in 1953) under the de facto and then de jure leadership of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir might be considered the culmination of Egypt's long and faltering "moment of arrival." These early years of the republic saw the end of the British colonial presence, and the enactment of a series of nationalizations, land redistributions and other social reforms that subverted the position of foreign nationals and the landed aristocracy. At the moment of "arrival," nationalist discourse was "passive revolution uttering its own life story."<sup>80</sup> 'Abd al-Nasir plainly diagnosed the cause of the faded hopes of the 1919 Revolution - personal and class divisions had overwhelmed solidarity and "hampered the rational progress of our country" - and he offered "national unity" as an antidote.<sup>81</sup> Fellow Free Officer Anwar al-Sadat explained that the goal of the revolutionaries was to "to get Egypt out of the middle ages, to turn

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<sup>79</sup> Joel Beinin, "Egypt: society and economy, 1923-1952" in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:331; Alain Roussillon, "Republican Egypt interpreted: revolution and beyond" in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:338.

<sup>80</sup> Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought," 51.

<sup>81</sup> Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir, "Foreward" in Anwar Sadat, *Revolt on the Nile* (New York: The John Day Co., 1957), 5; 'Abd al-Nasir said that Egypt was going through two revolutions simultaneously (a political revolution and a social one), and this condition demanded "unity of all national elements"; Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Economica Books, 1959), 36-37.

it from a semi-feudal country into a modern, ordered, viable state" while conserving those customs of the nation that "did not impede on the real progress of the community." <sup>82</sup>

Here, we will recall Rieker's observation that the alternative *Sa'id*-centered histories, "written in the shadow of other, older histories" had already largely vanished during the era of the constitutional monarchy. Subaltern and "unorthodox" voices would continue to be heard on the "margins," and subterranean movements would continue - including in what one scholar has referred to as "Egypt's religious 'passive revolution.'" <sup>83</sup> But the hegemonic narrative and blueprint of Egypt's past, present and future would be projected from the center of the nation (-state) that was shorn of contradictions and discontinuities. <sup>84</sup> During the same period, the discourses of the Sudan as an inseparable part of Egypt vanished as the nationhood of the Sudanese people was consummated with an independent state in 1956. As for the Ethiopia connection, the interventions of Murad Kamil, Zahir Riyad and others continued for a time. In an effort to salvage the historical relationship, Riyad published a series of very critical articles about the Fascist occupation in the 1930s, but these gradually began to fade during the 1940s. Republican Egypt would indeed remain active in multiple fields of "regional" activity, as was most powerfully demonstrated in the ideological ascendancy of pan-Arabism, but these were framed, authorized and articulated from the centers of state. <sup>85</sup>

In all of this, the complex historical formation of the Anti-Chalcedonian see of

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<sup>82</sup> Sadat, *Revolt*, 60-61.

<sup>83</sup> Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 174. As for the historiography of modern Egypt, Gorman has pointed out that the Egyptian academy has largely remained within the bounds of "acceptable national discourse." The more critical and groundbreaking work, he added, has largely come from "non-academic" historians who are not as closely affected by the political and institutional constraints to revisionist scholarship; see Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics*, 107-11.

<sup>84</sup> Rieker, "The Sa'id and the City," 41.

<sup>85</sup> On the historiography of Arab nationalism, see Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih and Reeva Simon, eds., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Rashid Khalidi, "Arab Nationalism, Historical Problems in the Literature," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (1991): 1363-73; James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, eds. *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Alexandria was gradually accommodated to a formal order of boundaried nation-states. An Alexandrian patriarch (Yusab II) consecrated the first Ethiopian *abun* in 1951 and by 1959 the Ethiopian Church had at last achieved autocephaly; in other words, it was formally "nationalized." By executive fiat Gamal 'abd al-Nasir put an end to conflicts which had arisen during the previous century - Egypt, so to speak, had pronounced her verdict. But the modern interventions were more than this, as Chatterjee reminds us. At the moment of arrival, the agents of modernity assume the grave postcolonial task of conducting the nation(-state) along the "rational path of real history." In the case of India, the Gandhian "ideological intervention" was now consigned to the "religious" sphere, and separated from the "rational" (civil) sphere.<sup>86</sup>

The course in Egypt was rather similar. Sadat recalled that the Muslim Brotherhood was a "useful ally to our revolutionary movement," but it later became "an organization of unbounded fanaticism, and a menace to the public order."<sup>87</sup> It was becoming one of the nation's (more obdurate) fragments as the postcolonial state carried on its grave duty of purveying reason against the subaltern "domain of unreason," and championing science and order against the "domain of faith." It also assumed the (still ongoing) task of "locating" and policing the proper boundary between these realms. The undue trespasses of "religion" in the civil realm represented a challenge to this progressive course, as Sadat articulated in 1957:

The Egyptian is a religious man. He has a deep respect for all religions, and for spiritual values. But religion is one thing, its exploitation for political purposes quite another. It must not be given a purpose which it does not inherently possess. If a religion is turned into a political system, then fanaticism is born. This confusion of temporal power with the spiritual has been the downfall of many Oriental societies.<sup>88</sup>

The nagging contests between Coptic ecclesiastics and laity involved questions of the proper

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<sup>86</sup> Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought," 154.

