

## ***Christianity in Asyut in Modern History***

### **A Historical Introduction**

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Asyut had taken Girga's place as the capital of Upper Egypt. With Muhammad 'Ali's interest in administratively organizing Egypt's governorates, the construction of the governorate building in Asyut began in 1811. In 1822, Asyut's population was around seventeen thousand inhabitants. By 1846 it had reached twenty thousand. In 1850, Asyut was the largest city in Upper Egypt and the sixth-largest in Egypt.

In 1843, one traveler estimated the Copts' population there to be no more than a thousand inhabitants, while in 1849 the estimation by Asyut's bishop pointed to six thousand inhabitants (Walz 1978: 113). It was a wealthy town: its cultivated land had increased from 134,422 to 164,843 feddans between ad 1298 and ad 1315 (Russell 1966: 77). Asyut had always been known as the Copts capital,' due to either its large population of Copts—estimated, in the mid-nineteenth century, to be as high as 50 percent of Asyut's entire population—or their economic power and wealth.[\[1\]](#)

The construction activities of Muhammad 'Ali and his family had a great impact on the governorate's revival. These included the al-Magzoub Barrage in 1835 and the 1872 extension of the railway thereby Khedive Isma'il. Khedive Tewfik also visited Asyut and its famous Caesarian market (known as the Kaysariat) in 1879, and he was received by Wissa and Wassef Khayat, two senior Coptic merchants, who rolled out precious carpets on the ground before the khedive's carriage (Fayd Allah 1940: 53—54).

At the turn of the twentieth century, Asyut's wealth was displayed in the orchards and gardens that surrounded its oldest districts, such as al-Alwah, with its large concentration of Copts, and [Kom](#) Abbas, which later

became a high-income district. Asyut's markets were characterized by their abundant supplies from Cairo, Hijaz, and Sudan (Walz 1978: 114). Historians mention that wealthy families of Copts built themselves palaces with gardens by the river bank (Leeder 1918: 336).

For a long time Asyut remained the seat of two governors: the governor-general of all of Upper Egypt and the provincial or local governor. Until the beginning of the twentieth century the administrative divisions of Asyut consisted of four units, each of which was headed by a mayor, *omdah*, or *sheikh al-balad*. A provincial governor was entrusted with assisting tax collection, the organization of individuals to work on projects requiring corvee labor, and the conscription of young men.

By the end of the nineteenth century a special 'omdaship' (or local mayorship) was created for the Coptic community. In modern times, Asyut knew three prominent guilds: brokers for ordinary goods (wholesalers), the slave merchants' guild (those who brought slaves from Sudan), and the Cameleers Association (camel owners, camels being the main means of transportation back then) (Walz 1978:114 nn. 8 and 9).

Studies of Asyut's social structure suggest that the ruling class was composed of a number of large influential families, most of which were traders and landowners, known as 'the notables.' A few of these were of Turkish descent.

These families formed a strong social network through the intermarriage of their sons and daughters. One study has monitored nearly sixty-four families, of which more than sixteen were Coptic (Fayd Allah 1940:172–200). It was out of these households that the holders of the most important administrative positions in the governorate generally came in the mid-nineteenth century, such as the mayor and the senior clergymen.

## **Economic Activities of the Copts**

The accepted measures of wealth included owning no less than fifty feddans of agricultural land, or owning orchards, palm trees, other trees, or a trade agency, and also took into account the number of slaves owned by the family (Fayd Allah 1940: 54). Of the large Coptic families, one can mention al-Gohari, Shenouda, Wissa, Khayyat, Maqar, Hanna, Daghesh, al-Meqaddes Girgis, and others. Some of these donated properties to churches as endowments, and restored or built churches and schools on a portion of their property, such as the Shenouda family, which restored the church of St. Abadir the Martyr (Fayd Allah 1940:172–200).

The main reasons for the strong economy of the city of Asyut were excellence in agricultural production and the fact that it was the capital of Upper Egypt, as well as its central location through which tourists passed during their Nile cruise between [Luxor](#) and Aswan in the winter. Asyut was a four-day journey by steamer from Cairo, and it was necessary to stop there to reprovision the boats.

