The Coptic Contribution to Christian Civilization

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By the late Prof. Aziz Surial Atteya





H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of Alexandria and the See of St. Mark

INTRODUCTION

The Copts occasionally have been described as a schismatic eastern Christian minority, a lonely community in the land of their forebears. They have been forgotten since they chose living in oblivion after the tragedy of Chalcedon (451AD), which was followed by a new wave of persecution inflicted upon them by fellow Christians and Byzantine rulers. Though not unknown to medieval and early modern travellers from Europe, Western Christendom appeared to have lost sight of the Copts until 1860, when a Presbyterian mission came to convert them to Christianity and the Coptic Archbishop of Asiut asked them the rhetorical question: “We have been living with Christ for more than 1800 years, how long have you been living with him?”

However, since the rediscovery of the Copts and their Christianity, interest has been intensified in the attempt to explore the religious traditions and the historical background of this most ancient form of primitive faith. Scholars of all creeds were stunned as the pages of Coptic history began to reveal the massive contributions of the Copts to Christian civilisation in its formative centuries. This brief essay is intended to outline the major segments of these contributions and show the need for the rewriting of numerous chapters of early Christian history. But let me first define the term ‘Copt’ and introduce you to some of the relevant data about the community. In all simplicity, this term is equivalent to the word ‘Egyptian.’ It is derived from the Greek Aigyptos, which in turn is a

corruption of the ancient Egyptian Hak-ka-Ptah - the house of the temple of the spirit of Ptah a most highly revered deity in Egyptian mythology; this was the name of Memphis, the oldest capital of the unified Upper and Lower Egypt.

When the Arabs came in the seventh century, Egypt became known as “Dar al-Qibt,” home of the Copts who were the Christian Egyptians to distinguish them from the native Muslims. Ethnically, the Copts were neither Semitic nor Hamitic, but may be described as the descendants of a Mediterranean race that entered the Nile Valley in unrecorded times. As such they are the successors of the ancient Egyptians, sometimes even defined as the “modern sons of the Pharaohs”. Traditionally, the Copts kept together in the same villages or the same quarters of larger cities until the dawn of modern democracy in the Middle East during the nineteenth century, which rendered their segregation quite meaningless. Numerically, it is not easy to give a precise estimate of the Copts. Whereas the official census tends to reduce their number to less than three million, largely for political and administrative reasons, some Copts contend that they are ten million, which may be an exaggeration. A conservative estimate may be set between six and seven million until an authoritative and factual census, now being conducted by the church, reaches its completion.

The wider circle of Coptic obedientiaries, who are not ethnic Copts however, includes at least twenty million Ethiopians, more than five million other Africans and another million of mixed racial origins in other continents. Doctrinally, therefore, followers of Coptic Alexadrine Christianity must be reckoned in excess of thirty million, making the Copt Church one of the largest religious units in Eastern Christendom.

The origins of Coptic Chrisitianity need no great elaboration. St. Mark the Evangelist is its recognised founder and first patriarch, in

the fourth decade of the first century. During the first two centuries, there was a continuous admixture of paganisms and Christianity in many parts of Egypt. But the fact remains that Christianity must have penetrated the country far enough to justify the discovery of the oldest biblical papyri Coptic language buried in the sands of remote regions in Upper Egypt. Most of these predate the oldest authoritative Greek versions of the Scripture in the fourth and fifth centuries including Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus, the Vaticanus and the Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus, which constitute in all probability four of the fifty copies of the Bible ordered by Constantine the Great after he declared Christianity the official religion of the state by the Edict of Milan in 312AD. Fragments of those papyri dating from the second century, both Coptic and Greek, are to be found in numerous manuscript repositories in the world. The most monumental collection is the Chester Beatty Papyri, now in Dublin, Ireland. These manuscripts have been dated by the classical scholar V. Wilcken at about 200AD. Another staggering papyrus collection, this time in Sahidic and Sub-Akhmimic Coptic dialects, numbering fifty-one texts, thirty-six hitherto unknown, most Gnostic or apocryphal was discovered far up the Nile Valley at NagHammadi in the 1930's. The importance of this discovery, which is regarded by scholars studying its contents as peer and parallel to the Dead Sea Scrolls, lies in the fact that it was found in the remote regions of Upper Egypt. All this proves beyond a shadow of doubt the depth of the penetration of the new faith among the Copts.

THE CATECHETICAL SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA

In fact the fiery activity which flared up in the field of Biblical and theological studies in Egypt must be identified with the foundation and development of the Catechetical School of Alexandria before 200AD. The first mention of it was in the life of Pantaenus, its first

president, who died in 190 AD. This is the earliest contribution of the Copts to Christian civilisation and culture. Created as a rival to the ancient pagan Museion of the Ptolemies, which survived until the assassination of the Hypatia in 415AD, the Catechetical School became the first great seat of Christian learning in the whole world.

We must remember that primitive Christianity came to the world and to Egypt as what may be described as an amorphous faith, based on the life and sayings or wisdom of Jesus without formal dogmatisation. It was in this fortress of Christian scholarship, the Catechetical School, that Christianity and the Bible were subjected to the very rigorous studies, which generated the first systematic theology and the most extensive exegetic enquiry into the Scripture. The greatest names of the era are associated with that institution, which continued to flourish in the age of Roman persecutions. Pantaenus, the founding father and first president of the School, started by bridging the gap between dynastic Egypt and Greek Gospels through the propagation of the use of the archaic Greek alphabet instead of the cumbersome Demotic script, thus rendering the Bible more readily accessible to the Coptic reader. His successor was Clement of Alexandria, a liberal who wanted to reconcile Christian tenets with Greek philosophy. The School finally came of age under Origen, a scholar of pure Coptic stock who is thought to have been the most prolific author of all time. Six thousand tracts, treatises, and other works of considerable bulk have been cited under his name by his old pupil, bishop Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus, though his literary remains now are fragmentary and we must assume that this number could have been possible only by a collaborative effort of the whole School. His Hexapla, a collation of texts of the Bible in six columns from Greek and Hebrew sources, is only one instance of his gigantic contributions. His labors in exegesis went beyond those of any other expositor, for he wrote most detailed commentaries on every book of the Old Testament and the New. He established for the first time

