

BISHOP

The Coptic term *episkopos* is a loan word from the Greek that can be translated *bishop*, *overseer*, *superintendent*, or *supervisor*. The Arabic *usquf* derives also from the Greek *episkopos*. According to the **Didascalia**, the bishop should be chosen by the congregation, and his consecration should take place on a Sunday in the presence of the people and the clergy with at least two or three bishops.

The bishop's main duties are the instruction of the people and clergy of his diocese, the ordination of **deacons** and **priests**, and the consecration of churches, **liturgical instruments**, and **icons**. The bishop provides for the poor, the widows, and orphans in his diocese. Canon 15 of the **Council of Nicaea** forbids the transference of a bishop from his diocese.

The greater majority of Coptic bishops were chosen from among the monks. It was Patriarch **Athanasius** the Apostolic who first encouraged monks to be ordained bishops. According to Bishop John of Ephesus (ca. 516-585), portraits of new bishops were hung in the churches of their dioceses.

Unfortunately, only one of the portraits of Coptic bishops survived, which shows Bishop Abraham and dates from the late sixth century. A number of significant Coptic texts represent biographies or encomia on famous bishops such as Macarius, bishop of Tkow (d. 451 or 452) and Pistentius, bishop of Coptos (569-632). The correspondence of the latter and that of Abraham, bishop of Hermonthis show the activities of the Coptic bishop in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Bishops played a crucial role in the history of the Coptic Church. Many of them are commemorated in the **synaxarion**. Some were martyrs, such as Patape, bishop of Coptos and Ammonius, bishop of Esna (4th century). **The Monastery of St. Hatre** was built in honor of St. Hatre, who was the Bishop of [Aswan](#) in the late fourth century. A number of bishops are

scholars, such as **Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa'** and **Athanasius, bishop of Qus**. The Bishop of **Alexandria** is the **patriarch** of the Coptic Church. *See also* BISHOP'S CONSECRATION; STRUCTURE OF THE COPTIC CHURCH.

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