This afforded an opportunity for tourists to visit the city's attractions and the nearby ancient Egyptian monuments, as well as to buy handicrafts at the bazaars (Hunter 2004:43). As for its agricultural production, it was abundant and diverse. Asyut produced corn, barley, wheat, and fava beans. In the mid-nineteenth century, it was one of the largest governorates in area of cultivated land and its productivity. The foreign grain trade was one of the trades monitored by the state.

Taxes in Upper Egypt used to be paid in kind rather than monetarily until 1880. Grains were collected in silos and shipped to Cairo and Alexandria where auctions were held by traders, especially European exporting companies. Those traders, some of them being Copts such as the al-Gohari family, played the role of mediator or agent. Foreign events, such as the Crimean War, also contributed to a rise in grain prices, which was in the interests of Asyut's traders and their trade. Since the turn of the twentieth century, Asyut has been fortunate in having a fairly good industrial base with the expansion of its cotton, wool, and silk textile

factories.

It was famous for its fine silk and cotton sheets. Asyut's wool was of such high quality that it was often described as being smooth as silk. Copts have largely dominated the dyeing industry in Asyut, performing most of the dyeing for Egypt's and Europe's textile factories, especially for fabrics exported to Sudan (Walz 1978:117–18).

Trade with Sudan played an important role in the growth of Asyut's economy. Asyut's distinguished medial location between the markets of Europe, Sudan, and Darfur led to the flourishing of convoy-based trade. The main commodities were textiles, dyeing materials, ostrich feathers, natron (natural salt), ivory, gum, and slaves. Copts, such as the al-Gohari and Shenouda families, took part in these trades, with the latter being able to pay a sum of twenty-five thousand piastres as a tribute or *jizya* on behalf of the Copts of Asyut in the days of Muhammad'Ali (Walz 1978:119). This was due to the fact that at that time the town was treated as a fiscal unit; that is, its inhabitants were collectively responsible for the payment of taxes (Baer 1959: 56).

The Shenouda family also acted as a commercial representative for the interests of the sultan of Darfur for some time. Other well-known Copts in the convoy trade were the families of Maqar, Khayyat, Wissa, Elias, and al-Meqaddes Girgis, as well as many Muslim families, to such an extent that almost half of Asyut's senior families took part in the convoy trade until the 1952 revolution. Some of the Coptic traders partnered with foreign agencies to bolster their position and for fear of exploitation. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, some of them acted as consuls or representatives of foreign countries, which would in turn confer their

protection. 'Abd al-Massih Shenouda al-Gohari of the al-Gohari family became consul of France in Asyut to assist in French tourism in the region. Maqar Demian of the Maqar family succeeded him in that position. In 1861 Wassef Girgis Khayyat became consul of the United

States in Asyut, and in 1868 Wissa Boctor became consul of Spain (Walz 1978:122).

There were three major trade routes connecting Egypt with sub-Saharan Africa, and the size of the trade coming along these routes fluctuated according to political conditions prevailing in both Egypt and the interior of the continent. The first route from Cairo to Sudan via the Libyan Fazzan oases was unsafe. The *darb al-arbain*,<sup>[2]</sup> a second route, leading from the middle Egyptian Nile Valley to the west of Sudan, may have begun to flourish toward the end of the seventeenth century with the rise of the new and powerful state of Darfur, which depended on external trade. A third route led into the kingdom of Funj at Sennar<sup>[3]</sup> from trade centers in Upper Egypt (Walz 1972:263).

The flourishing trade that developed between Egypt and Darfur, Fazara, and eastern Sudan along the *darb al-arbain* in Sudan (Powell 1999: 401) seems not to have started much before the turn of the eighteenth century, although the route was well known before this time. Merchants traveling to these regions and to the Funj capital via the desert route would have assembled in Upper Egypt at Girga in Sohag, before Asyut replaced it, with the caravan progressing to Kharga Oasis before it joined the *darb al-arbain* (Walz 1979: 213—14).

Of the cities of Egypt, Asyut at the end of the eighteenth century was the chief entrepot for merchants coming from and going to the interior of Africa. The area of Upper Egypt, from Asyut in the north to Aswan in the south, was ruled by a Bedouin tribe, the Hawwara. Originally from Tunisia, the Hawwara,<sup>[4]</sup> who had settled in Egypt in the sixteenth century, were tributaries of the Turks, to whom they provided grain. But they enjoyed considerable independence and were frequently dissatisfied with their overlords.