in history a systematic theology from which all students of divinity start to this day. His philosophy generated much controversy, not only in his time, but in succeeding centuries. We hear of the existence of two camps bearing his name in subsequent periods: the Origenist and anit-origenist schools of thought. His pupils included some of the most illustrious divines of all time. Among them was Heraclas (230-46) whose preferment to the throne of St. Mark carried with it the title of “Pope” for the first time in history and long before the Bishop of Rome (Episcopus Romanorum Servus Servorum Dei) claimed that dignity. Another pupil was Didymus the Blind, a forceful theologian and author who combated Arianism. Actually the well-known pillars of the faith in the Alexandrian hierarchy were both graduates of the Catechetical School, Athanasius the Apostolic and Cyril the Great. The international panel of its scholars who contributed to Christian scholarship in the Byzantine and Roman worlds was represented by such immortal names as St. Gregory Nazienzen, St. Basil, St Jerome and Rufinus, the ecclesiastical historian. It as a picturesque age, an age of great saints and heretics, an age in which the Copts worshipped openly in defiance of their Roman persecutors and sought the crown of martyrdom rather than pray in catacombs and subterranean galleries. An age in which paganism finally gasped its last idolatrous breath under Julian the Apostate (332—63) and in which the Museion was liquidated as the last refuge of Neoplatonist pagan philosophy. In summary, the foundation of an institutionalised system of Christian divinity was laid down within the walls of the Catechetical School of Alexandria and in the deliberations and massive writings of its theologians.

It was on this foundation that the next universal movement could formulate Christian doctrines and dogmas through the official gatherings of the bishops of Christendom in the General Councils of the Church. In other words, the formal emergence of Christianity as an organised religious system passed through two stages in its

evolution. The first took place in the open and informal philosophical-theological arena of the Catechetical School, the equivalent of the modern university with its free and unbridled thinking. This stage was in advance of the second, congressional phase of codification of the outcome of those deliberations. In the case of Christianity, the second phase is described as the Oecumenical Movement, in which the hierarchy of all churches met to decide what was canonical and what was uncanonical in Christian beliefs and traditions.

THE OECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

This movement began as early as the reign of Constantine the Great, under whom Christianity was recognized as the religion of the state by the Edict of Milan in 312AD. With the disappearance of Roman persecution against which the Christians had to present a united front, elements of disunity began to surface among those same Christians in matters of faith. Heresies arose with the vehemence of intense piety and split the faithful into rival camps, which imperiled the peace of the Empire. Perhaps the most dangerous situation occurred in Alexandria in the war of words which broke out between the followers of Arius and Athanasius, for both groups claimed to profess the only true orthodoxy, and each of them had a strong army of adherents to the extent that both factions had penetrated the inner circle of the imperial court. The problem was the principle of consubstantiation. The Homoousion, signifying that the Father and the Son were one and of the same essence, was the thesis of Athanasius in opposition to Arius, whose conception was that of the Homoiousion, indicating that the Son was of divine origin but only of like essence, begotten of the Father as an instrument for the creation of the world, hence the Father is unequal in eternity. Note that the little iota in the middle of one word made all the difference in the world and shook the Empire to its very foundations, and the peril of civil war between the contestant camps

loomed on the horizon. In passing, it might be said that a parallel of the latter scheme of thought predated Arius in the idea of the 'demiurge' of late antique Neoplatonism and Gnosticism.

Amidst all these confusions and in order to bring unity back to the Church and the Empire, Constantine inaugurated the Oecumenical Movement by calling to order the Council of Nicaea in 325 under the presidency of the old bishop of Alexandria. This was Alexandros (d.328), who came with a young and able deacon, the future Athanasius, destined to follow him on the throne of St. Mark. Athanasius was of course the moving spirit behind the throne. Against some accepted views in the science of petrology, he is revealed to be Coptic and not Greek. Recently it has been found that Athanasius wrote in Coptic, though most of his monumental works were composed in Greek. Greeks knew no Coptic and had no need for using it. But the educated Copts were masters of both tongues, and Athanasius belonged to this class. Furthermore, Athanasius spent two years in one of his five exiles in the Red Sea wilderness with St. Anthony the Great, whose life he compiled in a famous Vita. It is well known that Anthony was an illiterate Copt and spoke nothing but Coptic, which was his only means of communication with his illustrious visitor. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to relate Athanasian contributions to the native Church of Egypt.

It is beyond the limits of this work to cover the immensity of the Nicaean canons and the literature in which they have been discussed. But certain criteria are clear from the deliberations of the Council under Coptic leadership. First and foremost, the Nicaean Creed was sanctioned by the Council. Composed by Athanasius, it remains a triumph for Alexandrine theology to this day. Of historic importance was the creation for the first time of a Bishopric of Constantinople. A gift from a predominantly Alexandrine Council, the same bishopric paradoxically joined forces with the Bishopric of

Rome two centuries later to degrade the former Alexandrine benefactor. But let me first sum up the momentous events in the field of Christology which occurred between 325 and 451, from Nicaea to Chalcedon, to signal the parting of the ways between East and West. In that period, three major Councils were convened, one at Constantinople (381) and two at Ephesus (431 and 449), and all seemed to be under Alexandrine control. They dealt with two new major heresies: Eutychianism, which denuded Christ of his humanity, and Nestorianism, which relinquished the unity of Christ's divinity and humanity. Constantinople condemned Eutychius, though he was reinstated at Ephesus II after abjuring his former views. At Ephesus I, Nestorius clung to his view that Mary should be pronounced Mother of Jesus in the flesh, not Mother of God (Theotokos), a thesis that implied a cleavage between the human and the divine nature of Christ. Again under the influence of Dioscorus I, a Coptic patriarch, the formula of Cyril the Great (412-44) was accepted, and Nestorius and his teaching was condemned, leading to the schism of the Nestorian Church. What matters here is the question of Coptic leadership in definitions of Christology. St. Cyril was succeeded by his nephew, the aforementioned Dioscorus I (444-54), a determined and active theologian whom the Copts describe as a pillar of the faith, while the Romans stigmatized him as the leader of a Robber Council (Latrocinium) because he had judged Eutychius without reading the Tome or letter of Leo I to Ephesus II.

Feeling was running high in Rome and Constantinople and the change of Emperors brought changes in imperial policies. Theodosius II was succeeded by Marcian and his wife Pulcheria, a former nun, who deplored Alexandrine supremacy in ecclesiastical matters. The two capitals were drawn nearer by the high-handed actions of Dioscorus and Coptic patriarchs were described as the "Pharaohs of the Church", which was unpalatable to the authority of Byzantium. Thus Marcian summoned Dioscorus to answer for his

actions at Ephesus II and to discuss his views on Christology at Chalcedon in 451. The Romans quickly mustered a massive army of bishops from the West to join the East European prelates at Chalcedon in Asia Minor, while Dioscorus was detained by the imperial guard under a kind of house arrest, and the Council summarily condemned and exiled him to the island of Gangra in Paphlagonia, near the southern shores of the Black Sea where he died a few years later.

