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**Doctoral Thesis::**

***The Coptic Church from the beginnings until the  
13<sup>th</sup> century  
(Summary)***

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## **Summary**

**Keywords:** The Coptic Church, the Ecumenical Council, the Byzantine administration, Islam, Caliph, the persecution, the conversion, monophysite.

### **Introduction**

By choosing this theme „The Coptic Church from the beginnings until the 13<sup>th</sup> century” represents a wish at in-depth knowledge of this historical space of Egypt from a Christian point of view, being a historical and geographical immensely rich area in both spiritually and a theological dowry, but especially an example of strength and resistance during the history in this tried hard space.

The term "copt" comes from the Arabic "qupt" which means Egyptian, fact that shows from the beginning the nature of this church as an national church, specific to certain people and space, that of Egypt.

The Copts are the descendants of the Egyptians who accepted Christianity in the first centuries of our era, representing the largest religious minority in Egypt, as well as the biggest and one of the oldest Christian communities in the Middle East.

The founder of the Coptic Church is considered St. Mark the Evangelist. He arrived in Egypt during the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius in the year of 42 AC., founding a religious community in Alexandria, which, then, spread throughout Egypt. At the beginning of the third century, Christianity was the predominant religion of Egypt. The Church of Alexandria is considered the oldest church in Africa.

The foundation of the Christian monasticism was made in the desert, in the fourth century Egypt. Saints Anthony the Great and Pachomius the Great were the early founders of Egyptian monasticism.

The Egyptian Church, or the Coptic Church, has currently more than 19 centuries of history, which makes it one of the oldest Christian churches in the world, having its origin in the Church of Alexandria, that emerged from the differences in the tanks of the doctrinal Monophysite heresy in the V<sup>th</sup> and VI<sup>th</sup> centuries, whose adherents is.

The Islamic occupation weakened the Coptic Church, throughout the course of history, the issues raised by the Muslims are the same then and now.

I took into consideration this aspect when writing about this theme wanting to show the manner at coexistence between the Copts and the Muslims, which from the year 641 conquered Egypt from the Byzantines, this being possible due to the fact that the Coptic population was regarded as schismatic by the Byzantines.

The presentation of this theme that includes the history of the Coptic Christianity within twelve centuries, I want to bring in to the Romanian space a deeper knowledge of what the Coptic Church means, its evolution was and how managed to overcome the persecutions of the time until the thirteenth century.

The research methods that I used in the elaboration of this work are the structuralist method, the comparative-analytical method, the statistical regression method and the theological method.

This research paper is structured after the following plan: introduction, seven chapters and sub-chapters followed by conclusions.

## **Chapter I: Christianity in Egypt in the first 5 centuries**

For a better understanding of the history of the Egyptian Christianity, it should be made an incursion in its beginnings, but also a highlight of its characteristics and their contribution to the foundation of the Christian doctrine. The name "copt" is derived from the Greek word Αἴγυπτος (Αἴγυπτος), which was in turn derived from "Hikaptah" or "Ha-ka-Ptah," meaning "the house of the spirit of Ptah" which was a powerful deity worshiped in the Egyptian mythology, but also one of the names given to Memphis, the first capital of ancient Egypt. From the Arab conquest until today, this term refers to the Christian Egyptians to distinguish them from Muslims natives. The modern use of the term "Coptic" describes the Egyptian Christians, as well as the last stage of the ancient script of the Egyptian language.

The Coptic Church is based on the teachings of the Apostle Mark, who brought Christianity to Egypt during the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius in the first century, a few years after the Ascension. He was one of the four evangelists and the one that wrote the oldest canonical gospel. Christianity spread throughout Egypt for half a century after the arrival of Saint Mark in Alexandria, as results from the writings of New Testament found in Bahnasa in the Middle of Egypt, which date around the year 200 AC, and a fragment of the gospel of St. John, written using the Coptic language, which was found in Upper Egypt and can be dated to the first half of the second century.

The Coptic Church has a history of nineteen centuries and references of Egyptian space appeared references in many prophecies in the Old Testament. Prophet Isaiah says: "In that day there will be an altar in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar of the memorial at its border to the Lord" (Is. 19:19).

This well-deserved central position in the history of Christianity is also given by the fact that Egypt was the refuge of Child Jesus and the Virgin Mary, as was God's command to Joseph, "After their departure, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying,

Arise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to kill him. And he arose, took in the night the child and his mother and went to Egypt. And they stayed there until the death of Herod: to be fulfilled the word spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matt. 2: 13-15).

The important place Egypt occupies in the salvation of the history of the human race has made it an attractive place where Christianity will begin to develop and from which theological disputes will arise animated by the beginnings of the monastic life that will be the wellspring of the spirituality in the early Christian centuries.

