

MARIYYAH THE COPT

A Coptic consort of the Prophet Muhammad. Her story begins in A.D. 627 with the dispatch of letters from Muhammad to the rulers of the world, calling them to allegiance to Islam and its prophet as the messenger of Allah. Those letters included a special message addressed to al-Muqawqas, viceroy of Egypt, who wrote back a considerate and friendly but inconclusive response. He also sent the Prophet gifts of honey and fabrics produced by Egyptian looms, together with two Coptic female serfs who were sisters, Mariyyah and Shirin (or Sirin). Apparently both were daughters of a mixed marriage with a Greek mother. According to Yaqut's geographical dictionary, those two girls were from a village by the name of Hafn, situated on part of the ruins of ANTINOOPOLIS, the ancient [capital](#) of the [Thebaid](#) between the Nile to the west and the mountains to the east.

Of the two girls, the Prophet retained Mariyyah for himself and gave her sister to Hassan ibn Thabit, the famous poet and companion of Muhammad. Later, Mariyyah bore him an only son named Ibrahim, in whose birth the Prophet rejoiced. Her newborn earned her liberation from serfdom, which changed her marital status from concubinage to that of a legal wife. However, her child did not survive long. It is known to have died, probably at the age of less than two years, in the lap of his father, who mourned his death deeply. She survived the Prophet and died in Medina in A.H. 16/A.D. 637.

Mariyyah's native village gained prominence in Islamic [records](#) as a pilgrimage site. When it was visited after the ARAB CONQUEST OF EGYPT by 'Abadah ibn al-Samit, a companion of the Prophet and a former soldier in the army of 'Amr ibn al-'As, he built there a mosque that bore his name, Masjid al-Shaykh 'Abadah. It still stands in Hafn, the name of which was consequently changed to its present one, Shaykh 'Abadah. The natives have managed to [preserve](#) the adobe room that was the birthplace of Mariyyah, from a larger building where she had lived before her

departure to Arabia. That room is decorated, and the villagers have built a red brick wall around it for protection. The village has an ancient well from which Mariyyah presumably drew water. The well being still in use, sterile women come to drink from its healing water in the hope of conceiving. The actual population of the village today is in the neighborhood of four thousand souls, and its cultivable soil amounts to five hundred acres. Its inhabitants pride themselves on a peaceful life, free from crime.

The administration of Minya Province, in conjunction with the central Ministry of Tourism, has acknowledged the historic importance of the village of Shaykh 'Abadah and its potential as a pilgrimage site to be frequented by Muslim tourists.

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