In this way, the Copts lost their leadership in Christendom. Chalcedon of course was not recognized by them, and from that moment, we begin two parallel lines of succession from St. Mark, the one a Melkite obediantiary to Byzantium, and the other proudly nationalistic of native Coptic stock. Thus initiated a new wave of merciless persecution to curb Coptic separatism and humiliate the so-called Monophysite Christians, with disastrous results on the eve of the Arab Conquest.

MONASTIC RULE

If the Copts lost their leadership in the fifth century, we must go back in time for a more enduring contribution to Christian civilization. Parallel to the Catechetical School and the Oecumenical Movement, a new and more stable institution had evolved which must be regarded as a purely Coptic gift to Christendom. This is the monastic rule, which was generated by Coptic piety and the image of Christ and the Apostles. Social and economic factors played a role as well, since persecution forced many to escape to the desert.

From its humble beginnings on the fringe of the desert, monasticism grew to be a way of life and developed into cenobitic communities, which became the wonder of Christian antiquity. With its introduction into Europe, it was destined to become the sole custodian of culture

and Christian civilization in the Dark Ages. However, like all great institutions, Coptic monastic rule was perfected through a number of long and evolutionary stages.

The founding of this way of life is generally ascribed to St. Anthony (d.336), though organized flights to the wilderness are known to have predated his retirement from the Nile Valley. A certain Frontonius and seventy companions decided to reject the world and espoused a celibate life in the Nitrean desert during the reign of Antonius Pius (d.161). Anthony himself, while penetrating deeper and deeper into the Eastern Desert, assuming that he was in perfect solitude with the Lord, suddenly discovered St. Paul the Hermit at the age of 113 years already long established in that remote region.

Nevertheless, if we overlook these isolated instances, we can safely consider that the first definable phase in the genesis of monasticism was the Antonian way of life based on solitude, chastity, poverty, and the principle of torturing the body to save the soul. How did all this begin? An illiterate twenty-year-old Christian at the village of Coma in the district of Heracleopolis in Middle Egypt, Anthony heard it said one day in church: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven." (Matt. 19:21) A fundamentalist, he did just that and crossed the Nile for the desert solitude where he spent eighty-five years of increasing austerity and asceticism. Though a solitary, he could not hide his light of sanctity under a bushel, and, when his fame had spread so as to reach the imperial court, Constantine wrote asking for his blessing. Even the great Athanasius spent two years with the Saint and composed his biography. Others followed this “athleta christi” to the Red Sea Mountains and lived around his cave to seek his spiritual guidance. Thus the second phase in the evolution of the monastic rule arose in what may be termed “collective eremiticism,” where settlements of solitaries sprang up around the person of a saint, not merely for initiation and

orientation, but also as a measure of self-defense in the arid desert. A disabled anchorite in this distant wilderness could perish for lack of food and water, if he were not observed by another neighbourly solitary. Such settlements began to multiply in other parts of the country. Besides Pispir in the Eastern Desert, others arose in the Thebaid in Upper Egypt as well as the Nitrean Valley in the desert to the west of the Delta of the Nile.

Subsequently at Tabennesis, the third stage in the development of cenobitic life was already taking shape under the rule of St. Pachomius22 (d.346). Originally a pagan legionary in the armies of Constantine and Licinius, he was exposed to the goodness of Christian villagers during the wanderings of his battalion. They came to wash the soldiers' feet and broke bread with them despite their harsh tax levies. Captivated by their kindness to their oppressors, he decided, on his liquidation from the service, to become a Christian. After his baptism, he zealously followed a hermit by the name of Palaemon for training in the art of sanctity and self-torture. An educated man with a background of military discipline, he soon perceived that self-inflicted torture could not be the only way to heaven. This signalled the inception of one of the greatest cenobitic doctrines of all time. The new Rule of St. Pachomius prescribed communal life in a cenobium and repudiated the principle of self-mortification. Instead, the brethren should expend their potential in useful pursuits both manual and intellectual while preserving the monastic vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The Pachomian system reflected the personality of the soldier, the legislator, and the holy man. Pachomius aimed at the humanization of his monastic regime without losing the Christian essence of Antonian or Palaemonian sanctity. Every detail of a monk's daily activities was prescribed within the walls of a given monastery. Each monk had to have a vocation to make himself a useful human being to his brotherhood; all must labor to earn their daily bread, without losing sight of their intellectual advancement; and each must fully

participate in the devotional duties of monastic life.

Pachomian monasteries multiplied rapidly in their founder's lifetime, and all were enriched through wise administration as well as honest and selfless labor. In his famous work entitled "Paradise of the Fathers," the fourth-century Bishop Palladius states that he found in one monastery fifteen tailors, seven smiths, four carpenters, fifteen fullers, and twelve camel drivers besides unspecified numbers of bakers, cooks, basket and rope makers, millers, weavers, masons, instructors, and copyists of manuscripts - all living in complete harmony and perfect discipline within a structure that looked like a vast Roman fortification.

To preserve good government in his expanding institutions, Pachomius established a closely knit Rule to guard against corruption and moral deterioration. Three or four monasteries within reach of each other were united in a clan or a stake with a president elected from among their abbots, and all of the monks in the clan met periodically to discuss local problems. All clans were organized under a superior general who summoned the whole brotherhood to a general council twice each year: once in the summer after the harvest for administrative and budgetary considerations, and again at Easter for making annual reports as well as for the announcements of new abbots and the transfer of office among the old ones. The last meeting ended with an impressive scene of prayer and mutual forgiveness of sins.

The fame of Pachomian foundations spread far and wide, not only within Egypt but also throughout the world. Monks came to live with the fathers of the desert from many nations Greeks, Romans, Cappadocians, Libyans, Syrians, Nubians, and Ethiopians, to mention a few of those on record - and Pachomius devised a system of wards for each nation within every monastery.

