

MIKHA'IL (bishop of Damietta)

The twelfth-century bishop of Damietta. The dates of the birth and death of this celebrated Coptic bishop are not known, only that he lived under the patriarchs MARK III (1167-1189) and JOHN VI (1189-1216), that he completed the first edition of his [Nomocanon](#) in 1188, as he says himself, and that he was still alive when his adversary [Murqus](#) ibn Qanbar died in 1208. He was the first Coptic bishop to receive the honorific title of *mutran* (metropolitan), which does not confer any particular jurisdiction in Egypt. The division of the territory into provinces did not exist, but each bishop was directly dependent on the patriarch, so much so that the word *mutran* in Egyptian [Arabic](#) became synonymous with bishop. Mikha'il handed on this privilege to his successors.

Mikha'il of Damietta's principal work is his Nomocanon, of which a first version was completed in 1188 in Luxor, as was indicated in his manuscript (National Library, Paris, Arab. 7428; cf. Bouriant, 1886, p. 393, n. 1).

He had to combat one of his priests, [Murqus](#) ibn Qanbar, against whom he wrote several polemical works, among them *A [Justification](#) of the Peculiarities of the Copts*, a work recapitulated later in his *Ten Canons of Michael of Damietta* (Burmester, 1936, pp. 101-128), and "Letter to Mark ibn al-Qanbar" (Graf, 1923, pp. 180-192), written after the latter had joined the Melchites. He also acted as a polemicist against the Muslims in a letter known as "Letter to One of the Learned Muslims," unfortunately still unpublished.

Apart from the *Ten Canons*, which have been preserved in chronological canonical collections as a summary of his controversial work against [Murqus](#) ibn Qanbar, he wrote, according to Abu al-Barakat IBN KABAR, a work in five chapters with the title *Kitab sama' al-bughyah liman talaba linafsihi al-khalas wa-al- najat yawn al-qisas* (The Desire of Him Who

Seeks for Himself Salvation on the Day of Retribution). Two manuscripts are noted by P. Sbath (Cairo, 1938, p. 65), but their present whereabouts are not known.

Another work that appears to be lost is quoted in a liturgical directory (Vat. Arab. 58). The title translated into English means Book of the Demonstration, and Guide in the Safe Way and the Very Practicable Path on the Doctrine of Faith and the Refutation of the Melchites (Graf, 1947, p. 335).

Finally, a short treatise of refutation of the obligation of confession could well be by Michael of Damietta, although it is anonymous.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bouriant, U. "Rapport au ministre de l'instruction publique sur une mission dans la Haute-Egypte (1884-1885)." *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission archéologique française au Caire*, 1 (1886):367-408.
- Burmester, O. H. E., ed. and trans. "The Sayings of Michael, Metropolitan of Damietta." *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1936):101-128.
- Graf, G. *Ein Reformversuch innerhalb der koptischen Kirche im zwölften Jahrhundert*. Paderborn, 1923.
- Samir, K. "Bibliographie du [dialogue](#) islamo-chrétien." *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976):230.
- Sbath, P. *Al-Fihrist*, nos. 528-529. Cairo, 1938.

RENÉ-GEORGES COQUIN

Tags: [Eminent](#)