Egypt was a refuge for many people, particularly in times of famine. Abraham visited Egypt (Gen. 12:10). His successor Joseph became the second man after Pharaoh, giving crops to all neighboring countries. Jacob and his sons came to Egypt where they all lived as a family and a nation rose. It was the birthplace or better said, the nursery of God's people, and their first leader, Moses, the great prophet, and his brother, Aaron, the first chief priest, came to Egypt to give them freedom.

The fulfillment of prophecies related to Egypt makes it the first most important outside the Holy Land, to whom the early Christians went, having strong spiritual connection with it.

After the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Virgin Mary with the Child and Old Joseph fleeing from the wrath of Herod the Great, took refuge to Egypt, where, according to local tradition, stayed for three years until the death of Herod.

According to the Coptic traditions that testify this period it can be distinguished seven locations where they lived for a time, with legends and numismatic traditions: Bubastis, Mataryah, old Cairo, in Upper Egypt, Zaytoun, El-Ezrawia and Palm Mountain (El -Kaf).

The Coptic Church celebrates the flee to Egypt on the 24th of the month Bashans corresponding to the first day of June. This great event is glorified in the liturgical Difer book and in the Coptic Orthodox Synaxarium. Holy Scripture provides no information on the duration of the staying of the Holy Family in Egypt. This was left by the tradition that has developed over the centuries. In the third century, Hippolytus of Rome states in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew that Christ remained in Egypt for three years and a questionable number of months.



Many medieval sources, especially in Arab, states of the journey with fascinating details and with miraculous occurrences, this being reinforced by numerous churches built on the spots where tradition establishes links with the Holy Family during the time in Egypt.

Copts take pride with the apostolicity of their National Church, whose founder was none other than the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark, the author of the oldest canonical Gospel, which was used both by St. Matthew the Evangelist and by St. Luke the Evangelist, and, perhaps also by St. John the Evangelist.

The Church of Egypt or the Coptic Church is part of the Christian churches of eastern tradition that recognize only the first three Ecumenical Councils of the Orthodox Church, namely: Assembly of First Council of Nicaea in 325, the First Council of Constantinople in 381 and the Council of Ephesus in 431 . The Old Oriental churches reject the dogmatic definitions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, being called in this case "nonchalcedonian" or "anti-Chalcedonian".

Scientists studying the first Ecumenical Councils, have concluded that the Alexandrian theologians are the leaders and the pioneers of the Christian faith and also at an ecumenical level, given the importance taken by them in discussions and decisions of the Holy Councils. This prominent position was not based on any political power, because Alexandria was under the Roman Empire and was later ruled by the Byzantines until the Arab conquest of Egypt. Their power was based on deep spirituality, piety and on the theological reflection based on the theological and biblical studies.

The beginnings of Christian monasticism are found in the East in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and not after the Edict of Mediolanum (313), as a protest against the secularization of the Church in the time of Emperor Constantine the Great.

The foundation of Christian monasticism was done therefore in desert, in the fourth century Egypt, as another way of living martyrdom. There are some voices who attribute the emergence of monasticism during the changes that have occurred in the Roman Empire in society as a result of the conversion of St. Emperor Constantine to Christianity and the transformation of Christianity in a tolerated religion throughout the Empire. This ended the persecution of Christians and their small religious group position, persecuted, also increasing the "Christian name" in the Church. In response to this, many of those who wanted to preserve the intensity of the spiritual life of the Christianity of the first centuries fled into the

desert to spend their lives in fasting and prayer, free from the outside influence and the disturbing world. The end of persecution meant that martyrdom was becoming less likely, so asceticism began to become a way of life separately.

Considering all these aspects of the early Christian life, it is identified easily in space and time the occurrence at the current monastic under different forms in the Egyptian space, which makes many researchers assert that monasticism, as a manifestation, originated from the Egyptian monasticism (coptic), because the father of the monks "is considered St. Anthony the Great and St. Pachomius is the one that determined in the first system of living in common (communal) monasticism, in the province of Upper Egypt.

The Desert Fathers were the monks who lived in the Egyptian desert, even though they did not write as much, compared to the great influence they had among Christians in the Constantinian period. Among them are St. Anthony the Great and St. Pachomius, as evidenced by the large number of witnesses, usually short scraps collected in the "Apophthegmata Pratum".

Thus, the role of the Egyptians in the first centuries of Christian history is a very important one, being a starting point of the truths of faith and also of great theological disputes caused by the many heresies that would result in 451 to schism.

## **Chapter II: The Coptic Church between 451-642**

For the universal Church, the Council of Chalcedon had many unfortunate causes and effects that led to the first division of the churches founded by the Holy Apostles. The most unfortunate result was the emergence of germs of misunderstanding between the churches founded by the Apostles and other sister churches, effects visible until the present day. The biggest cause had been of those who planned the Council without being able to approximate its consequences, acting in a totally different way.

After the completion of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 Christians were divided into the orthodox or Chalcedonian, appointed by their opponents Councilors and Chalcedonians or anti-Chalcedonians, who did not receive the orthodox

Church doctrine about the coexistence of the two natures in the divine-human person of Christ and they fiercely opposed dogmatic decisions of the fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon.