The Coptic cenobitic rule became the wonder of ancient Christendom. The planting of the Coptic system in Europe and other continents of the Old World was achieved by some of the greatest divines of the medieval world. We know that during one of his exiles in Europe, St. Athanasius spoke about Coptic monasteries at the Roman Curia of Julius I (337-52). But the real apostles of Coptic monastic rule were celebrated personalities who resided for years in Pachomian establishments in the Thebaid and sojourned as well in the convents of Kellia, Scetis, and Nitrea in the Western Desert. To quote some of the illustrious names who made extended pilgrimages to the Coptic fathers of the desert, we must begin with St. Jerome (ca. 342420), who translated the Regula Sancti Pachomii into Latin, which must have been used by St. Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480550) in composing his famous Rule. Others included St. John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407); Rufinus (ca. 345-410), the renowned ecclesiastical historian; St. Basil (ca. 330-79), the Cappadocian author of the great Eastern liturgy used to this day and the founder of a Byzantine monastic order on the model of the Rule of St. Pachoniius; St. John Cassian23 (ca. 360-435), the father of monasticism in Gaul, who is known to have spent seven years in the Thebaid and Nitrea, Palladius24 (ca. 365-425), Bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia, who complied the lives of the desert fathers in "The Lausiac History"; St. Augen or Eugenius of Clysma (d. ca. 363), the father of Syrian asceticism; and many more from other parts of Europe in addition to some lesser known persons from Ethiopia, Nubia, and North Africa. In reality, the Rule of St. Pachomius continued to influence European monasticism beyond the Middle Ages. St. Benedict failed to incorporate in his rule the Pachomian system of unifying the convents into clans with annual meetings for mutual surveillance of their activities. It is known that independent Benedictine houses became very rich in the long run, and that the Benedictine monks decided to discard toil and live luxuriously on the hired labor of local farmers, thus losing the virtue of the Pachomian system of surveillance by other members of the

brotherhood. Only the Cluniac reform of the tenth century was able to remedy that rising evil by reverting to the spirit of the Pachomian rule. Subsequently most newer European orders of religion observed the same cooperative system. The Carthusians and the Cistercians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as well as the Franciscans and the Dominicans were founded on the basis of union among their convents under the authority of a central government. Even the Jesuits in the sixteenth century appear unwittingly to have fallen under the spell of Pachomian dictates. It becomes quite obvious that the contribution of the Copts in the field of monasticism persisted until the modern age.

MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

A by-product of historic significance to the monastic movement among the Copts was their early missionary endeavour. All the aforementioned renowned names who spent years of their lives in the monasteries of Nitrea and the Thebaid must be regarded as unchartered ambassadors and missionaries of that Coptic Christianity which they had experienced among Coptic religious leaders. Meanwhile, the Copts themselves, at least in the first four or five centuries of our era, proved to be extremely active in the spreading of the faith beyond their frontiers in practically every direction.

It is not inconceivable that Coptic relations with North Africa, notably with Cyrenaica or the Pentapolis, took place with the introduction of Christianity. In his visitations from Alexandria, St. Mark must have been accompanied to the Pentapolis by Alexandrine helpers. Educationally, the natives of the Pentapolis looked toward Egypt. Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 370414), bishop of Ptolemais, received his instruction at Alexandria in both the Catechetical School and the Museion, and he entertained a great deal of reverence and affection

for Hypatia, the last of the pagan Neoplatonists, whose classes he had attended. Synesius was raised to the episcopate by Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria, in 410. Since the Council of Nicea in 325, Cyrenaica had been recognized as an ecclesiastical province of the See of Alexandria, in accordance with the ruling of the Nicaean Fathers. The patriarch of the Coptic Church to this day includes the Pentapolis in his title as an area within his jurisdiction. It is doubtful, however, whether Coptic influence extended further west in North Africa, where Carthage and Rome held greater sway.

The area where Egyptian Christianity had its most direct impact was probably in the upper valley of the Nile, by the southern gate of Egypt at Syene (modern Aswan). The ancient Egyptians had known those parts since the eighteenth dynasty, some fifteen hundred years before Christ, and their magnificent temples and monuments are spread all over Nubia. Two factors helped in the steady flow of Christian missionaries south of Syene. First, the persecutions gave the initial incentive to Christians to flee from their oppressors to the oases of the Western Desert and beyond the first cataract into Nubia. Secondly, the rise of ascetic monasticism furnished the new religion with pious emigrants who penetrated the southern regions as soldiers of Christ. Recent archaeological excavations in the lower Sudan prove that Christianity had struck root in those distant regions by the fourth century. In the fifth century, good relations are recorded between the monastic order of the great St. Shenute whose monasteries still stand at Suhag and the Nubian and Baga tribes of the south. At the beginning of the sixth century, there was a certain Bishop Theodore of Philae, apparently a Christian substitute to the Isis high priesthood established on that island from Roman times. In the same century, Justinian (483-565) issued a command that all the pagan tribes on the periphery of the Byzantine empire should be converted to Christianity. The imperial order accelerated a process already taking place in Nubia, though, as a consequence, the monophysite Copts had to combat both paganism and the

Chalcedonian profession of faith at the same time. It would appear that the Coptic victory was complete by 559, and through the sympathy and connivance of Empress Theodora, and in defiance of court injunctions, a monophysite bishop, Longinus, was consecrated for the See of Napata, capital of the Nubian kingdom. The ancient temples were progressively transformed into Christian churches including the temple of Dandur (now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City) and new churches were constructed. Furthermore, monasticism was introduced among the Nubians, who founded numerous monasteries on the edge of the valley. The most outstanding example is that of St. Simeon (Anba Hidra), which stood at a short distance across the Nile from modern Aswan. Though raided by Saladin's Islamic armies in the year 1172, its imposing ruins are still a testimony to architectural, artistic, and spiritual solidity.

Even more romantic than the conversion of the Nubian kingdom to Christianity in late antiquity was that of the more distant and isolated kingdom of Abyssinia. According to an apocryphal tradition, the Ethiopian court at Axum had long been acquainted with monotheism. The story of the journey of the Queen of Sheba to the court of King Solomon in the tenth century B.C., their marriage, and the subsequent birth of Menelik I of Ethiopia, though probably legendary, has given the Ethiopian monarch the title "Lion of Judah". Menelik's visit to his father in Jerusalem, and his return with the Ark of Covenant, said to be enshrined in the cathedral of Axum, belongs to the same tale. The next contact with monotheism occurred when the eunuch in the service of "Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians," encountered the Apostle Philip on his return from Jerusalem by way of Gaza. Here, however, the Nubian queen is confused with the Ethiopian. Historic evidence shows that Ethiopia remained pagan until the fourth century A. D. when the authentic evangelisation of the kingdom took place. Two brothers, Frumentius and Aedesius, residents of Tyre but originally from Alexandria,