<sup>87</sup> Sadat, *Revolt*, 30.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

boundary between temporal and spiritual spheres, and these too were "remedied" by acts of state. The very field of contest was largely eliminated through the absorption of educational and benevolent institutions into the national ministries of Education and Social Affairs, and the abolition of personal status religious courts and *ahli waqfs*.<sup>89</sup>

It was during this same period that the president intervened in the ongoing disputes between Ethiopia and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, ultimately agreeing to Emperor Haile Sellassie's demand for autocephaly. During a state visit to Cairo in 1959, the emperor looked on as Patriarch Kirulus VI consecrated an Ethiopian as patriarch-catholicos for the Ethiopian church.<sup>90</sup> For his part, Haile Sellassie was now unencumbered to carry on, in the words of Erlich, a national project which blended "traditionalism and modernization" beneath the banner of "a revitalized, nationalized church under his complete control."<sup>91</sup> But one major link between the Ethiopian Church and the Alexandrian see would be preserved. The latter retained its spiritual primacy, and Alexandria remained the "mother" - the *spiritual* mother - of the autocephalous Ethiopian church.<sup>92</sup> In his remarks at the inauguration of the new Alexandrian cathedral in 1968, Ethiopian patriarch Basilius emphasized this distinctive connection, proclaiming that the "spiritual relationship will continue to bind [Ethiopia and Alexandria] together." Here, he echoed words he had spoken at his investiture as metropolitan: "The Ethiopian church has secured its

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<sup>89</sup> Adel Azer Bestawros, "Communal Council, Coptic," *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 2:581-82. The Communal Council was finally abolished in 1962, and though a communal council reappeared in 1972, it had little influence; Sebastian Elsasser, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74-75.

<sup>90</sup> Haggai Erlich, "Identity and Church: Ethiopian-Egyptian Dialogue, 1924-59" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 1 (2000): 38-41.

<sup>91</sup> Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 127. The "spiritualization" of the role of ecclesiastics was evident in Ethiopia as well. One example of this was a 1944 law that limited the judicial purview of the church to "spiritual" matters; Riyad, *Tarikh Itiyubiya*, 203. Stéphane Ancel, "The Centralization Process of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: An Ecclesiastical History of Ethiopia During the 20th Century" in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 106, no. 3-4 (2011), 510.

<sup>92</sup> Some Ethiopians challenged this arrangement, arguing that they had a stronger claim to supremacy, given the Copts' minority status in a Muslim polity; Shenk, "Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church," 215.

right without disconnecting the existing ties in the spiritual realm." <sup>93</sup> As the churches acclimatized to their location in the "spiritual" domain of a modern order, it is scarcely surprising that the "international" ties that were maintained should carry a "spiritual" designation.

In 1954, the church witnessed another significant milestone as an Alexandrian patriarch sent a Coptic delegate to the conference of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, Illinois. <sup>94</sup> The moment was rich with symbolism as Alexandrian Christianity joined this global gathering of churches; it was now part of a nebulous assembly of "spiritualized" entities. At last freed from the trammels of provinciality, it would later help to found the Conference of Churches of all Africa, and by 1965 the official title of the patriarch had become "His Holiness Patriarch [Kirulus VI] Pope of Alexandria *and of all Africa*." <sup>95</sup> An ancient idea of "Africa" was reimagined to encompass the entirety of the continental land mass. This was in part a response to the attraction of many Christians of sub-Saharan Africa to an indigenous "African" Christian tradition. <sup>96</sup> Zahir Riyad recalled the first fruits of this new era, hailing a "discovery" on the part of some South Africans of what they deemed to be "a pure African church." From Riyad's point of view, it was natural that Alexandrian Orthodoxy should attract interest across the continent, for it had "possessed the national African imprint from its founding." <sup>97</sup> During the coming

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<sup>93</sup> Nicolas, *Church's Revival*, 25. The text of Archbishop Basilios' speech at his investiture (January 19, 1951) is found on 24-25. His 1968 speech (as patriarch) is published in al-Anba Ghrighuriyus, *Watha'iq lil-tarikh: al-Kanisa wa-Qadaya al-Watan wa al-Dawla wa al-Sharq al-Awsat* (Cairo: Usqufiyat al-Dirasat al-Lahutiya al-'Ulya wa al-Thaqafa al-Qibtiya wa al-Bahth al-'Ilmi, 1975-77), 2:196. This volume (195-99).

