

Johann Michael Wansleben<sup>1</sup>  
on the Coptic Church

Anthony Alcock

The text that follows translates the chapter 'Relatione dello stato ecclesiastico dei Copti' on pp. 130-221 of the book entitled *Relazione dell Stato presente dell'Egitto*, written after Wansleben's first stay in Egypt and published in 1671. When he made the journey, he was a Protestant. When the report was written and published, he was a Catholic.

Johann Michael Wansleben (1635-1679) was born in Sömmerda.<sup>2</sup> After studying at Erfurt and Königsberg, Wansleben became a private tutor in an aristocratic family in Marienwerder, but left this employment to join the Prussian army and fight in the 1657 campaign against Poland.<sup>3</sup> After a brief period he returned to Erfurt, where he met Hiob Ludolf, a distinguished Ethiopic scholar and tutor of the children of Ernst, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha,<sup>4</sup> who took him on as an assistant because he saw that Wansleben had a talent for learning languages. He learned enough Ethiopic to oversee the printing of Ludolf's dictionary in 1661 in London,<sup>5</sup> there being no suitable ones in Germany after the ravages of the Thirty Year War, which had ended only 13 years previously. While there, he made changes to Ludolf's work, which may not have pleased the great scholar.

In 1663 he started out on a journey to Ethiopia, financed by the Duke. The background to this is that Ernst some years before had been introduced by Ludolf to an Ethiopian prelate. Ludolf convinced Ernst that Ethiopia might be fertile ground for the spread of Lutheranism. The background to this exercise in religious colonialism, according to Pougeois, is as follows: in the mid-16th cent. the Portuguese had helped the Ethiopian sovereign to secure his throne, and in return the Jesuits had been allowed to establish 'une

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<sup>1</sup> German form is Wansleben. Other languages, *mutatis mutandis*, Vansleb.

<sup>2</sup> About 20 km from Erfurt. It suffered badly from both sides during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648).

<sup>3</sup> The information that follows has been taken from Alexandre Pougeois *Vansleb; savant orientaliste et voyageur* (1869).

<sup>4</sup> The name of the British royal family before it was changed in 1917 to Windsor

<sup>5</sup> While he was in London, Wansleben made the acquaintance of Englishmen who were discussing the political system generally known under the simplified term of 'republicanism' and worked as an assistant to one of them cf. *The European Contexts for English Republicanism* ed. D. Wiesmann and G. Mahlberg (2013) ch.8

chrétienté florissante' in the country. Catholic influence, however, came to an end in the first half of the 17th century. The 'effervescent Protestants' in Germany saw an opportunity of replacing the Catholics in Ethiopia. Ernst and Ludolf, both committed Lutherans, supported this idea and decided to send Wansleben, but he got no further than Egypt, having apparently been dissuaded by the Coptic Patriarch Matthew in Cairo from continuing his journey to Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he seems to have been undergoing a conversion to Catholicism,<sup>7</sup> completed when he travelled to Italy on his return from Egypt.

In 1666, while in Rome, he converted to Catholicism and subsequently entered the Dominican Order. It may perhaps be assumed that the conversion meant the end of his relationship with his former patron, a committed Lutheran. The text named in the title was published at Paris in 1671 and dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici. Between 1672 and 1673, when Wansleben was Catholic, he travelled once again to Egypt, indeed as far south as Sohag, which enabled him to write an account of the White Monastery, founded by Shenoute in the 5th cent. I have not read this second account.

If the report is a translation from Wansleben's native language, there is no indication of this on the title page and no copy of it has survived.

## Chapter One

As to the conversion of Egypt to the holy faith of Jesus Christ, it is known from the church histories, both ours and those of the Greeks, Ethiopians and Copts, that it was St Mark the evangelist and disciple of Peter who was the first to preach the gospel of Christ in Alexandria, the capital of Egypt and at that time the most noble and, after Rome, the wealthiest of all cities in the world, Pentapolis, Libya and Nubia. He founded in that city, on the orders of St Peter, his episcopal cathedral. After 19 years of preaching, that is in 64 AD, he gained his crown of martyrdom.

The story of the preaching of the evangelist has been recorded by Cardinal Baronio and other ecclesiastical writers. The scope of this account of Egypt, which is confined to reporting the current state of things, does not allow me to expatiate and report on the details that I have found relating to this topic or the martyrologies in Arabic and Ethiopic. I will merely state nevertheless that this ecclesiastical see was founded by an evangelist and disciple of Peter and preserved its primitive sanctity and purity of doctrine intact for four hundred and fifty years

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<sup>6</sup> Pougeois *Vansleb* p. 16. Whether this is the same letter mentioned by Wansleben on p. 133 I do not know.

<sup>7</sup> Allowing for the somewhat 'novelette-ish' prose of Pougeois (p.16) one is inclined not to disbelieve the brief sketch provided of Wansleben's conversion process: after his conversations with Matthew about doctrinal matters (for which, it must be presumed, Wansleben's Arabic was good enough): *Vansleb, avec sa droiture d'esprit, pu comparer les nouveautés allemandes avec l'antique symbole des communions orientales. Les rayons de la vérité commencèrent à frapper son esprit.* If Matthew wrote a letter

and that suddenly, because of the heresiarch Dioscorus, became a seat of heretics and most inimical to the Roman Church. All the successors of Dioscorus persisted and continue to persist in this schism.<sup>8</sup>

The jurisdiction of this Patriarch has always been and continues to be extensive, and this is evident from a letter given to me for the prince who commissioned me to make the journey to Abyssinia, the opening of which is translated here from Arabic: *Matthew*,<sup>9</sup> *unworthy servant of Jesus, called by the grace of God and constituted in His service by His Will in the cathedral of St Mark in the powerful city of Alexandria, Jerusalem above one*<sup>10</sup> *and the rest of Egypt, Nubia, Abyssinia etc.*

His residence is no longer in Alexandria,<sup>11</sup> as in the past, because there were so few Copts, their homes having been destroyed, but in Great Cairo, in the street called *Harat Zuweila*, near his Patriarchal Church, named after the Virgin, the name of which it retains.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes he stays in Old Cairo, named *Harat Batrak* because of the Patriarch's residence there, where there is church called St Mercurius.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes he resides in the convent of St George in another part of the city, sometimes in Giza, opposite Old Cairo on the opposite bank the Nile, as required by the seasons or his work.