boarded a trading ship going to India and were shipwrecked on the Red Sea coast near the shores of Erythria. They were picked up by men of the Ethiopian monarch, probably King Ella Amida, who took them into his service. Aedesius became his cup-bearer, and Frumentius his secretary and tutor to the young crown prince, Aeizanas (Ezana), to whom he doubtless gave a Christian education. When Aeizanas became king, he and his courtiers and retainers were converted, and Christianity was declared the official religion of the state. Afterwards Aedesius was allowed to return to Tyre, while Frumentius went to Alexandria to convey the news to the Patriarch Athanasius and to plead with him to consecrate a special bishop to watch over the spiritual welfare of those distant Christians. The meeting with Athanasius was presumably between 341 and 3463. The patriarch appointed Frumentius himself under the name of Anba Salama, that is, “the father of peace”34. The new bishop of Axum finally returned to his see in or before 356, no doubt accompanied by presbyters to help in the process of evangelisation of the kingdom and the establishment of churches in the country. In 356 the Emperor Constantius, an Arian, wrote to Aeizanus to withdraw the Orthodox Frumentius, but without avail. After the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Ethiopians adhered to the Coptic profession.

The winning of Ethiopia for the Gospel must have been regarded as one of the most spectacular events of the century, crowning the labor of the Copts in Africa. Further east, the Copts emerged in the missionary field in Asia, though of course on a more modest scale. It is very difficult to generalize here on the basis of isolated instances, but there is no doubt that the Egyptians moved freely to many parts of Palestine, Syria, Cappadocia, Caesarea, and to some extent Arabia. Origen, the great theologian, was invited to Bostra to arbitrate in doctrinal differences. Mar Augin of Clysma (the modern Suez) was the founder of monasticism in Mesopotamia and the Persian empire, making a considerable impact on both Syrian and

Assyrian Christianity37. As early as the second century the great Pantaenus (d. ca. 190), who presided over the Catechetical School of Alexandria, was chosen by Demetrius I, the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria to preach the Gospel in India38. After accomplishing his mission, he visited Arabia Felix (the modern Yemen) where he must have continued his missionary enterprise. Unfortunately our information on this fascinating chapter is extremely limited. In the sixth century there was a further Indian adventure by another Alexandrine, Cosmas Indicopleustes, who later became a monk in Sinai and left an account of his travels, now in St. Catherine's monastery. He speaks of Christian communities with their bishops in the Persian Gulf, the existence of Christians in the island of Socotra, and the yet more numerous Christians of St. Thomas in India. He is reputed to be one of the first travellers to Ceylon. The role of the Copts in Europe may be illustrated from the first two exiles of the great Alexandrine patriarch, Athanasius. The first exile began in Constantinople and ended in Trier, where the saint spent parts of 336 and 337, and it is difficult to believe that he did not preach during all that time in his new environment. Most of the second exile, from 339 to 346, was at the Roman curia as the guest of Julius I. Apart from establishing good relations between Alexandria and Rome, Athanasius carried out some missionary work by introducing into Roman religious life the highly developed monastic rule of the Fathers of the Egyptian deserts. This was an important event in view of the magnitude of the contributions of the rising monastic orders in the preservation of culture, and in the progress of European civilization as a whole.

In those days the stream of pilgrims who came from the west to visit the Egyptian wilderness with its hermits and monks included many who may well be regarded as missionaries of Coptic religious culture, since they transplanted Coptic teachings to their native countries. One of the most eminent of these was John Cassian (ca. 360-435), a native of southern Gaul and the son of rich parents who

gave him a good education. He and an older friend named Germanus decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and in Bethlehem they took monastic vows. Then they went to Egypt, where they spent seven years visiting the solitaries and holy men of the wilderness of Scetis in the Nitrean valley as well as the Thebaid during the fourth century. It was on that occasion that John Cassian collected the material for his two famous works, the Institutes41 and the Conferences. These books deal with the life and habits of the Egyptian monks as well as their wisdom and institutions, and both were widely read in medieval Europe. St. Benedict of Nursia used them when he codified his rule in the sixth century. After spending some time with St. John Chrysostom in Constantinople on his return journey, John Cassian was ordained priest, probably in Rome, before settling down in the neighborhood of Marseilles, where he has been accredited with the introduction of Egyptian monasticism into Gaul. At Marseilles, above the shrine of St. Victor, who was martyred by Emperor Maximian (286-305) in the last Christian persecution, John Cassian founded a monastery and a nunnery on the model of the Coenobia, which he had witnessed in Egypt. In the catacombs below the present day fort of St. Victor will be found numerous archaeological remains, including sarcophagi with stone carvings and sculptures which portray in animal and plant motifs the direct influence of early Coptic art. On the island of St. Honorat, off the coast at Cannes, there is an old monastery where the monks explain to visitors that they use the rule of St. Pachomius of the Thebaid.

Wherever the Roman legions went, they apparently were followed by Christian missionaries. To Switzerland a mission from Thebes, according to local legend or tradition, arrived in the year 285 with the Theban legion. It was led by St. Mauritius, who seems to have earned the crown of martyrdom for refusing to sacrifice to the heathen gods. His statue stands today in one of the public squares of Saint-Moritz, and his body was enshrined in what later became

the chapel of an abbey of Augustinian canons at Saint Maurice in the Valais. His companions, a legionary named Felix, his sister Regula, and a third called Exuperantius hid themselves in the dreary wastes of the land of Glarus and ultimately reached the Lake of Zurich, where they baptized converts until they were seized by the emperor's men and led before Decius, the Roman governor of the region. On refusing to sacrifice to the gods, they were tortured. Legend says that as they were beheaded a voice from heaven called to them: "Arise, for the angels shall take you to Paradise and set upon your heads the martyr's crown." Thus the bodies arose, and, taking their heads in their hands, walked forty ells44 uphill to a prepared ditch, where they sleep underneath what is now the crypt of the Zurich Grossmunster. On the spot of their martyrdom arose the Wasserkirche. The Fraumunster cloister across the Limmat River has eight famous medieval frescoes representing every stage of their story. The three saints with heads in hand are the subject of the coat of arms of the city of Zurich. A parallel story with some variation has been recounted about the town of Solothurn, and the name of St. Victor (the Coptic Boktor) is mentioned as its hero and patron saint.