In addition to the doctrine differences, a key role was played by the jurisdictional historical factor who was considered to be a profound humility at Chalcedon of the Church of Alexandria, who only two years earlier, in Ephesus, it was shown as the main Eastern apostolic church. This was the decisive and painful event that led to the creation of the national Coptic Church.

The argument accepted as an axiom in many works of history of the Church in Egypt, sustain the existence of a national conflict in Byzantine Greek Egypt. Therefore, the adherence to the Coptic Christianity was motivated by the alleged hostility to the Greek.

Thus, the reaction of Egyptians to be with Dioscoros was not simply a nationalist backlash against Hellenism, but the result of a political separation movements, nationally hidden under the label of religion.

Not all the Egyptian clergy followed Dioscoros on his religious policy: small groups, but well organized, followed the provisions of Chalcedon. Backed by the imperial power, the four Egyptian bishops who denied Dioscoros at Chalcedon returned home where they managed to impose themselves replacing the patriarch dismissed by the council with its own candidate, the priest Proterius (Nov 451-28 March 457), which even Dioscoros entrusted the management at the Church in Alexandria before leaving for Chalcedon, which went on the same side as the Chalcedonians.

An defining aspect of the involvement of external factors in the Egyptian problem is the approach regarding the celebration date of Easter, to which Pope Leo of Rome sent a letter to Proterius asking him to inform him of the date of the celebration because this was a prerogative assigned by the Council of Nicea in 325 to the Patriarch of Alexandria.

After the death of Dioscoros in the year 454 and the election of Timothy Elur in 14<sup>th</sup> March, 457, the situation has not undergone any change that would lead to a cessation of rebellion and persecutions, being only a matter of time until Copts will punish the one that brought so much terror among the population with the first opportunity.

In total contempt towards threats of escalation of events in Egypt due to persecutions, Emperor Leo ordered the exile of Patriarch Timothy Elur and his brother on the same island

Gangra where Dioscoros was exiled some years before, fact that started another rebellion against the Byzantine administration and also towards the people promoted by it.

However, the Council of Chalcedon, instead of bringing a faith unity, it produced a great division among Christians.

The pro-Chalcedonian politics of Emperors Marcian (450-457) and Leon (457-474) through the measures taken against the Monophysites, who rejected the decisions of the council, led to the uprising of the people and monks in Egypt. This resulted in the killing of the Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, Proterios (457), and the uprising in this stage of a fanatical Monophysite, Timothy Elur (457-460). Zeno's reign (474-491) and the one of the usurper of the throne, Basiliskos (475-476), were rocked by the opposition to Chalcedon. Emperor Zeno, wishing to put an end to the disorder made in Syria and Egypt and to bring back the unity of the Church, with the support of the patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius (472-488), published in 482 the Decree called Henotikon.

Until the enthronement of Emperor Justin , the entire period between the years 491-518 years, it has been marked by the attempts of the Byzantines to require the text at Henotikon to be signed by the Coptic patriarchs and bishops.

When Justin I (518-527) took over the rule of the Eastern Roman Empire, its religious policy was established by his nephew and successor, Justinian I (527-565).

Thus reaching Emperor, Justin approaches differently the religious problem of the empire. Acting differently from his predecessor who had appeared willing to the Monophysites, preferring loyalty to Antioch and Alexandria in the detriment of Rome. The new emperor, sees the stability of the Empire by joining the two Romes, "old" and "new", the possibility is not radically lost. Therefore the different vision of the religious policy paves the way for the pro-Chalcedonians, which leads inevitably leads to the tragic division of the Byzantine world into two camps, Chalcedonian and Monophysite.

To achieve this, Justinian was to bring peace in the Church. Therefore, on the one hand, he tried to heal the wound caused by the Acacian schism (484), which separated Rome from Constantinople, and on the other hand sought a solution to the monophysitic problem.

Justinian based its religious policy on the principle of harmony (Symphonia) between

State and Church. According to this principle, the two sources of authority do not take power from men, but from above, from the source of all authority, that is from God.

Emperor Justinian sought to find bridges between Orthodoxy and Monophysitism, having always the ultimate goal the return to the Orthodox Church of the West. Still could not ever reach an understanding between Orthodox and Monophysites without removing all the differences in the Council of Chalcedon.

In his approach to union Emperor Justinian, convened the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, starting from 5<sup>th</sup> May until 21<sup>st</sup> June 553 AC., which was attended by 150 bishops among whom only 8 were bishops of the West, having as president patriarch Eutychios of Constantinople. The council anathematized Origen, Didymus the blind and Evagrius of Pontus and their dogmas, such as: pre-existence of souls, transmigration, the doctrine that hell will end that demons will return to the angelic grace, the doctrine of the resurrection of souls without bodies, about the existence of animated celestial bodies and other heresies.