The tribal chiefs were served by a bureaucracy consisting almost entirely of Copts (Hamilton 2006: 48). The trade with Sudan included textiles of

various sorts, cotton stuff, printed cotton, slaves, and eunuchs,[\[5\]](#) as slavery was an important part of the economy. In eastern Africa, important African castration centers were in Ethiopia, at Aswan [on the Egyptian](#) border, and near Asyut in Upper Egypt (Toledano 1984:383).

Late in the eunuch trade, the stretch of the Nile between Girga and Asyut drew considerable notice from travelers, with activity reported at or near Girga itself, at the monastery of Dayr al-Ganadla near Abu Tig, and the town of Tahta, both south of Asyut. This was especially true at Zawiyat al-Dayr, a predominantly Coptic village that some authorities describe as the center with the largest output.[\[6\]](#) A large shipment of slaves arrived in the Asyut area twice a year (Hogendorn 1999: 142; Baer 1967: 419).

Castration was prohibited by law in Egypt in 1841 (Walz 1985:159). Slavery, in general, was addressed by the state, and, in one incident, troops from Cairo reached Asyut on 25 April 1880 when Khedive Muhammad Tewfiq was informed about the arrival of a large caravan of 1,200 slaves at Asyut (La Rue 2002: 81–82). This incident became a cause celebre in diplomatic and British anti-slavery circles. It helped to shape British public opinion toward the Egyptian regime of Khedive Tewfiq and was a factor in the decision to send back to the Sudan Charles Gordon, who had gained considerable public acclaim for his anti-slavery work there. Shortly after his arrival, he became a British martyr as the most famous victim of the Sudanese Mahdiyya (La Rue 2002: 83).

## **Churches and [Monasteries](#)**

The wealth of the Church arose from its *waqfi*, or endowments, which were divided into two main branches: endowments to [monasteries](#) and endowments to specific churches in the form of lands and houses. Church authorities were secretive about these *waqfi*, and consequently suppressed information relating to them. From other sources, it is possible to form some picture of Church possessions. A study has estimated that in 1906 [monasteries](#) and churches controlled about 15,000

feddans; Jirjis Hunayn, a Copt in the service of the Ministry of Finance, reckoned the *waqjs* of monasteries as amounting to 4,044 feddans, based on his own investigations in 1906 (Seikaly 1970: 261).

A Coptic writer affirmed that thirteen Coptic families owned between 2,000 and 30,000 feddans each. Another hundred families owned between 100 and 2,000 feddans separately. Altogether, the Copts possessed about 1,500,000 feddans. To this must be added wealth arising from other sources, with the result that the Copts controlled one-fifth of the wealth of Egypt (Seikaly 1970: 268).

As one would expect in a place with a long and rich tradition of Christianity, there are a number of churches and [monasteries](#) in and around Asyut. *The Coptic Encyclopedia* refers to about seventeen [monasteries](#) and churches. A recent census study registered about sixty-eight sites.<sup>[7]</sup> For the Catholic Church, there are about thirty-nine churches in Asyut. It was part of the Thebes diocese, founded in 1898. It became the Diocese of Lykopolis fifty years later in 1947.<sup>[8]</sup> Asyut was the target of missions more than any other governorate, and there were thirty-seven Evangelical churches there by 1947.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **Missionaries' Activities**

American missionaries, who started coming in the middle of the nineteenth century, formed the largest group of missionaries working in Egypt. By 1917, their number ranged between two hundred and three hundred. They spent a total of over le800,000 and established several schools. They educated many Coptic notables, particularly in Asyut. While Muslims did sometimes attend American missionary schools, they did not do so in large numbers. Catholic missionaries, notably Franciscans, made their first Coptic converts to Catholicism in Upper Egypt in the eighteenth century. They were more tactful in their methods and also more tolerant of Coptic religious custom than were the Protestants.