There is little doubt that the Coptic missionaries reached as far as the British Isles on the fringe of medieval Europe. Long before the coming of St. Augustine of Canterbury in 597, Christianity had been introduced among the Britons. The eminent historian Stanley Lane-Poole says, "We do not yet know how much we in the British Isles owe to these remote hermits. It is more than probable that to them we are indebted for the first preaching of the Gospel in England, where, till the coming of Augustine, the Egyptian monastic rule prevailed. But more important is the belief that Irish Christianity, the great civilizing agent of the early Middle Ages among the northern nations, was the child of the Egyptian Church. Seven Egyptian monks are buried at Disert Uldith and there is much in the ceremonies and architecture of Ireland in the earliest time that

reminds one of still earlier Christian remains in Egypt. Everyone knows that the handicraft of the Irish monks in the ninth and tenth centuries far excelled anything that could be found elsewhere in Europe, and if the Byzantine-looking decoration of their splendid gold and silver work, and their unrivalled illuminations, can be traced to the influence of Egyptian missionaries, we have more to thank the Copts for than had been imagined.

Even when we review Coptic heresies and heretics, it behoves us to consider how these ardent sons of the Nile, forbidden to practice the beliefs of their sects within the Pax Romana, crossed the frontiers of the empire to the unknown realms of the barbarians and there freely preached Christianity in accordance with their convictions. Perhaps the most striking feature in the history of the barbarians as they descended on the Roman Empire was the spread of Arianism in their midst. The Goths, Visigoths, Vandals, Burgundians, and Lombards must have had their apostles of Arian Christianity. Perhaps the best known is Ulphilas (ca. 311-83), apostle to the Goths, who was probably of Cappadocian birth, who knew the Gothic language as well as Greek, and who translated the Bible into the Gothic tongue for the first time. But Arianism, it must be remembered, was purely an Alexandrine creation, and its founder was the heresiarch Arius, a Libyan native of Alexandria. It is only logical to assume that the followers of Arius or their disciples were responsible for the spread of that heresy from Egypt to the Germanic and barbarian tribes beyond the Danube and the Rhine.

COPTIC MUSIC

On the subject of music, we are constrained to seek the opinion of the specialist. In 1927 the great English musicologist Ernest Newlandsmith of Oxford and London Universities spent several months in Egypt listening to the old native chanters of the Coptic

Church and reducing their tunes to notation. He managed to compile a number of volumes and declared that the results of his pursuit exceeded his wildest expectations. We can do no better than quote his verdict. "What we understand today as Oriental music," he proclaimed, "appears simply a degradation of what was once a great art. This music, which has been handed down for untold centuries within the Coptic Church, should be a bridge between East and West, and place a new idiom at the disposal of the western musicians. It is a lofty, noble, and great art, especially in the element of the infinite which is lacking today." Newlandsmith is apparently of the opinion that, to quote his own words, "Western music has its origin in ancient Egypt." If we believe this renowned English musicologist, then we must accept the thesis that Coptic Church music is a bridge between the music of ancient Egypt and western music in some way. It is not inconceivable that the Coptic missionaries who crossed over to Europe at the dawn of our era could have carried with them the essence of the native Coptic chanting. The theory that there had been interaction between that Coptic vocal music and the Gregorian chants, though still debatable, seems to have more than a little historical support. At the present juncture, we can only say with the eminent English musicologist that "Such a basis of music opens up a vista quite undreamt of by the ordinary musicians of the Western world."

COPTIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Akin to music is the field of the Coptic arts which has been shrouded in a blanket of oblivion for many centuries. In recent times, however, the discovery of Coptic art has aroused a great deal of excitement and interest among historians, archaeologists, and modern artists.

There is hardly a notable museum in the world which has not

devoted a special section or department to exhibits of Coptic provenance. In originality, depth of feeling, and unusual vigor, Coptic art has earned for itself a position of independence in Christian antiquity. The motifs of Coptic art emerged in stonework, painting, woodwork, terracotta, ivories, and, above all considerations, in the renowned monochrome and polychrome fabrics from Coptic looms. The Coptic textile industry has been attracting a great deal of attention in recent years, and specimens of embroidered fabrics of astounding beauty are on display in all major museums. The Coptic weavers' dexterity produced fantastic scenes from classical antiquity, which were replaced, from the fourth century or a little earlier, by Christian themes. In the early Islamic period, the figures became increasingly stylized but retained their special vigor, and geometrical designs were customary. The fabric and carpet collections, both public and private, have had their impact on the style of a number of great modern artists. They proved to be a source of inspiration to some masters including Matisse, Derain, and Picasso. When the American painter Marsden Hartley discovered Coptic textile portraiture, he set out to build a collection of his own, and his style was strongly affected by this contact.



The arm of the Lord on the shoulder of St. Mina in friendship. 6 th century, The Louvre, France

In the realm of Coptic ecclesiastical architecture, we can assume that the genesis of the basilical style in the Christian world may be

traced to ancient Egypt with Coptic craftsmanship the bridge between the ancient dynastic temple and the modern cathedral. In the beginning, the Copts were in the habit of transforming the ancient temples into Christian churches. Later, when the Copts started to erect their own chapels independently, it was normal for the Coptic architects to copy existing models of their ancestral master builders of antiquity, more especially as these old structures appeared to fulfill the requirements of the new faith.

The topography of the ancient Egyptian temples comprised three main divisions. First the outer gate flanked with two lofty pylons led into an open court lined by two rows of columns with a narrow stone roofing. Secondly, beyond that huge quadrangle devoted to general worshippers, was the hypostyle. This space was filled with crowded columns in close rows supporting a massive stone roof and reserved for the royal family and the aristocracy. The third section at the end of the temple was a dimly lit chamber, wrapped in great mystery. This was the inner shrine, the sanctum sanctorum, or holy of holies, where the deity resided, and which was accessible only to the high priest or pharaoh.

The primitive Coptic churches appear to have retained this triple division, which may still be witnessed in some of the historic chapels of the ancient convents. The innermost area behind the iconostasis was the sanctuary (haikal) where priests and deacons alone were admitted to officiate the mystery of the Sacrament. Outside the sanctuary, the central part of the church was reserved for baptized Christians, while a third section at the entrance was left open for the unbaptised catechumens. This architectural arrangement fits the Coptic offices to perfection. Indeed the Coptic liturgy is subdivided into three parts, namely, the liturgy of the catechumens, the liturgy of the faithful, and the Anaphora. Whereas the catechumens were expected to depart after the first stage, the screen was drawn after the second to conceal the mystery of sanctification of the Precious

Body and Blood before Holy Communion.