The real situation of the Church's life was a complicated one, the non-Chalcedonian group who had no authority but represented a theological power, which could pose problems, but still lacked enough theologians able to lead a fight at the Empire, this group gaining strong popularity especially in Egypt and Syria. Because of this the Egyptian people, the Syrians and their shepherds suffered bitter persecutions, exile, that created tension against Byzantium and developed a trend of nationalism, advocating for the release of their countries or at least be free in the choice of their patriarch or bishop.

Emperor efforts for proper defusing the conflict within the Church were put in difficulty by Pope Vigilius gesture, a gesture that required a penalty. Thus, in the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Fifth Ecumenical Council of the 26<sup>th</sup> May 553, was debated the problem caused by the pope, who was willingly absent from the sessions of the council and hadn't had an consistent outfit on the matter of the "Three Chapters", facing the council itself, this were targeted actions to thwart the Pope's attempts to not recognize the decisions of the Council and to impose their own de facto decisions.

From the perspective at the Coptic Church, this Council was a failure, which was caused by several factors, duplicitous characters and personal egos being those that prevailed at that time, perhaps both groups - Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian - felt the king as two-

sided, with one side turned west demanding direction from Rome, while with the other to the east, in search of truth with the monks in Syria and Egypt.

The Coptic Church does not recognize this Ecumenical Council, and all the events of that period are seen as reprisals against them and restrictions of religious expression, fact that aroused in the hearts of the Copts feelings of rebellion, hatred and disobedience against the Byzantines.

Although the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 was meant to unite all the results were not immediate nor fully achieved their goal. The problem of the "Three Chapters" went on even after this council finished, even if the manner in which Justinian imposed for signing its decisions, did not coincide with the conclusion of theological disputes.

After the death of Justinian, on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 565, followed him on the throne of the Byzantine Empire, the emperors: Justin II<sup>nd</sup> (565-578), Tiberiu I<sup>st</sup> (578- 582), Maurice (582-602) and Phocas (602- 610). They all followed the same political dynastic Justinian line regarding the church as their predecessor, supporting a foreign patriarch to represent the Byzantine authority in Egypt and not a patriarch elected by the people to represent the people in the Church.

Justinian's imperial policy consequences, had an effect on Egyptian space. Thus the succession of the seat of Patriarch of Alexandria after the death of Theodosius clearly points at to light the derelict and almost complete anarchy who ruled the world monophysitic between 567 and 577 when they have failed to elect a stable patriarch, being an uncertain period for the Coptic Church.

The anarchy of the Coptic Church in this period caused by the death of Patriarch Theodosius consisted of a split into several factions of monophysite believers whom began fighting against one another. The two main monophysite groups were represented by the Theodosians who were the descendants of the dead patriarch and followers of the doctrine of Severus of Antioch, and Gaiani that quickly were divided into many sects.

Resolving these differences, was possible by choosing in the seat of Patriarch, Damian, largely accepted by all monophysite factions, his shepherding being a lull in the life of the Coptic Church.

The last years of the tenure of Patriarch Damian were marked by the imperial enthronement of Emperor Phocas, on the 22<sup>th</sup> November 602. He was just a centurion in the Byzantine army but a very tough one, who managed to seize the imperial throne following a riot.

At the beginning of his pontificate despite the Byzantine persecutions, he lived undisturbed in Alexandria, where he has watched the life of the Coptic Church clergy ordaining bishops and priests, building new churches. These facts have bothered the Chalcedonian patriarch Evloghie who sent a letter to Emperor Phocas in which defame Anastasius.

Due to these increasing difficulties in active participation to church life domestically, Anastasius turned his attention on the issue of the unity of monophysite Churches that marked that period, showing restraint and being open to debate clarifying the underlying problems existing Syrian Church with whom they were in schism due to the involvement of his predecessor, Patriarch Damian, in the internal affairs of the Syrians.

The Persian danger was to strike the Egypt territory at the end of 618, and was to last until 629, when Egyptian territories fall under the Byzantine rule.

During their occupation, the Persians left on the patriarchal monophysite coptic throne Andronie (616-623), the successor of Patriarch Apozygaro Anastasius (605-616). Andronie belonged to one of the most influential and richest families in Alexandria.

However, after they took power and confiscated goods, the Persians, after the initial wave of violence showed a greater tolerance toward Copts. This made the new order acceptance to be made with resignation as another line of foreign rulers.

The political situation in Egypt has undergone continuous transformation that was determined by the geographical location but also the economic one being a good one that most invaders sought to hold, being a troubled area also in terms of religious life.

The premises of Arab conquest of Egypt come amid the longest war between the two greatest powers of that time - Byzantium and Iran - which lasted from 602 to 628 and it has depleted their forces. This allowed the emergence of the arab Islamic power founded by Muhammad whose leadership after his death on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June, 632, is taken by Abu Bakr (632-634), followed by Omar I (634-644). This new military power led by a religious belief

inspired by the Islamic teachings preached by Muhammad will gradually unite all the Arab tribes under the scepter of Islam, union which was not finished at the time of Muhammad's death, this being sanctioned in the time of Abu Bakr.