Prime Minister Isma'il Sidqi once pointed out that the Egyptian government had never had any problem with Catholic missionaries and he praised, in particular, the Jesuits for their subtlety and skill. Missionaries formed a visible and very vocal interest group that the Residency (i.e., the patriarchate) was hard-pressed to resist and the Egyptian government to ignore. By 1930, there were 450 foreign missionaries in Egypt with a native staff of 1,500 and an annual expenditure of \$700,000 (Carter 1984: 19-20).

John Hogg, a Protestant missionary in Egypt from the United Presbyterian Mission, reached Asyut in February 1865. A school was opened by Mr. Hogg on 5 March 1865 and six boys and two girls joined it. By 13 March they had increased to eighteen boys and thirteen girls; by 12 June the number of boys enrolled was thirty-five (Sedra 2007). Through the intrigues of the Coptic clergy and the connivance of government officials, the number was reduced during the following two years, but afterward, it rallied and grew apace.

Consequently, the missionaries felt that a high school should be established where young men might pursue studies of a higher grade than were to be found in the existing boys' school. Therefore, an academy was established in Asyut for more advanced literary training of candidates for the theological path. The academy was under the direction of Dr. Johnston starting on 15 October 1874, when the theological classes began for the winter. On 8 February 1875, Dr. Johnston was elected president, and the institution was called the Asyut Training College.

The number of pupils in 1875 was 96, 100 in 1876, 96 in 1877, 165 in 1878, and in 1879 it reached 199 (Watson 1904: 451-52; McNaugher 1930: 56-61). The need to provide a place for girls from the surrounding towns and villages produced a boarding school. It was opened in 1866, and at the end of the year there were seven girls in it. During 1867 the number increased to nine, but at the end of the year, there were only six. At the close of 1879, there were twenty-four girls in the school. The pupils were

from Asyut, Jawili, Mallawi, Banub, Azziya, Muti'a, Mas'udi, Nakheila, Tima, and even from Alexandria. Its name was changed to the Pressly Memorial Institute after a [donation](#) from Mr. William Pressly, of Monmouth, in the United States (Watson 1904: 446).

The conflict between the native Church of Egypt, the See of St. Mark, and the missionaries during the reign of Khedive Isma'il was inevitable. The American missionaries started their campaign in Upper Egypt to convert Copts to Protestantism. They succeeded in annexing two well-known families from Asyut. The Copts had the full support of the khedive, who sponsored a tour for Pope Demetrius (1862—70) in Upper Egypt to confront the missionary activity there (Hamed 1991: 1692).

In 1867, the year that saw the establishment of the first Protestant church by the missionaries in Asyut, he made a tour of Upper Egypt to rally the Coptic flock around the mother Church (Shoucri 1991). On 11 March, the Coptic patriarch, accompanied by clergymen, left Cairo in a government steamer lent to him by the viceroy, ostensibly to visit his people in Upper Egypt, but really, and as all his attendants averred, to stamp out the Protestant heresy. Letters were sent to the governors of the provinces to supply the patriarch with an escort of soldiers.

Nothing of special importance to the mission occurred during the patriarch's tour until he reached the towns of Abnub and al-Hammam, about thirteen kilometers south of Asyut. There he summoned before him the leading Copts and addressed them, saying he had been recently informed that some of the agents of the American mission were in the habit of visiting their towns in order to disseminate their abominable heresies, and, as this was not only prejudicial to the interests of the Coptic Church but was also displeasing to the viceroy, he hereby gave them warning not to bring injury or pain upon themselves.

Watson reported that "as the Patriarch is regarded by all devout Copts as the Vicar of Christ upon the earth, and is called by them 'the earthly

Christ,' or 'present' Christ, or the living Christ, so on reaching Asyut, where there is a large Coptic population, the procession from the steamer to the town was arranged in imitation of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem" (Watson 1904: 200-201). The American Presbyterian Synod of the Nile was formed in 1899, and in 1926 it was recognized as the Evangelical Coptic Church (Hamilton 2006: 278).

Asyut is also linked to the name of Lillian Trasher, a Christian missionary who arrived in Asyut in October 1910 and opened her shelter in February 1911. At the beginning of her service she visited many villages using animals, as they were the prevalent means of transport in those days, and sailboats during the flood. By the mid-twentieth century her establishment became home to 650 children and widows. The twelve-acre campus had thirteen major buildings. In her lifetime, Trasher served more than ten thousand orphans and widows (Howell 1960: 59, 76, 104, 150).

