

MACARIUS II

The sixty-ninth patriarch of the See of Saint Mark (1102-1128) (feast day: 4 Tut). Macarius, or Abba Maqarah according to the HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS, was a monk of Dayr [Anba](#) Maqar when his selection for the patriarchate was decided by the [Cairene](#) delegation of [bishops](#) and the clergy together with the Coptic ARCHONS. He was subsequently confirmed by the Alexandrians. He was a middle-aged man of sufficient vigor, knowledge of monastic rules and traditions, and logic to undertake the heavy burdens of the patriarchate, according to the *History of the Patriarchs*.

At first, he was unwilling to accept the nomination and tried to convince the delegates that he was unsuitable because he was the son of a second wife and because he was ignorant of the meticulous details of the priesthood. But the delegation overlooked his [arguments](#) and led him to Cairo, where the vizier, al-Afdal, permitted his passage to Alexandria. Its inhabitants wished to extract from him the promise of patriarchal contributions toward the maintenance of their churches, but he declined and told them that he was an impecunious monk and implored them to relieve him of their requests and let him return to his cell in the wilderness of Wadi Habib. At this, the [Alexandrians](#) were silenced, and he was forced to go to Saint Mark's Cathedral, where he was formally invested with the patriarchal dignity. Afterward, he was led to Cairo, where another consecration was performed in Greek, Coptic, and Arabic in the [Church of the Virgin](#) in Old Cairo.

One of the first historic acts of his reign was the acceptance of a decree transferring all financial transactions connected with the land tax (KHARAJ) from the Coptic calendar year to the Hegira (A.H.) year. Consequently, all state accounts were computed under Islamic rather than Coptic chronology, and the books were now kept only in Arabic.

The eighth year of the reign of Macarius witnessed two significant natural

phenomena that disturbed the population of the whole country. First, there came to pass a tempestuous wind that filled the air with desert sand to the extent that the whole sky was darkened, and people thought that the end of the world was coming. Ultimately, however, the wind subsided and the sun broke out to appease the frightened populace. The second was a series of earthquakes, in which some buildings fell, including the church of Saint Michael on Rodah, later restored by Yusuf ibn Marqurah.

The writer of the biography quoted in the *History of the Patriarchs*, Yuhanna ibn Sa'id, devotes a lengthy discussion to the vacancy of the bishopric of [Misr](#) after the death of its bishop, [Anba](#) Sinhat, which is indicative of the seriousness with which the population regarded the problem of succession. An interesting series of letters is reproduced by the biographer regarding the search for the right candidate to fill that vacancy. Even extraneous dignities like the [Armenian](#) patriarch, who was in Cairo at the time, were consulted before a list of twelve candidates was made. The names were deposited at the sanctuary and a young [deacon](#) was to draw the name after a period of prayer. He chose John, the spiritual son and former assistant of the deceased bishop. The selection was communicated to the [governor](#) for his sanction. He was then consecrated in a formal service conducted by [Anba](#) Mina, bishop of Malij, [Anba](#) Mikha'il, bishop of Atfih, [Anba](#) Yuhanna, bishop of al- Khandaq, and a priest by the name of Bastah. The consecration took place in the [ancient church](#) of Our Lady at Harit Zuwaylah amid tremendous celebrations. The investiture was, of course, sanctioned by the patriarch, and no mention of a CHEIROTONIA was made.

A very interesting event is recorded by the biographer in the *History of the Patriarchs* from the fifth year of the patriarchate of Macarius II that had a direct bearing on the history of the Crusades. The Crusaders, after the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, continued their conquest in southern Palestine and seem to have reached al- Farama, on the eastern frontier of Fatimid Egypt, around 1106, under the leadership of Baldwin, the

Bardawil of the *History of the Patriarchs*. The soldiers pillaged al-Farama and set the city ablaze, but they had to withdraw afterward owing to the death of their leader. They were pursued by the Fatimid armies deep into Palestine. But this information cannot be entirely correct. Western sources do not mention anything about Baldwin's death at that time; in fact, he is known to have returned safely to Jerusalem to rule his kingdom.

What is significant about this is the evidence of the feeling of the Copts toward the crusading movement, and specifically Baldwin's expedition: "God protected us from his deeds. We asked Him, whose name is great, to perpetuate his mercy and his grace; and to inspire us to give thanks to Him and to cause us not to forget the remembrance of Him through His goodness and glory." Indeed, no more eloquent a statement on the Coptic view of the [Crusades](#) could be found in a purely Coptic source.

The reign of Macarius was almost identical to that of the Fatimid caliph al-'Amir (1101-1130). The last important event of his caliphate to be cited by the *History of the Patriarchs* is an attempt by three youths from the east to assassinate the caliph and his minister, al-Afdal ibn Shahinshah. Two of them were cut down by the swords of bodyguards, but the third struck al-Afdal with a sharp knife, and he was carried home to die of his wound. The caliph, who participated in his funeral, returned to seize the immense wealth he left behind, which included jewels, gold and silver objects, precious textiles and robes, the furniture that filled his palace, and bags filled with 4 million gold dinars.

Little is mentioned about the financial treatment of the patriarch, but it must be assumed that he rendered his *kharaj* land tax. He was left by the Islamic administration to live in peace and security with his congregation throughout his patriarchate of twenty-six years.

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