

## ABUN

The highest spiritual leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. The term signifies “our father” and is applied to bishops, archbishops, and patriarchs, as well as to saints who were monks. The office of the *abun* was filled usually by a [Coptic monk](#) elected by his brethren in the [monasteries of Egypt](#) and was consecrated by the patriarch of Alexandria. Around 110 such metropolitans were sent to [Ethiopia](#) between the fourth and the twentieth centuries. Ethiopians could for the first time accede to the episcopate in 1948.

Only one [metropolitan](#) filled the office at a time, and in principle, he could not be replaced except in the cases of decrepitude, infirmity, insanity, or doctrinal deviations. He was also expected never to leave his metropolitanate even temporarily. These norms have, nevertheless, not always been adhered to in practice. The dignitary often resided close to the imperial court, which was relatively mobile since the thirteenth century. But he was not always obliged to follow the royal camp. ‘Axum, Addi Abun, Gondar, Azazo, and Addis Ababa were the principal episcopal seats in various periods of Ethiopian history.

The *abun* derived his resources from the estates permanently endowed upon his office, from presence of the sovereign and the notables, and from the fees paid by the [clerics](#) he ordained. His major function consisted of ordaining priests and deacons, consecrating new or restored churches as well as articles pertaining to them, performing coronation ceremonies, saying Mass on special occasions, and attending [church](#) councils. He had practically little to do with church administration *per se*, which was under the auspices of his counterpart, the *ECCAGE*; but he was so highly respected and often trusted that he could participate even in the privy council. In the protocol of seats in council sessions, the *abun* sat to the right of the sovereign while the *eccage* sat to the left.

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