The Arabian danger at the borders of Egypt comes after a very tumultuous period from the military and administrative point of view which had an religious implication in this space, preceded by the Persian occupation and the Byzantine reconquest at the Egyptian space.

The leader of the Coptic Church in that time was patriarch Benjamin (623-662), pastoring in three administratively different eras: Persian occupation (623-628), the Byzantine oppression after the conquest (628-640) and the Arab occupation 640 until the end of his life.

The Arab conquest of Egypt took incalculable consequences for the Coptic Church. All started from the eve of the Arab invasion when Emperor Heraclius named Cyrus both civil and ecclesiastical captain, he was more concerned with the persecution of the Copts and their patriarch Veniamin. He had to flee in the Upper Egypt for 13 years to hide. Thus, the Copts had no incentive to support the Byzantine army but nevertheless, there is no evidence for their cooperation with the Arabs at the beginning of the invasion in 639, nor with the capture of the city of Babylon in April 641, facts that the Byzantines accused them, which shows the opposite by the large number of martyrs that the Coptic Church has had at that time.

With the successful conquest of Alexandria, a Christian force to rule Egypt had ended. Thus it begins an irreversible period of Arabisation of the population.

In the autumn of 644 the Coptic patriarch Benjamin has appeared in Alexandria, having a very amicable meeting with the Arab General who showed tolerance towards Christians being driven only by the material interests, Christians were free to worship only if they paid their fee, but were not they allowed to build other houses of worship. This process has led slowly but surely to the imposing of Islamic religion.

### **Chapter III: The Patriarchs of the Coptic Church - Timeline (451-1300)**

Church life in Egyptian space after the Council of Chalcedon experienced a radical transformation, being marked by the emergence of a national church in detrimental of the



historical Patriarchate Alexandria having a Greek root, leading to the existence of two church hierarchs that put their mark on the political and religious life. Today the Coptic Church, in the form of Orthodox perspective, appears after Chalcedon and the first patriarch is Dioscoros I. In terms of the Coptic Church its patriarchal succession to the throne has as a starting point the Apostle and Evangelist Mark as the first Patriarch of the Church Coptic. Therefore Dioscoros I is considered to be the 25th patriarch of this Church.

This difference in conception from doctrinally point of view makes that the list of Patriarchs of the Coptic Church to start at Dioscoros, let alone to talk about the other 24 patriarchs recognized also by the Alexandria Patriarchate. Doing this separation of the two overlapping hierarchies, the attention will be channeled on Coptic hierarchy, listing the serial number will be at from the perspective of the Orthodox Churches and the name presentation will be specified the order in the tradition of the Coptic Church.

The starting point is the person of patriarch Dioscoros, the one who appears in both hierarchical lists, both Coptic and Melkite continuing their enumeration data with aferent about the contribution that they had in history, finishing with Patriarch John the 6<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Chapter IV: Egypt's Arab caliphs and Caliphats**

The term caliphate is a form of feudal theocratic state established by the Arabs in the territories controlled by them, led by a caliph who was the successor of the prophet and head of the community. This form of organization appears after Muhammad's death when the various groups that made up the army and the Prophet subjects tried to regain autonomy. Appointment of Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father in law as a successor (khalifa, 'caliph') was inspired, he managed to improve the situation.

The first four caliphs of the Islamic world named the righteous ones or termed as "the good guided" (al-raşidun) were: Abu Bakr (632-634), Omar (634-644), Uthman (644-656) and Ali (656- 661).

These caliphs who founded the Arabic empire were all from around Muhammad (two father in-laws and two bridegrooms), leading on the conquest shares started by him,

surprising it by how quickly was done, being animated by the religious, political and economic motivation.

Dominated by the desire of a quick enrichment acquired after the first expeditions followed naturally by the Syrian and Egyptian invasion of the territory that represented the most important treasures of the seventh century.

The expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula on the time of the Caliphs: Abu Bakr (632-634) and Omar (634-644) stunned by the speed and scale.

Egypt regained Byzantine province in 628 supports hardly the economic exploitation as the granary of the metropolis and the religious oppression exercised by the Greeks on Copts. In 639, the Arab general Amr ibn al 'As I defeated the Byzantines at Heliopolis.

The conquest of Egypt completed the first phase of the Muslim expansion the following years being devoted to the administrative organization of the conquered countries. Egyptian territory enter into Arabic dominion during Caliph Omar after the year 642, when the Arab conquest definitively ends in Egypt, which is the starting year of the caliphate as a form of government in Egypt.

After the four Orthodox caliphs, followed two major dynastys at the helm of the Arab Caliphate, the Ummeyad Dynasty between 658-750 and the Abbasid dynasty between 750-1258. During the first dynasty, Islam spread further, its borders extending from India to Spain. Under the second dynasty the Islamic world takes the ancient knowledge from the Greek, Persian, Egyptian and Hindu world into its culture. Also from this period dates the biggest robberies, massacres and humiliations of the people conquered by the Arabs, being a curse to them.