### **Cultural Activities of the Coptic Community**

Copts began publishing religious, intellectual, and political periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some journals and newspapers were written to appeal to Muslims as well as Christians, while others focused more narrowly on communal and church affairs. The newspapers with the widest circulation in Asyut were *al-Nuzhah*, published bi-monthly at Asyut by George Khayyat from 1886 to 1890; *Asyut Weekly*, published by Amin Khayr al-Asyuti from 1930 to 1954; and the monthly *Buq al-Qadasah*, first published in Asyut in 1902, and then relocated to Cairo. *Buq al-Qadasah* is still being published (Ghali 1991:2012; Baron 1994:217-40).

The spread of education due to the missionaries' activities led the affluent Coptic women of Asyut to adopt modernism. They entirely discarded the veil and moved about as freely as if they were in England, except for some necessary compromises (Leeder 1918: 21). This atmosphere of relative liberty led to the appearance of prominent female figures such as

Ester Akhnoukh Fanous or Esther Fanous, also known as Esther Wissa (19 February 1895-August 1990), who was an Egyptian Christian feminist born in Asyut.

In March 1923 Esther Fanous established, along with other women, the Egyptian Feminist Union to improve women's stature in literature and social aspects, and to promote equal treatment with men in rights and obligations. She was involved in other associations, such as the Young Womens Christian Association (YWCA) and the Labour Association of Egypt, as well as other charitable associations (Wissa 1994:144).

### **Political Activities in Asyut**

The positions and financial skills of the Coptic bureaucrats enabled them to wield a certain administrative influence. However, by virtue of their religious affiliation, they were not permitted to play a commensurate role in public life until late in the nineteenth century. As compensation, they desired to play that role within and on behalf of the Coptic community: their proximity to the rulers would enable them to influence decision-making by the state toward the Church. Coptic sources would apply to these bureaucrats the historical term *al-arakhina* (singular *arkhon*, meaning 'influential layman in church affairs') (Afifi 1999: 277–97).

Muslim-Christian tensions in Egypt, exacerbated by the assassination of the Coptic prime minister Butros Ghali in 1910, along with a lack of unity within the Egyptian Coptic community, were the catalysts for the Coptic Congress of Asyut. It was convened on 6-8 March 1911 with reluctant permission from Patriarch Cyril V and the Egyptian government. Issues raised at this conference included a call for an end to religious discrimination in state employment and education, and proportionate representation for Copts in parliament (Bahr 1991).

National unity has been the hallmark of Egypt since the formation of the Wafd Party in 1919. The party upheld a firm policy of cooperation

between Muslims and Christians. When George Khayyat asked Saad Zaghlul, the founder of the Wafd Party, what the future of the Copts would be after independence, the answer was, “Their status will be our status, they will have the same rights and the same duties, with no difference between any of us” (Ghali 1991: 950).

When the Muslim Brotherhood began to expand its organization in the 1930s, after its founder, Hasan al-Banna, had moved from Ismailiya to Cairo, new branches and sub-branches were located primarily in the Delta while Asyut was the only new branch in Upper Egypt (Lia 1998:121-22). The rise of al-Gama’a al-Islamiya, or [Islamic](#) Group, in the Upper Egypt governorates of Qena, Asyut, Sohag, Minya, and Aswan must be examined in relation to the social fabric and spatial organization of their cities and towns. The complexity of social organization based on tribe and family, and the hierarchies characterizing social, economic, and political positions in the various provinces, have yet to be studied in a comprehensive manner (Ismail 2000: 363 n. 2).

A modus vivendi was established between the Islamists and some official figures, among them governors, university deans, intermediate cadres in the government party, and high-level functionaries. Asyut in particular and Middle Egypt, in general, provided the ‘laboratory’ where this modus vivendi was tested: de facto prohibition of the distribution and consumption of alcohol in the governorate started in April 1986 with the cancellation of all distribution licenses, although Asyut had one of the highest percentages of Copts in the country; de facto sexual segregation in university halls; an Islamist takeover of sporting and youth clubs (Daly 2008: 386).

