

## **COPTIC BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES**

Societies set up by voluntary organizations, which constitute an important element in the social fabric of Egypt. Their growing importance and the role they played were conducive to the creation of a Ministry of Social Affairs in 1952, with the express aim of supervising these societies, which multiplied throughout the country in both Muslim and Coptic communities. In 1930, the ministry issued a useful guide under the title *Directory of Social Societies and Organizations*, which included Coptic associations and defined their functions. A description of the most important and effective organizations follows.

The oldest and still the most important of these societies, founded in 1881, is the Benevolent Coptic Society, whose first [president](#) was Boutros Ghali. Its achievements were detailed in a report issued on the occasion of its golden jubilee. Though initially it was founded to help the needy of the community, it developed into a huge organization by extending its projects to most fields of education and public health by the end of the nineteenth century. Apart from the establishment of schools and technical centers for both boys and girls, it was ultimately able to build its own hospital. Its role strongly motivated numerous emerging societies.

Next in importance and seniority, the Tawfiq Society was founded in 1891, and its name, which means “reconciliation,” signified an aim that was essentially the coordination between the modern reform tendencies with what was best in the older systems. The society distinguished itself in the establishment of schools run by a highly proficient faculty. [Parallel](#) to the educational endeavor, this society attended to cultural interests, first, through the establishment of a public library and, second, by the foundation of a printing press, which published many books.

*Jami’yyat al-Nash’ah al-Qibtiyyah*, founded in 1896 at Harit al- Saqqayin in Cairo, had three main objectives: teaching the Coptic language, inculcating the principles of religion, and compiling a history of the

Copts.

The society also published an annual calendar giving the Coptic, Gregorian, and Hegira dates in three separate columns, and details of fasts, feasts, and commemoration of saints, as well as agricultural information related to seasonal crops, sowing, irrigation, and harvesting.

*Jami'yyat Asdiqa' al-Kitab al-Muqaddas*, one of the most active Coptic societies, was founded in 1908 by Basili Butrus, who devoted a great deal of his energy toward its development. He remained as its [president](#) until his death in 1921. A graduate of the Clerical College, he spent his early years as a preacher in the [Coptic churches](#) of Suez, Bahjurah, Minya, and Tantâ before settling down as a teacher of religious studies in the Coptic College, where he became interested in the service of [Coptic youth](#) and founded the aforementioned society. He then went to England in May 1910 to study English activities in this sphere.

Butrus devised a closely knit organization with several secretaries, committees, study circles, and a board of directors to watch over the fulfillment of the religious aims of the society. In 1932 summer camping grounds were provided on the shores of the Mediterranean at the Manderah seaside resort, east of Alexandria, for socioreligious gatherings. In 1953 the society established its own Saint Mark's [chapel](#) in Shubra, and a noted educationist, [Hafiz](#) Dawud, was consecrated as its priest.

The society paid special attention to the young people living in the capital away from home, and in particular took care of girl students for whom a special branch was founded.

*Jami'yyat Thamarat al-Tawfiq* was founded in Cairo in 1908 by Tadrus Mikha'il as a charitable organization to provide free education to the poor. In 1909 it established a boys' school; a dispensary was founded in the following year. It is also worth noting that the society took an active

part during the nationalist movement of 1919, and that [SA'D ZAGHLUL](#) chose its premises to be a venue for his political speeches as a mark of Coptic-Muslim solidarity.

*Jami'yyat al-Ikhlās* was established in 1909 in Alexandria to carry out socioreligious reform and to support the Community Council in implementing its resolutions. Among its outstanding achievements were the building of the second [church](#) in Alexandria (dedicated to the Virgin Mary), a large hospital, a sewing and needlecraft center for girls, and an elementary school.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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