By a quick analysis of the first centuries since the advent of Islam and the Arab Empire, it can be seen the tremendous stretch of gains that will lead to a mix of cultures that gave rise to the in fightings for autonomy, is important to note the impact of Arab civilization among the conquered areas, the religion footprint and mentality remaining unchanged.

## **Chapter V: The Coptic Church between the VII<sup>th</sup>-X<sup>th</sup> centuries**

With the Arab conquest of Egypt by the Arab General Amr ibn al-As, begun in 639 and completed in 644 when the Byzantines are removed permanently from the Egyptian space, the Monophysites saw them as liberators from under the Byzantine domination, which lately they will bitterly find that they were wrong. At first Arab Muslim have shown great tolerance towards Copts.

Arab interest at first was of a financial nature which then assumed a religious aspect. Arab conquerors have kept the Byzantine tax conduct using the Coptic population that occupied state positions. Patriarch Benjamin utilized at maximum the period of tolerance of Arabs for Copts, using the mutual respect relationship that he had with General Amr. Tolerance and religious freedom conferred by Arabs to Coptic Church was only an illusion that will turn into the darkest nightmare for both the clergy and the people. Starting the conversion to Islam for various reasons, mostly financial, Arabs found out that wealth begins to decrease and thus resort to increasing taxes for Christians.

The economic policy of Arabs concerning the Egyptian area was clearly defined, with specific taxes on land "kharaj" and "jizya" for those non-Muslim, forced labor and forced enrollment as sailors to Christians who were fighting on ships in their Arabic expeditions against the Byzantines.

The political situation in Egypt was quite tense because the struggle for the leadership of the Islamic Empire was given between the heirs on direct bloodline at Muhammad and the most distant ones especially coming from the governors of Damascus.

The commencement of the limitation of Coptic population and Coptic Patriarch to express faith, began with the death of Caliph Muawiya in 680, the caliphate throne being taken by his son Yazid (680-683). The fear of Arab authorities for an escalation of the situation in Egypt because of Christian sympathy population to Byzantium, led to a hardening of the attitude towards the Christians by banning the celebration of religious services in churches, lest the pretext of religion, to organize meetings for revolt. From the express orders of Caliph Abd al-Malik were destroyed all crosses placed outside churches and from public places being considered an insult to Islam and therefore a crime.

The perpetuation of this extreme situation caused by the greed for money of Arab authorities had a negative impact on the clergy of the Coptic Church, which was unfortunately

indulged in the practice of simony, fact that will create a lot of trouble later in the Coptic Church.

The decision to dismiss the Christians employees in the Egyptian government imposed by the caliph and governor, and their replacement with Muslims put in unthankless situation many Copts who wanted to stay the administration to convert to Islam.

All these acts of oppression that has undergone the Coptic population through excessive taxation, the destruction of religious symbols, coercion towards Islamisation, did nothing but to worsen the resentment of the people and Coptic clergy to the Arab administration. This will result in a rebellion in the eighth century, which will be marked by a large number of martyrs for the faith of the Coptic Christianity.

These armed insurrection took place in the years 725, 739, 750, 767, 773 and 818 - particularly in the Nile Delta in Lower Egypt. They were very hard repressed by Arab authorities mercilessly followed by massacres, which targeted the Coptic population. Instead they brought Arab settlers from the Arabian Peninsula.

The Ninth Century represented the forfeiture of the Abbasid Dynasty, being a period of great social unrest, an escalation of violence and radicalization of Muslims that will bring for the Coptic Christian population only suffering, being the beginning of a century of persecution and forced conversion to Islam.

The Migration Arabic administration policy was a determining factor in the Islamization of Egypt, many Arabs leave the big cities where they lived until now and go to the rural areas where they get into the possession of villages and of abandoned land by Coptic communities decimated or eradicated by Arab army in riots. Thus, the Muslim population of the country will have the supremacy.

The situation of Copts has slightly improved towards the end of patriarchy Cosma II, starting with the removal and sudden death of al-Ghayr Governor Abd al-Masih and the coming of Abdullah ibn Yazid's governor al-Turki. The situation changed drastically in 861, when Caliph Al-Mutawakkil was killed. Within nine years, 861-870, four caliphs were able to bring the Arab Empire into chaos because of fighting for the throne, the fate of the Egypt province remains in the hands of the administration of Turkish origin, which protected the

capital of Fustat and lands from around it, while some provinces have fallen into anarchy declaring independence.

The year 870, brings in Egypt a new stage in the life of the Church, being the year in which the governor is installed on the throne from the Tulunid dynasty. Between 870 and 905, period characterized by the Copts as one of tolerance and peace, together with the reigns of the governors from the Ikhshidid dynasty (935-960) and Fadimid dynasty (969-1171) meant the revival of the spiritual life of the copyic clergy. It is characterized by the reviving of theological education, of the canonical work and relocation of administrative point of view of the Coptic Church as far as it could be possible in a society that had become predominantly Muslim.