At an unknown date, the distinction between the baptized faithful and the unbaptised catechumens began to disappear with the elimination of the latter through the spread of Christianity, and it became meaningless to retain the three transverse divisions of the church. Instead the perpendicular triple division of nave and aisles was substituted for the transverse sections of bygone days. In this way, the basilical style began to assert itself in Coptic ecclesiastical architecture. St. Mena's cathedral, built by Emperor Arcadius (395-408) in the district of Mareotis west of Alexandria, the ruins of the magnificent cathedral at Ashmunayn in Middle Egypt, and the majestic churches of the Red and White Monasteries of St. Shenute at Suhug are fourth and fifth century examples of this imminent change which was gradually adopted by the rest of the Christian world. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the change was sudden even among the Copts. The irregularity of church forms in Old Cairo proves that the definitive style of the basilica must have been an extended process. But it is an inescapable conclusion that these architectural developments in Egypt are tied with basilical forms throughout Christendom.

OBLIVION AND REDISCOVERY

One of the most disastrous events in Christian annals came to pass at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Its condemnation of the Coptic patriarch Dioscorus I, and its interpretation of St. Cyril the Great's formula of the physis or hypostasis of Christ contrary to the Coptic profession led to the irreparable cleavage of Christendom into two hostile camps; Eastern and Western, or monophysite and diophysite. To this day, Chalcedon is acrimoniously remembered by the Coptic natives of Egypt and, for that matter, also by the Jacobite Syrians, the Ethiopians, and the Armenians who followed the

example of Egypt. The immediate outcome of Chalcedon, however, was more keenly felt in Egypt. The Byzantine Emperors who aimed at unity within the Church as the sole bearer of cohesion in the Empire stopped at nothing to impose that unity by brutal force on the Egyptian people. It was thus that a new wave of gruesome persecution was inaugurated to obliterate all vestiges of separatism in Egypt. For effective action, the Emperor combined the civil, military, and ecclesiastical authority in the hands of one man, the Prefect Apollinarius, who was governor, army general and patriarch of Alexandria at the same time. This offered him immense powers to force the Chalcedonian profession of faith on the obstinate Copts who were adamant against the Greek dictates. In opposition to this military rule of the Church, the natives elected their own national patriarch who was pursued by the legionaries of the Melkite patriarch while he moved in secret from monastery to monastery. Unbearably excessive taxation, together with the most horrible torture and humiliation were inflicted upon the Egyptians throughout the period from 451 to 641 until the advent of the Arabs on the scene.

The defeat of the Greeks and the surrender of Cyrus, the last prefect-patriarch, to the Arab conquerors on Good Friday, April 6 641, has often been ascribed to Coptic connivance with the invader against their oppressor. But this is not true. The Copts merely took a neutral position between the contestants. They had nothing to lose by changing masters. On the contrary, whereas the Byzantines inflicted servitude on the Copts both religiously and politically, the Arabs promised religious freedom to all the people of the Book (Ahl al-Dhimmah), i.e., the Christians and the Jews. In fact, after the downfall of the last Greek bastion of Alexandria, ‘Amr invited the fugitive Coptic Patriarch Benjamin II out of his concealment and offered him an honorable safe conduct and the Melkite churches which were vacated by the Greeks.

In this way, a new chapter opened for the Copts and a new barrier under Muslim rule terminated the relationship between the Christians of the East and those of the West for more than a thousand years. It is beyond the theme of this paper to detail the story of the Church under Muhammadan dynasties. The main point here is that the Copts were gradually forgotten by Western Christendom and lived in oblivion until the dawn of their rediscovery by the French Expedition of 1798-1802. At that time the Copts began to establish a measure of communication with Western Christendom. With the birth of democracy and the enfranchisement of all Egyptians, the Copts emerged from their closed communities and opened to interaction with the West. With little to offer beyond their ancient heritage and long-established traditions, they became curious objects of interest vis-a-vis the searching Western mind. At the same time, increasing confidence in age-old enemies began the process of removing the barriers erected by the misapprehension of other Christians. This led to gradual rapprochement with other Western creeds and sects, thereby quietly bringing to a close the old Chalcedonian feud which had broken out fiercely in 451 between the monophysite and the diophysite camps over "the one physis or hypostasis of God's word incarnate." Perhaps the most significant demonstration of the rebirth of interaction between East and West became ostensible in the participation of the Copts for the first time in this century with the dispatch of a delegation consisting of one secular and two clerical representatives to the World Council of Churches convened at Evanston, Illinois, in the summer of 1954. An amusing incident took place at that meeting when the Copts vehemently protested against the gracious welcome accorded to them by the delegates of Western Christendom as newcomers to oecumenicity. The Copts rejected the word "newcomers." They had been participants in a leading position from Nicaea in 325 until Chalcedon and the parting of the ways in 451. They were thus just resuming their role in oecumenicity after an interregnum of 1,503 years. Since then, the Copts have been active in that international

body, notably in Africa, where their mission is more readily acceptable to the Africans than the European and American missions of colonial days.

At this juncture, it may be fitting to ponder the miracle of the survival of this most ancient Christianity. The explanation of this remarkable phenomenon may be found in a set of causes, some internal and others external. Internally, the Copts, in the historicity of their own Church, have developed a profound spirituality, watered by the blood of their martyrs and confirmed by the racial consciousness of their remote ancestry which extends over millennia, and which is visibly represented by the Church in the Christian era, only the last of many earlier ages. Within the walls of that fortress of faith, they preserved the purity of their race against pollution from intermarriage with the ceaseless waves of invasion from outside. The Church proved to be the cementing ingredient among those sons of Ancient Egypt. Initially a way of worship, Coptism became in the end a way of life and a symbol of an old culture for those isolated Christians in their ancient homeland. Consequently they became the bearers of a torch which had been ignited in the first century and which they were determined to hand on to posterity and keep aglow.

On the external level, we have to admit that the shrinking Coptic community of the Middle Ages was never underestimated by its Muslim rulers. The Copt not only was accepted by the growing Muslim majority but also was revered as a highly beneficial neighbor and an honest civil servant of the state. it is not inconceivable, however, at numerous critical moments in those lonesome centuries, that the depleted Coptic minority might have been exterminated by the overpowering Muslim majority. But the facts of history have proved the contrary, and this external factor has indubitably contributed to the realization of the miracle of Coptic survival.