<sup>94</sup> Antunius al-Antuni, *Wataniyat al-Kanisa al-Qibtiya*, 2:70-71; Jacques Masson, "La Mission Copte," 297-98  
<sup>95</sup> Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 469.

<sup>96</sup> Anba Antonious Murqus, a longtime Coptic Bishop for African Affairs, quoted one professor in Zaire who had given voice to this appeal. After learning about the Coptic Church, he criticized the "colonialists and the Western Churches" for hiding "such [an African] Church from us for all these centuries." Bishop Antonious Markos, *Come Across ... and Help us: The Story of the Coptic Church in Africa at the Present Time* (Johannesburg: Coptic Bishoproic of African Affairs, 1996), 2:61.

<sup>97</sup> Zahir Riyad, "St Mark's Doctrine and Africa" in *Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate: St. Mark and the Coptic Church* (Cairo, 1968), 37; Zahir Riyad, *Kanisa al-Iskandariya*, 5. The contacts with South Africa commenced in 1950; al-Antuni, *Wataniyat al-Kanisa al-Qibtiya*, 2:205. After the autocephaly of the Ethiopian Church and the shifts in the political climate, Riyad began to focus on such wider topics of African history, including European colonialism and the anti-colonial movements; for example, see *Ist'imar Ifriqiya*, (Cairo: al-Dar al-Qawmiya lil-Taba'a wa al-Nashar,



decades, congregations in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and elsewhere would join the fold as daughter churches of Alexandria.<sup>98</sup>

This fascinating and momentous expansion of the church can reinforce a false impression of a "Coptic Church" finally escaping its stifling provinciality. To avoid such a reading, it is important to acknowledge that the modern period has engendered profound transformations, and given rise to "religion" as a universal conceptual category.<sup>99</sup> The patriarch was becoming "pope of all Africa" at the very time in which memories of "Egyptian" monks travelling to distant regions and claiming land patrimonies, or wielding political, juridical and other institutionalized forms of temporal power were fading away. As it adapted to an order of nation states, the Anti-Chalcedonian see of Alexandria was also in some sense becoming a fully modern religious institution. Its scope both narrowed and expanded at one and the same time, a phenomenon which goes a long way toward explaining the concomitant universalization and fragmentation of Alexandrian Orthodoxy and its following.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church finally gained its "national" independence, and when Eritrea attained statehood years later, it too would secure an autocephalous patriarch. As for the Copts, they now belonged to "minority communities" of Egypt and neighboring states. The expressions of an earlier order would continue to recede as confessional - and clerical/lay - lines were defined with ever increasing clarity. In Egypt, the custodians of "orthodoxy," presiding over their circumscribed, "private" demesne, continued to correct the corruptions of "popular

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1965.) In his writing on Ethiopia, he identified the Egyptians and Copts as an anti-colonial force in Ethiopia, both at the time of the Portuguese interlude and during the Italian occupation; Riyad, *Tarikh Itiyubiya*, 197.

<sup>98</sup> Bishop Antonious Markos, *An Introduction Into Theology of Mission* (Johannesburg: Coptic Orthodox Church Bishopric of African Affairs, 2001), 168; Masson, "La Mission," 298-306. Anba Antonious Murqus, the bishop for African affairs, has written several anecdotal accounts of the missions of sub-Saharan Africa. In 1964, there were perhaps 400 families in South Africa that had entered the Alexandrian communion; Watson, *Among the Copts*, 73. Watson provides a fascinating narrative of Coptic/Alexandrian African missions in recent decades, with particular focus on the life of Marcos al-Askiti, who was born in the border regions between modern Kenya and Uganda in 1942, and eventually ordained a Coptic priest; see *ibid.*, 72-92.

<sup>99</sup> See Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

religion." One commentator has noted an unmistakable consequence of this longstanding trend:

Muslims, once so numerous at the Coptic *mouleds* [religious festivals] are becoming rare. The clericalization of the rites leaves no place for them but points, on the contrary, to the aim of reconstituting a Coptic Egypt, mythically smooth and intact ...<sup>100</sup>

Meanwhile, through mission projects and the diaspora, the communities following the patriarchal see of Alexandria have proliferated across several continents. Modernity has transformed the Alexandrian see into a "globalized" phenomenon, and made it possible for its patriarch to look to the four corners of the earth, and behold a diffuse "spiritual" dominion.

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<sup>100</sup> Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, "The Coptic Mouleds: Evolution of the Traditional Pilgrimages" in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, eds. Nelly van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt (Oslo: Novus forlag, 1997), 226-27. For a study of the mawlid from the earlier part of the century including descriptions of 126 Islamic and Christian feasts, see J.W. McPherson, *The Moulids of Egypt (Egyptian Saints-Days)* (Cairo, 1941). Throughout the text, McPherson notes the various efforts on the part of religious and secular authorities to control the mawlid. He also noted that the "student class and the young effendis" (in other words, the *effendiya*) were not inclined to patronize these feasts.

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