

## **MIKHA'IL JIRJIS, MU'ALLIM (1873-1957)**

Master chanter of the [Cathedral](#) of Saint Mark in Cairo and described as the figure in whom the Coptic church's vocal music was preserved and from whom its immortal chants were transmitted through his pupils. He was a blind man whose intense sensitivity for Coptic chanting and [church](#) hymnology [impressed](#) upon his inborn musical [genius](#) the fullest record of traditional Coptic musicology as he had heard it from the older priestly masters of that art. This evolved especially from the ancient monasteries where unbroken conservative traditions handed the singing of liturgical texts from generation to generation.

From his early youth he showed an outstanding aptitude to learn the tunes in which only two chanters specialized before him: Mu'allim Armaniyus and Mu'allim Salib. Hence he is considered as the channel through which [church](#) tunes in their pure ritual form were transmitted intact from ancient and medieval times to the modern era.

He was brought up in his early childhood like the majority of Coptic children, joining the Coptic *kuttab*, or lowest elementary school, of Abu al-Sa'd, in the Azbakiyyah quarters. There he remained for two years, from 1879 to 1881 during which time he studied the [Psalms](#) and hymns as well as the Coptic and Arabic languages. Later he joined the Coptic [Clerical](#) College, which was then under the administration of Yusuf Manqariyus. He graduated in 1893 and was appointed teacher of [church](#) music there.

In 1895 he was asked to teach [church](#) ritual, religion, Coptic, and Arabic in the school for the blind, set up at Zeitoun, a suburb of Cairo. He used the Braille method in teaching Arabic, and designed the Coptic alphabet after the same method for teaching Coptic.

He was chosen by CYRIL V as [church](#) singer of the [cathedral](#) and as teacher of church music at the [Clerical](#) College. When the Higher

Institute for Coptic Studies was founded in 1954, he collaborated with Raghib Muftah, head of the department of Coptic music at the Institute.

His most important achievement was the [translation](#) of the Coptic service into Arabic, in collaboration with the *qummus* PHILUTHAWUS IBRAHIM, who was a priest at the [cathedral](#) under CYRIL V.

His legacy continued with his pupils, some of them blind like himself, who attended his classes of religious cantors. His task extended from Coptic vocal music to Coptic elocution where he had to rectify the pronunciation of a language long [dead](#) and largely forgotten.

## **SULAYMAN NASIM**

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