

## **SHENUTE II**

The sixty-fifth patriarch of the See of Saint Mark (1032-1046). Shenute was a native of the town of Tilbanat-‘Adiy, but the date of his birth is unknown. He joined the Monastery of Saint Macarius (DAYR [ANBA MAQAR](#)) at the youthful age of fourteen. The [HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS records](#) that he was an ambitious monk, and that he coveted the episcopate of Misr (al- Fustat), but he could not attain it because he had no funds to offer for his investiture.

He was a contemporary of the [Fatimid](#) caliphs al- Zahir Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali (1021-1035) and al-Mustansir Abu Tamim M‘add (1035-1094). When Shenute was selected to become patriarch a delegation headed by Buqayrah al-Rashidi, the bearer of the cross in al-HAKIM’s reign and a member of the Coptic delegation, went to the vizier, Najib al-Dawlah Abu al-Qasim ‘Ali ibn Ahmad al-Jurjani, to get the permission to elect him. The vizier advised Buqayrah to use a system known as *al-qur‘ah al-haykaliyyah*, or the sanctuary lottery, as practiced in Baghdad by the [church](#) of Antioch (see PATRIARCHAL ELECTION).

Though the delegation departed with the vizier’s approval, they refrained from applying his advice. They chose the monk of Saint Macarius, Shenute, but they procrastinated in his consecration until they secured his written approval of their conditions; in the meantime they raised him to the position of archpriest or HEGUMENOS. Their conditions included the payment of 500 dinars annually to the people of Alexandria for the benefit of their churches, and the suppression of simony (CHEIROTONIA) levied on the bishops and the clergy at their investiture. The ambitious Shenute approved their conditions, although he had no intention of following them after his consecration.

He later explained to Buqayrah, the bearer of the cross, that by obeying the conditions he would not be able to pay the 3,000 dinars due to the state on the occasion of his accession, nor meet the heavy expenses of his

office. He requested 600 dinars for investing the new bishop of Asyut and even confiscated the religious property of Iliyya, bishop of Bishnanah, after his death, while deposing Yuhanna, bishop of al-Farama, for his inability to pay his simony. Such events recurred throughout his reign.

However, a number of events worthy of recording took place during Shenute's patriarchate. Contrary to [Islamic](#) tradition, Caliph al-Zahir permitted the Copts, who had been forced to apostatize to Islam during the reign of al-Hakim, to return to their Christian faith without incrimination or decapitation. Also, in the year 1040, the Nile was low, and the land was desiccated. The meager crops were further attacked by rats, which exterminated the corn from the fields and the grapes from the vineyards.

The biographer of the *History of the Patriarchs* adds an interesting supplement to his account, ascribed to MAWHUB IBN MANSUR IBN MUFARRIJ, the [deacon](#) from Alexandria. He [records](#) the total number of monks in the area of Wadi Habib in 1088 as 712: 400 in Dayr [Anba](#) Maqar, 165 in DAYR YUHANNIS AL-QASIR, 25 in DAYR YUHANNIS KAMA, 20 in DAYR AL- BARAMUS, 40 in DAYR ANBA BISHOI, 60 in DAYR AL- SURYAN, and 2 in the cave of Abu Musa—one Syriac and another Coptic. The number of itinerant monks was unknown. The caliph at this time was al-Mustansir Billah, who succeeded his predecessor at the age of seven and occupied the throne of Egypt for fifty-nine years. His minister was Badr al-Jamali.

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