Omar ‘Abd al-Rahman [\[10\]](#) was chosen as spiritual leader of the young Islamists of the Jihad and al-Gama’a al-Islamiya. His ideas were influenced in part by the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood, and particularly by reading Sayyid Qutb. [\[11\]](#) He offered religious legitimacy and expertise to the group’s activities, as reported later in some of the

testimony at his first trial in Egypt in the early 1980s. Indeed, he was arrested after President Anwar Sadat's assassination and sat among the defendants during the trial against the murderers of the Egyptian president (Zeghal 1999: 393). His main duty was to issue edicts, *fatwas*, to legitimize the activities of the Tanzim, a secret organization.

They committed several crimes, from ransacking jewelry stores in Nag' Hammadi in the deep south and in Shubra al-Khayma, north of Cairo, to committing acts of violence against Christian places of worship, such as bomb explosions in churches. The person who led the attack on jewelry stores in Nag' Hammadi confessed that his thinking was influenced by the sermons of the group leader in Asyut (Ansari 1984: 125-29).

All through the late 1970s and in 1980, house-to-house searches for hidden weapons were conducted in parts of Asyut and Minya, thus increasing tension. This culminated in the bloodiest clashes ever with the security forces in Asyut, two days after Sadat's assassination. The militants' doctrine further sanctioned collecting *jizya* or poll tax from non-Muslims. Among the consequences of this doctrine were assaults on the security forces, which cost the state more than one hundred lives in Asyut alone, and the robbing of Christian jewelry stores in different parts of the country (Ansari 1984:131-38).

The sectarian tension and violence greatly affected the income of Asyut in general and the Coptic Church in particular.<sup>[12]</sup> One of the most important sources of income is the *mtilids*, or annual festivals of the Virgin and saints (Girgis 2002). Nearly three and a half million [pilgrims](#) a year converge on the village of Durunka, ten kilometers southwest of Asyut, and half of that number visit during the annual *mulid* in honor of the Holy Virgin (Kamil 2002:12). The history of the foundation of the Monastery of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Dayr al-Muharraaq) is closely interwoven with the tradition of the Holy Family's journey to Egypt.

Copts who live near Dayr al-Muharraq refer to the place as the 'Second Jerusalem' or the 'Second Mount of Olives.' The Holy Family's visit to the area has endowed it with great spiritual importance. Every year, from 21 to 28 June, a hundred thousand [pilgrims](#) journey to the monastery to commemorate the consecration of the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Watson 2000:12).

Asyut represented and still represents an obsession in the minds of many politicians because it was the headquarters of the first Coptic Legion. It was founded by Mu'alleem Ya'qub (1745-1803), a finance commissioner, then military leader in the [French expedition](#) of Egypt by Bonaparte. He formed the Coptic Legion of nine hundred men in the region of Manqabad near Asyut. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and headed an Egyptian delegation that left for Europe with the French forces on 10 August 1801.

His plan was to create an Egyptian army and seek the assistance of European powers. His plan came to be known as the "project for the independence of Egypt," as it is referred to in the Public Record Office of London, in two documents (Foreign Office Records 78 Turkey vol. 33). A [historian](#) described this project as "perhaps the first official project and plea for Egyptian independence in modern times" (Meinardus 2002: 67; see also Haddad 1970 and Louca 1991).

The same obsession appeared in an article published in 2012 about the division of Egypt by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI).[\[13\]](#) In 1980, President Anwar Sadat (25 December 1918-6 October 1981) accused Pope Shenouda III (3 August 1923-17 March 2012) of plotting to become the political as well as the religious leader of the Copts and to "set up a separatist Coptic state with Asyut as its capital" (Heikal 1984: 228).

The features of present-day Asyut have been shaped by different factors, among which are its Coptic heritage, social, political, and economic

aspects, and its geographical location in the middle of Egypt.

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[1] On population, see Baer 1969: 134—35, table 2.

[2] The ‘Forty Days’ Road,’ from Asyut in Egypt to Darfur. For a discussion of trade and caravans in this region through the history of one of the caravan leaders, see La Rue 1984.

[3] The Funj are a line of kings who ruled in the Nilotic Sudan of eastern Africa from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The Funj capital was the city of Sennar, on the left bank of the Blue Nile above its confluence with the White Nile.

