

MARQUS IBN AL-QUNBAR (?-1208)

A Priest, reformer. Marqus ibn al-Qunbar (“son of the lark”), sometimes referred to as “Marqus the Blind,” flourished in the final third of the 12th century as a traveling priest and spiritual teacher who gathered a following known as the “Qanabira.” Falling afoul of Coptic **Patriarch** Mark III ibn Zur’ah (73rd, 1166-1189), he and his followers went over to the Melchite Church. Later, perhaps after another round of switching allegiances, he attempted to return to the Coptic [Church](#) but was refused; having antagonized the hierarchies of two churches, he spent the last years of his life quietly at the Melchite Monastery of al-Qusayr, south of Cairo, where he died in 1208.

Marqus is an interesting witness to the language shift that was taking place among the [Copts](#) in the 12th century: He gathered great crowds to himself by teaching and interpreting the Bible in Arabic at a time when Coptic Christian **theology** and culture were still largely bound to the **Coptic language**. His importance to Coptic [Church](#) history lies especially in a cluster of ideas that he insistently promoted (as can be seen from his allegorical *Commentary on the Pentateuch* and from the catechetical *Book of the Master and the Disciple* in eight chapters): that every Christian should partake of the Eucharistic elements frequently, though only after confession to a spiritual master and performance of **penance**, necessitating that every Christian have a spiritual master or father-confessor.

Although Marqus’ ideas (including a number of Melchite teachings that he adopted) were firmly rejected by **Mikha’il, Metropolitan of [Damietta](#)**, his insistence on recovering the ancient practice of auricular confession to a priest—which had fallen out of practice in the 12th-century Coptic [Church](#)—began a debate that continued into the next century, when auricular confession received support in *The Book of Confession*, written by Da’ud al-Fayyumi (before he became Patriarch

Cyril III ibn Laqlaq), Bulus al-Bushi, and al-As'ad [ibn al-'Assal](#).

[GAWDAT GABRA](#)

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