## **Chapter VI: The Coptic Church between the XI<sup>th</sup>-XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries**

The beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, began in Egypt under the reign of the Fatimid dynasty, a period marked by the reign of Caliph al-Hakim, a dark period for the Coptic Church. Most of the Fatimid caliphs adopted a policy of tolerance towards the Christian Coptic population, applying the same policy to Jews, Melkites and Sunni Muslims.

The novelty of the Fatimid dynasty in the Egyptian space was the independence from the Arab Caliphate of Baghdad, becoming an independent state, being a Shiite caliphate that made him different from the Sunni Baghdad. This difference, Shiite and Sunni, made that the restrictions and persecutions to be applied at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century not only Christians and Jews but also to Sunni Muslims without exception.

All these forms of persecution of the population were taken back by al-Hakim, appealing again to forced conversions (Islam or death) by which a large number of Copts have given up in the past and have become Muslims, but now has been applied also to Sunni Muslims requiring them to be Shiite.

Between the years 1017-1021, al-Hakim has become more tolerant to Jews and Christians, and hostile to Sunnis. Ironically, he developed a particularly hostile attitude regarding the Shiite Muslims. During this period the single Druze religion, began to develop

as an independent religion based on the revelation (Kashf) of al-Hakim who was seen as having an origine divine of law.

The life of Coptic Churches in the last year of Fatimid dynasty has not been marked by moments of repression, this being only temporary because the new dynasty will apply restrictive measures on Copts.

Generally the Fatimids were known for their tolerance. However, towards the end of their kingdom era when the kingdom was weakened from the war against Europeans in Syria, being very expensive for them, provided the necessary motivation for oppression of the Copts.

Fatimid Dynasty meant substitution of the Coptic language beginning to disappear from worship, being left only to be spoken rarely, being imposed Arabic not only in administration but also in the liturgical rite, which will affect subsequent the Coptic identity as an ethnic group, being a slow but steady stage of Islamisation..

The Ayubid dynasty was a Muslim dynasty of Kurdish origin, founded by Saladin and centered in Egypt. This dynasty ruled the Middle East in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Ayubid family, experienced its inception during brothers Najm ad-Din Ayyub and Asad ad-Din Shirkuh, who served as governors of the Zengid Dynasty (Zangid) in Syria, being the father and the uncle of Saladin.

Saladin's ascent to the throne of the Egyptian caliphate meant the inauguration of an era of security and justice, providing equal rights for all Egyptians, but also duties.

The Coptic Church, during the reign of Saladin, was led by Patriarch Mark the 3<sup>rd</sup> (June 12, 1167 - January 1, 1189), a contemporary of the last years of the Fatimid governance and the establishment of the new ayubide administration the situation of the Copts had undergone major changes. If in the first years of his reign, Saladin, issued repressive measures against Copts, with time, his attitude is changing for the better, especially after the conquest of Jerusalem.

The Coptic community life has improved once with gaining his confidence Saladin and also of the Muslim administration, that paved the way of Patriarch Mark the 3<sup>th</sup> to carry out his philanthropic work unhindered. He pleaded that the rich to help the poor, managing to restore ruined churches and build new ones.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1187, Jerusalem surrenders to Saladin's army after a siege of 12 days. Saladin enters triumphantly into Jerusalem giving strict orders that no Christian whether cruciate or oriental not be harassed. Also, Saladin forbade any robbery or destruction in Jerusalem, even punishing those who demanded the destruction of Holy Sepulchre as punishment for Crusader actions in 1099 when they installed a cross on the dome Rocher and turned al-Aqsa mosque into church.

Unlike crusaders, who, when they conquered Jerusalem in 1099, people massacred 70,000 unarmed civilians, Saladin allowed civiliansto leave unharmed Jerusalem. Saladin did not allow anyone to desecrate the Holy Sepulchre Church and the Patriarch of Jerusalem received to leave with all Christian treasury.

Copts have access to Jerusalem, which they had been banned by the Crusaders because of their Monophysite rite and the church of the Holy Sepulchre is given to the Orthodox clergy and leaving access to Latin pilgrims.

The Jewish community in Egypt was an influential social group throughout history, who played an important role especially in economie, Jewish community being focused on commercial activities. Hebrew population reaches a significant number in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, being reported ninety places in which it was present.

Christians, Muslims and Jews have always had a close relationship in Egypt. Jews under the Fatimid and ayubid dynasties were integrated into the contemporary society back then, having the right to buy, sell and lease property from their neighbors practicing freely the same trades as the Muslim population.

The effect of the fall of Jerusalem is causing in the West a new regrouping of armed forces under the leadership of Pope Gregory the 8<sup>th</sup>, who died after only a few months of initiating the crusade in 1187, preparations being continued by Pope Clement the 3<sup>rd</sup> (1187-1191). This new military campaign carried out between 1189-1192, is known as the Third Crusade or The Kings Crusade.