[4] A faction from the Hawwara had been moved from Buheira province in the Delta by Barquq (when not yet sultan) in the fourteenth century to counterbalance the power of other tribes in Upper Egypt and Nubia (Walz 1979: 217).

[5] The major demand for slave eunuchs was as supervisors of women, especially in the harems of rulers, nobility, and the wealthy in the Ottoman Empire and its Muslim precursors and neighbors.

[6] Although in general high mortality characterized the ‘manufacture’ of eunuchs, travelers in the early nineteenth century reported that the castration center near Asyut on the [Upper Nile](#) was registering significant reductions in deaths from the operation. Burckhardt, a traveler who visited the area in 1813-14, drew special attention to the Coptic village and monastery of Zawiyat al-Dayr. He claimed that the monk-surgeons at this location had managed to reduce the death rate to a spectacularly low figure.

[7] Nine in al-Qusiya, seven in Manfalut, nine in Abnub and al-Fath,

twenty-three in Asyut, five in Dayrut, four in Sanabu, and seven in Abu Tig (Gabra, forthcoming).

[8] Catholic Church in Egypt,  
<http://www.cathohcchurch-eg.com/cathohcchurch/contactsf.php/2010/04/21/200-2.html>

[9] <http://copticatholic.net/p7058/>

[10] Commonly known in the United States as the Bhnd Sheikh, he is a blind Egyptian Muslim leader who is currently serving a life sentence at the Butner Medical Center, which is part of the Butner Federal Correctional Institution in Butner, North Carolina, in the United States. Formerly a resident of [New York](#) City, Abd al-Rahman, with nine others, was convicted of seditious conspiracy, which requires only that a crime be planned, not that it necessarily be attempted. His prosecution grew out of investigations of the 1993 World Trade Center bombings. Abd al-Rahman was accused of being the leader of al-Gama'a al-Islamiya (also known as the [Islamic](#) Group), a militant Islamist movement in Egypt that is considered a terrorist organization by the United States and Egyptian governments. The group is responsible for many acts of violence, including the November 1997 [Luxor](#) massacre, in which fifty-eight foreign tourists and four Egyptians were killed. Middle East Media Research Institute, "Egyptian Government Daily: U.S. Striving to Divide Egypt<sup>mt</sup> Four Countries," 17 February 2012, [http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/6104.htm#\\_ednl](http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/6104.htm#_ednl).

[11] An Egyptian author, educator, [Islamic](#) theorist, poet, creative thinker, and the leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. Although he joined the Brotherhood at a much later date, Sayyid Qutb, whose writings would in due course become a catalyst in fundamentalist thinking, was born in Musha near Asyut in 1906. He even wrote his memoirs about the village while still in the literary, pre-fundamentalist stage of his life. In 1966 he was convicted of plotting the

assassination of Egyptian [president Gamal Abdel Nasser](#) and was executed by hanging. Another prominent figure in the 1970s, Mustafa Shukri, the leader of the Takfir wa-l-Hijra (Anathema and Exile) group, was born in the village of Abu Khurus near Asyut in 1942. He first joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1960s and later participated in the assassination of President Sadat (Kupferschmidt 1987: 407-408).

[12] After the ousting of President Muhammad Morsi on 4 July 2013, the mosque of Rabaa al-Adawiya, in the Nasr City district of eastern Cairo, turned into a sit-in camp for the supporters of Morsi. The security forces raided it to end the six-week sit-in, with the result of a violent backlash on 15-17 August of which Copts bore the brunt with more than sixty churches, schools, businesses, shops, and vehicles burned or ruined. The fiercest attacks were in Minya, Asyut, Sohag, Beni Suef, and the Fayoum in Upper Egypt. National targets such as the Mallawi Museum and the governorate building of Giza also came in for a fair share of the brutal attacks. In Asyut, two churches were burned and thirty homes and businesses belonging to Christians were plundered, while in Minya the number reached nineteen churches and more than 250 properties (Makaryous 2013:73-96).

[13] “The Real Plot to Partition Egypt, 20 February 2012,” <http://copticliterature.wordpress.com/2012/02/20/the-plot-to-partition-egypt/>

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