An episcopal list of the Coptic Church
In the time of Gabriel VI

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Resumen: Este artículo se interesa por una lista de obispos en Egipto de mediados del siglo XV. El listado refleja las concentraciones de cristianos durante ese momento y los problemas a los que se enfrentaban, como el concubinato. Este texto contribuye al conocimiento de la Historia de los Patriarcas.

Abstract: The article highlights a list of bishops in Egypt in the middle of fifteenth century. The list reflects the concentrations of Christians at that time and the problems that they faced such as concubinage. This text contributes to our knowledge of the History of the Patriarchs.

Palabras Clave: Obispos egipcios. Cristianos en Egipto. Siglo XV.

Key Words: Egyptian bishops. Christians in Egypt. Fifteenth century,

Introduction

Since the pioneering work of H. Munier, and followed by the article of J. Muyser, little had been added to these two important studies.

The Book of the History of the Patriarchs is one of the most important books narrating the stories of the Patriarchs starting from the first Century till the beginning of the XXth century. It was written by

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1 I would like to thank father Athanasius of Saint Macarius who kindly supply me the photo of this important manuscript.


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several authors from different backgrounds and epochs. This book was originally written in Coptic, but was translated and augmented in the eleventh century by the deacon Mawhub in Mansur ibn Muffarrig. Starting from the thirteenth century with few exceptions, the Book of the History of the Patriarchs became extremely brief.

Gabriel the Patriarch, and he is the nineteenth of their number: This father Gabriel, the patriarch was from the monastery of Saint Antony. He was consecrated on the twenty-sixth day of the month of Amshir in the year one thousand, one hundred and eighty-two of the martyrs, and he remained patriarch for eight years and ten months. And he went to his rest on the twenty-sixth of the month of Amshir in the year one thousand, one hundred and ninety-one of the martyrs. May the blessing of his prayer be with us. Amen”.

I. The manuscript

The manuscript is preserved in a private collection and contains some moral, pastoral and liturgical issues:

Fol. 149 recto contains the following colophon

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Translation:

«(Here) finishes this book, which is the pure canon on blessed Thursday 12th of Baramhat, which is the seventh month, in the Coptic year 1570 of the pure,3 happy righteous martyr, May God grant us, the acceptance of their prayers to the last breath. Amen!

The person in charge was the honoured pure, saint, perfect entrusted precious priest, our father the Hegumen Hermina the

3 = 20 March 1854AD
minister of the church of the great saint Abba Hermina at Qaw of the East, by spending his own money and his private belongings, we beseech the Lord elevated God in His Highest to help him and reward him zeal for this work, by the forgiveness of his sins, through the intercessions of Lady Madonna, the Virgin, the angels, the pure Apostles, the martyrs and all who pleased Him.

An inalienable endowment and eternal bequest for the church of saint Abba Hermina at Qaw of the East. It should be sold or given as a pledge, or borrowed, or taken out of his endowment for any damaging reason whoever transgress and took it out of his endowment for the abovementioned reason, will have his share with Simon the Magician and who resembled to him; and whoever preserved and conserved it, God may guard him; Amen!

2. The text

2. The text
In the Name of God, the Creator, the intellectuel living who is my help

We begin with the help of God, let Him be praised and elevated, to copy some inquiries and answering concerning the engagement (Imlak), the marriage, the concubinage and the inheritance from the saying of the fathers, the masters of the Church may God have pity upon us through the blessing of their prayers forever; Amen!

Inquiry: A man who was married with a woman and the latter rested, he intended to marry the cousin of her father. They answered him allowing that, I mean the chosen fathers, who are:

- Anba Isaac the great of Minia
- Anba Gabriel of Sohag
- Anba Isaac of Talla
- Anba Gabriel of Naqada
- Anba Gabriel of al-Muharraq
- Anba John of Assiut
- Anba John of Fayoum

And their meeting took place in the cell of Anba Gabriel al-Gharbawi and he (Anba Gabriel) put his seal on the paper over the signatures of the above mentioned bishops. He (the patriarch) allowed them according to the authority given from the holy, true mouth saying what you shall loose will be loosed and the signatures of my fathers the bishops allowing that.

3. Commentary

1. The patriarch mentioned here is Gabriel VI (1466-1475AD) who was born at al-‘Arabah al-Madfunah and consequently was called al-‘Arabawi. Our manuscript mentioned him as al-Gharbawi.

2. There are another two copies on the same topic:
   * Theology 294 (Egypt, eighteenth century), fols. 50b-86b

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8 Samir Khalil SAMIR, “Gabriel VI”, CE, IV, p. 1133.
9 G. GRAF, Catalogue des manuscrits arabes chrétiens conservés au Caire. «Studi e Testi» 117 (Città del Vaticano, 1934). no. 439/10; M. Simaika, Y. ‘Abd al-Masih,
3. The list shows the reduced number of bishops of that time, only 7 bishops.
   Only one represents the Lower Egypt Anba Isaac of Talla
   There is one for the region of Fayoum.  
   We may notice the concentration of the Christian of that time is
   between Minia and Sohag. There are four bishops (Minia, al-
   Muharraq, Assiut and Sohag) there is one bishop for Naqada; while
   the important diocese of Damietta is not mentioned.
   There was a bishop for the monastery al-Muharraq, replacing the
   other diocese such as Qusqam, Qusiah, Sanabu etc
4. As this meeting took place in the patriarchal cell at the Church of
   Harit Zuweila at that time, we may assume that the Metropolitans
   'overseas' were not able to attend. We mean by this the metropolitan
   of Jerusalem, as that time; there was no Coptic prelate for Ethiopia.
   The discussion shows the pastoral concern of the bishops and the
   patriarch. It seems that every bishop submitted the problems that he
   faced in his diocese to this synod.
5. Among the subjects treated in the text, we may notice the
   "concubinage" which became a serious issue for the Copts especially
   under Mark V the ninety-eighth of the number of the patriarchs who
   was imprisoned in the tower for not allowing Christian concubinage.
6. A detailed study of this manuscript will appear soon.

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Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, the
Patriarchate, the Principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries
of Egypt (Cairo, 1942), II/2, p. 541/1.
10 G. GRAF, Catalogue..., no 443/1; M. SIMAIKA, Y. 'ABD AL-MASBI, Catalogue..., no
394/1.
18 For the history of this diocese cf. Archbishop BASILIOS, “Jerusalem, Coptic see of”,
CE, IV, pp. 1324-1329.
20 Nabih KAMEL and Samuel AL-SURIANY, Tarīḥ al-Abā al-Baṭārikah –Anbā Yusab
Usqaf Fuwwah, [= The History of the Fathers Patriarchs by Yusab Bishop of
Fuwwah] (Cairo, nd), p. 205.