An essential role in attracting kings and nobles from the West under the same crusader flag, had a monk, Foulque of Neuilly, who managed to convince to participate in the crusade the two kings in conflict, Philip the 3<sup>rd</sup> of France ( 1180-1223) and Richard the Lionheart (1189-1199). They were joined by the German Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1180-1190).

The relationship between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin was one of mutual respect and a perfect chivalry was displayed. Hearing that Richard was wounded and lost his horse in the battle, Saladin sent him his personal physician and two thoroughbred stallions, very valuable.

The idea of religious war became known under the term "holy war" who was declared by a competent religious authority, such as the pope, in Western Christianity, and the Caliph in Islam.

The Crusades represented a medieval chapter of a lengthy interaction between East and West, religious, ethnic and linguistic differences went to fight in the name of faith. Etymologically Crusade is the name given to military colonization expeditions undertaken by the feudal lords in Western Europe between 1096 and 1270 in the Middle East under the pretext of the liberation of the Holy Sepulchre from the Turks.

Jihad is an Arabic word that can be translated as "effort", "fight", "endeavor"; "Holy War" and designates a religious duty, communitary excellence, required to all Muslims in order to spread the Islam.

According to Islamic doctrine there are several ways to fulfill this obligation: by heart (own spiritual purification), by word (supporting what is right and correcting evil) and by sword (having war against "infidels" and enemies of the Islamic faith). Jihad is worn by men, and those who die are declared martyrs, having Paradise as a promise.

The concept of jihad in the broadest sense has the sense to protect Islamic civilization (Dar al-Islam) from the invasion of "infidels". Wars in the name of Islam, in the early area of this religion was early were perceived as forms of jihad as a "holy war".

Egyptian area felt the danger of the Crusades since their debut in 1097, being very close to Palestine, having both cultural and economic ties with it. To better understand the position of the Copts towards the crusading movement of the West against the Muslim countries in the Middle East, we have to take into account the report to the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451.

## **Chapter VII: Particularities of the Coptic Church**



Coptic Liturgy belongs essentially to the Greek-Byzantine rite. When, in 451, after the Council of Chalcedon, the Copts separated themselves from the Universal Church, they developed, to some extent, an own Liturgy, in which they use three languages: Coptic, as descendants of the ancient Egyptians, Greek and Arabic. The Coptic Church liturgies are: the Liturgy of St. Basil, St. Gregory the Theologian Liturgy and the Liturgy of St. Cyril of Alexandria (Liturgy of St. Mark the Apostle and Evangelist).

The early Christians took Egyptian timesharing systems used in the ancient world that they have changed, adapting them to their practical needs. Timesharing in terms of civilians for the Egyptian Christians has the central point the day, it starts in the morning, taken from the ancient Roman world sharing time, but their liturgical day begins under the Byzantine liturgical day.

The liturgical time, as division is identical to the Jews and Muslim momentums having as a starting point the sunset and weekdays organization was taken from the Jews, the difference being that it begins on Sunday, the Lord's Day.

Coptic Christian year is the extension of the ancient Egyptian civil year, retaining its subdivision into three seasons of four months each. The three seasons are commemorated by special prayers in the Coptic liturgy. This calendar was used throughout Egypt, farmers watched the agricultural seasons after it.

Coptic calendar begins with Neyrouz feast being the first day of the Coptic year, the first day of the month Thout, the first month of the Coptic calendar, which coincides with September 11<sup>th</sup> unless it falls on September 12<sup>th</sup> the Gregorian leap years. Coptic years are counted from 284 AC, the year when Diocletian became Roman Emperor, his reign being marked by torture and mass executions of Christians, especially in Egypt.

Coptic music is the sung music having a special role in the Coptic Church, being a purely religious music. It consists especially of hymns sung in rhythm with instruments such as large hand cymbals and triangle. Coptic Song has a very old tradition, assumed to have links with the ancient liturgies in Jerusalem and Syria, while some of the songs were taken from Egyptian burial practices and other ancient pagan rituals.

## **Conclusions**

The Coptic Church existence despite the vicissitudes of history, is an example of perseverance and patience, often carried to the supreme sacrifice for dogma and doctrine.

The history of the Christian worship is marked by the fourth Council of Chalcedon, after which most Christians will adopt the dogma that Christ had two natures, one human and one divine. The decision taken by the Council of Chalcedon was not adopted by the extremists disciples of St. Cyril of Alexandria. Those Christians, subsequently called Monophysites sustained St. Cyril explanations, according to which, Christ had just a human nature.

Since its inception, the Coptic Church has played a significant role in defining Christian theology, especially in preserving and protecting the authentic texts of Christianity from the influences of the Gnostic heresies.

The Coptic Church history shows the time and space evolution of Egyptian Christianity and the impact of Islam in a territory that was the cradle of early Christianity.