On occasions in modern times, the Copts were offered integration with other Christian powers, but they chose systematically a life of harmony with their Muslim compatriots. Peter the Great (1689-1725) in the eighteenth century offered a merger with the Copts on the condition that they become a Russian protectorate. The reigning patriarch then asked the Russian delegation "Who protects the Czar?" The reply was "God." The patriarch then answered that the Copts are under the protectorate of He who protects the Emperor. The matter was dropped at that. The Episcopalians of Britain tried the same tactic in the days of colonialism with the same response. Nevertheless, in recent years, with the increasing spirit of acceptance and dialogue among the sects and nations of Christendom, the Copts seem to be advancing out of their prolonged isolation to participate in the widening circle of good faith among all Christians in anticipation of the discovery of their common Father.

CONCLUSION

Like a great and solitary Egyptian temple standing sorrowfully on the edge of the desert and weathering sandstorms over the years until it became submerged by the accretions of time, the ancient Coptic Church led its lonely life unnoticed on the fringe of Christian civilization and was buried in the sands of time and oblivion. Like the same massive temple, too, it has proved itself to be indestructible though battered by the winds of change. As an organism, its potential vitality though enfeebled by sustained fighting, has survived in a latent form under the weight of accumulated rubble. In the last few decades, with increasing security and liberty from within and support and sympathy from without, its sons have started removing the sands of time from around the edifice, which has shown signs of shining again.

The miracle of the survival of the Copts in a surging sea of Islam, coming after the black days of Byzantine misrule since Chalcedon in 451 can be explained only by the depth of spirituality which the genius of their forebears was able to build during the formative ages of Alexandrine Christianity. The religious contributions of the early fathers of the Coptic Church have remained unnoticed and sometimes have been ascribed to the Greeks, until the relatively recent rediscovery of the Copts and their heritage. During the first four or five centuries of our era, Egypt produced some of the most illustrious names in Christian annals. Men such as Origen, Athanasius, Cyril the Great, St. Anthony, St. Pachomius, Shenute the Great, and many more have left their mark on the history of Christian civilization both within and outside Egypt. Whereas the Catechetical School of Alexandria was the only center of Christian scholarship in the second and third centuries, the Oecumenical Movement was inaugurated in the fourth and fifth to formalize decisions on burning questions of Christology. In both fields, the role of the Copts was supreme, and their enduring contributions became an integral part of Christian civilization for all time. Perhaps even more staggering as a Coptic contribution was the monastic rule in its perfected form. Irrespective of later views on monastic life, the fact remains that monastic orders have been instrumental in the preservation of culture and civilization through the darkest ages of European history. Furthermore, the Coptic monks of those early centuries were responsible for an active missionary movement and the evangelisation of many parts of the old World. In the south, the kingdoms of Nubia and Abyssinia were converted to Christianity by these missionaries, and in the north, missions from Thebes and from Mareotis followed in the steps of the Roman legions to Switzerland, Gaul, and even Britain long before the advent of St. Patrick and St. Augustine of Canterbury.

The impact of Coptic Christianity may also have penetrated other fields which are still open to further enquiry. The interaction between

Coptic vocal chanting and the immortal Gregorian chants, the basilical style in Coptic ecclesiastical architecture and the standard cathedrals of the West, and the minor arts of the Copts are all subjects which attract increasing attention by specialists with a promise of revealing hidden influences on our civilization.

In fact, the conglomerate impact of these and more items has awakened the searching minds of students of divinity and culture in many countries of the West to explore this forgotten corner of a most ancient Christianity for greater light. The foundation of institutes of Coptic studies independently and within the framework of noted universities came as a natural response to this growing pursuit of knowledge. Coptology was established as perhaps the newest branch of the humanities, parallel to the other disciplines of Egyptology, Papyrology, and Islamology. Then in 1976, the Coptologists of the world were convened in Cairo by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, and there they created the International Association of Coptic Studies for the coordination of the expanding activities in the exploration of the Coptic heritage. It was also on that occasion that the project of the Coptic Encyclopaedia was hailed as a much needed and long overdue research tool in an unusual field and as a means of diffusing knowledge concerning one of the most glorious chapters in the story of Christian civilization.

About the Author



Aziz S. Atiya was born in an Egyptian village shortly before the turn of the century. His education began in Egypt and was continued in England, where he secured a Ph.D. in 1933 from the University of London and a D.Litt. from the University of Liverpool in 1938. He was awarded the Charles Beard Fellowship as well as the Ramsay Muir Fellowship in 1931 and the University Fellowship in 1932 from the University of Liverpool for outstanding scholarship in Medieval History. In America he was granted three more doctorates in an honorary capacity: an LL.D. from Brigham Young University (1968) and two doctorates of Humane Letters, from Baldwin-Wallace College (1962), and from the University of Utah (1968).

Professor Atiya's teaching career began with a Tutorship in the University of London School of Oriental Studies (1934) followed by a Professorship of Medieval (including Oriental) History in the University of Bonn in Germany (1936-1939). He returned to Egypt after the outbreak of World War II, and became First History Inspector for Egyptian Secondary Education (1939-39). He then

became Professor of Medieval History in Cairo University from 1940 and in Alexandria University from 1945 to 1954. He was elected first Fulblright scholar from Egypt in 1951 and as such acted as Consultant to the Library of Congress as well as lecturing at many American universities.

Professor Atiya was later invited back to the United States as Visiting Professor at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) for the year 1955-56. The following academic year he occupied another Visting Professorship of History at Colombia Unviersity together with the Henry W. Luce Professorship of World Christianity at Union Theological Seminary. Simultaneously, he was selected Patten Lecturer of the year at Indiana University. He accepted a similar appointment in the following year (195758) at Princeton University and became a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study in 1958-59. At the end of his term at the Institute, the University of Utah offered him a tenured position as Professor of Languages and History. He founded its Middle East Center and its significant Middle East Library, and in 1967 he was named Distinguished Professor of History.

Immediately before coming to the United States, Professor Atiya established the Institute of Coptic Studies and became its first President in 1954. He also was elected Corresponding Member of the Society of Coptic Archaeology as well as of the UNESCO International Committee for the Cultural History of Mankind. Among a number of similar memberships of learned academies and societies, he was elected one of four Orientalists in the world to be an Honorary Fellow of the Middle East Association of North America.

Long recognized as a leading authority in the fields of Medieval Studies and the Near East with a concentration on the Crusades and East-West relations, Professor Atiya has published widely,

many of his books appearing in translation and in several editions. Among his most influential works are The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages (1938), A History of the Egyptian Patriarchs (1948-59), Crusade, Commerce, and Culture (1962), and A History of Eastern Christianity (1968).

The greatest achievement of his life was the compiling and editing the important and monumental Coptic Encyclopedia.