

MARK VII

The 106th patriarch of the See of Saint Mark (1745-1769).

His original name was Sam'an, and he was a native of the village of Qulusana in the district of Samalut in Upper Egypt. As a youth, he retired to DAYR [ANBA BULA](#) in the Eastern Desert, where he took the monastic vow and therefrom frequented the neighboring [DAYR ANBA ANTUNIYUS](#) for years until his predecessor, JOHN XVII, died in 1745. At that time the Coptic community began the search for a worthy successor. In the end, it was decided to recruit the monk Sam'an for the dignity, and a special delegation escorted him to Cairo, where he was consecrated patriarch. He occupied the patriarchate for twenty-four years, three months, and fourteen days until his death.

The first few years of his reign were relatively peaceful. Unsettled times were coming when the Mamluks regained power, owing to the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Mamluk tyranny and intrigues broke out in the ranks of the [military](#) forces, involving parties of Mamluk amirs, in which Khalil Bey, the powerful *amir al- Hajj* (prince of the Mecca pilgrimage), 'Ali (Bey) al-Dimyati the *Defterdar* (governor), 'Umar (Bey) Ghaytas, and Muhammad (Bey) Zadeh were murdered. Others took flight, including Sanjaq 'Umar and his brother, together with Hasan, an orderly of Ibrahim, as well as 'Umar, governor of Jirja (al-Jabarti, 1959, Vol. 2, p. 62). They reached Upper Egypt in 1748 and stayed there for eight months. Apparently, these fugitive Mamluks were conciliated with the [bedouins](#) whose leader, a certain Hammam, supplied them with corn, butter, and honey in anticipation of bedouin passage to Hijaz from the port of Qusayr to escape the perils of the Mamluk intrigues at home.

An interesting episode concerning the Copts took place during that period in Egypt. Since the time of the Crusades, the Copts had been forbidden from undertaking pilgrimages to the Holy Land by both the [crusaders](#) and the local [Muslim](#) rulers of Egypt. The pious Copts resented

these restrictions and wanted to resume pilgrimages to the Holy Sepulcher. In 1753 they seized an occasion to secure a *fatwa* (juridical consultation) from Shaykh al-Azhar in return for a bribe of 1,000 gold dinars, which legalized the pilgrimage and prevented interference from the Mamluk amirs or the [Muslim](#) population. Consequently, the overjoyed Copts began immediate preparations for the pilgrimage on a grand scale. The rendezvous of the congregating pilgrims was the desert east of Cairo, where daily they arrived in groups, carrying gifts for the Holy Sepulcher. Litters were constructed for women and children, and an escort of [bedouins](#) was engaged as guides for the expedition.

However, news soon circulated among the Muslims, who took offense to the Christian project. The *shaykh* al-Azhar ‘Abdallah al-Shabruhi, who issued the *fatwa*, became the subject of popular ire. To mend his precarious position, it was insufficient for him to deny the Copts the right to make the pilgrimage. Instead, he mustered a body of students in al-Azhar mosque, whom he inflamed against the pilgrimage. Together with the angry mob, they descended upon the camp of the unsuspecting Christians with arms, sticks, and stones. Taken by surprise, the Copts took flight, and their camp was pillaged with no hope of redress from the Mamluk authorities.

Mark VII, like his predecessors, continued to struggle with the foreign missionaries from the [Roman](#) See, who thronged the country and attempted to proselytize the Copts by offering them an education that was lacking in the primitive [Coptic village](#) schools. In the meantime both Jesuits and Franciscans were active in the establishment of regular schools in a considerable number of districts spread throughout Upper Egypt.

These difficulties, both internal and external, had to be faced by the majority of the Coptic patriarchs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Mark VII died in 1769, amidst this strife, after a reign of twenty-four years.

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AZIZ S. ATIYA

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