

## **NABIS**

A fourth-fifth-century bishop of 'Aydhab. The commemoration of Bishop Nabis in the Arabic Synaxarion of the Copts on 22 Kiyahk provides the only piece of evidence of an episcopate situated on the coast of the Red Sea. This Arabic text bears all the indications of a translation from the Coptic. The "[scala](#) copte 44" identifies 'Aydhab with Berenice in Nubia (Munier, 1930).

[Muyser](#) was inclined to believe that Bishop Nabis lived between the seventh and tenth centuries (Muyser, 1944). Nabis was born in a village near Coptos (Qift) and became a monk at an early age. The compiler of the Synaxarion tells us that he was found worthy of the [episcopal](#) dignity over the churches of 'Aydhab, "for our fathers held this seat from the beginning, so that merchants and sailors who voyaged over the Red Sea could receive communion there." Bishop Nabis did not reside in 'Aydhab but in a small church at Coptos. He sent one priest and one deacon to 'Aydhab. When it was necessary for the bishop to go there himself, the BEJA, a tribe that lived in Nubia and the Eastern Desert in Upper Egypt, carried him and the church ornaments on their camels, receiving a price for the hire of their beasts.

Three bishops are mentioned in the Synaxarion as contemporaries of Nabis: "The fathers, the bishops who lived during his time, asked him often to gather with them in the Cathedral. Those were Anba Phoibammon, who is indeed worthy of mention, Anba John, and Anba Papnoute." Since the residence of Bishop Nabis was in Coptos, the episcopates of these three bishops must have been located in that same part of southern Upper Egypt. A certain bishop of Hermonthis (Armant) named John was consecrated by Patriarch THEOPHILUS (385-412); Papnoute, bishop of Qus, also lived at that time (Gabra, 1983, 1986). The third bishop, Phoibammon, is among the bishops who participated in the [Council](#) of EPHESUS in 431 (Munier, 1943). Thus Nabis must have lived in the fourth/fifth century. According to the Synaxarion, his [episcopal](#)

ministry lasted forty years, and he died when he was ninety years of age.

The commemoration of Nabis in the Synaxarion is important in that it provides evidence concerning a bishop who had to deal with different groups of people having varying interests. The first were the Beja (Blemmyes), who often attacked Egypt and made the flow of trade between the Red Sea and [Coptos](#) unsafe. Significantly, Bishop Nabis had considerable contact with them long before the spread of Christianity throughout Nubia. The second group were the military representatives of the late Roman Empire. The third group consisted of merchants and sailors. Moreover, the bishop took care of the congregation of his own diocese. The relatively long text about Nabis differs from other texts of the Synaxarion in that it preserves the characteristics of an encomium (Gabra, 1986).

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