He is assumed into the monastic order of Anthony,<sup>14</sup> and when I was there in 1664 the Patriarch was a monk of the monastery of Macarius. The qualifications he needs are the ability to read and write, to look after the Church and to be well versed in Christianity, the Gospels, the Fathers and the Church Councils. No great knowledge is required of him, all the clerics being relatively simple priests or monks and for the most part semi-literate.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Dioscorus was the Patriarch who represented Egyptian interests at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew IV (1660-1675).

<sup>10</sup> This is a literal translation, but I do not understand the meaning of it.

<sup>11</sup> The Patriarchate was re-located to Cairo in 1047.

<sup>12</sup> The foundation may be as early as the 4th cent., but appears to have been rebuilt within the confines of the new Fatimid city of Cairo. It was demolished by the last Fatimid caliph, who carried out purges of Christians, but it was once again rebuilt and from the 14th cent. to 1660 was the residence of the Patriarch. It is now located on *Bûr Sa'id* street, but from the 14th cent to 1906 this was a canal.

<sup>13</sup> Residence of Patriarch in Old Cairo from 1300 to 1500

<sup>14</sup> Designations such 'order' made sense in Europe, where they were relatively well organized units initiated by individuals or splinter groups, e.g. Benedictines, Cistercians (splinter group of Benedictines), Franciscans and so on, each following certain principles. In Egypt there were never really anything but 'types': the solitary type (associated with Anthony), the *laura* type (semi-communal living in an area, such as in Kellia) and the cenobitic type (communal living and working in a specific set of buildings, the founder of which was Pachomius).

<sup>15</sup> Lit. 'idiots in any sort of belles lettres'.

He is sometimes obliged to say Mass and to perform ordinations, baptisms, marriage ceremonies, to visit churches and monasteries in Egypt and to maintain the state of the Church in good order.

A day in his life: he usually sits all day in the audience room of his residence, with his legs crossed, on a woollen sheepskin, which is on a carpet that covers half of the floor. All those entering remove their shoes, which they leave near the door. When they reach the Patriarch, they kneel before him on both knees, take his hand, kiss it and put it to their forehead. He puts his hand on their head and blesses them. They withdraw several paces, to sit in a row with the others sitting cross-legged at various places on the carpet. While the others are finishing their business, they drink coffee and eat biscuits and dried dates. When the Patriarch signals to someone, that person tells him what he wants. The same reverence is displayed when leaving.

His table is a modest one: fish, eggs, a little white cheese said to be Moorish,<sup>16</sup> radishes and onions. He drinks Nile water and has no wine in the house. Sometimes there is a small glass of spirits. Dessert is dates or figs. His dining companions are his secretary, a priest, and one of the priests or monks, or others. I was present myself on more than occasion.

His manner of dress is decorous but without splendour. His shirt is of white cloth,<sup>17</sup> on top of which he wears a cassock of deep blue or purple cloth with a vest of black cloth above it. He changes his dress according to the seasons. In place of a staff he always carries a crozier,<sup>18</sup> as do all the other monks. Since they preach standing, it serves as a support when they are tired. Above the turban he wears a long sash, mostly ash-coloured, which falls down on both sides and girdles his flanks. He never wears shoes. When he goes out, he rides a donkey, with his secretary and two monks behind him, each with his crozier, but on horseback.

His income amounts to 20,000 Abu Kelbi,<sup>19</sup> 20,000 Dutch Talers with the stamp of the lion. It seems generally a little excessive to me, since Jerusalem, where his nation has a chapel,<sup>20</sup> yields enough interest. But the greedy Turk,<sup>21</sup> who cannot tolerate the prosperity of others,

<sup>16</sup> Described as *gibna haloumi*: the first is Arabic and the second occurs in Coptic (Ⲅⲁⲗⲟⲙⲓ), which in turn may be related to the Anc. Eg. *hnm̄t* 'nurse'. I do not know why the adjective 'Moorish' is used.

<sup>17</sup> The meaning 'twill' is also given for this word, which indicates a particular weave.

<sup>18</sup> Lit. 'fork'. I am not confident that 'crozier' is the correct word.

<sup>19</sup> I am unable to find this expression. The Taler was a Bohemian silver coin with a lion stamped on one side, the 'Dutch' coin known as *leeuwendaalder* (lion taler). The only sense I can make of the Arabic is that the lion has been confused with a dog,

<sup>20</sup> Presumably the property in the Holy Sepulchre.

<sup>21</sup> This was written at the time of the Ottoman Empire. The disparaging reference to Turkish people has a contemporaneous parallel in the work of, among others, Annibale Adami *Spada d'Orione* (1680), where they

taxes those who are not of his belief, as happened to the Patriarch eight days before I left Cairo, where he was obliged to hide in a stable in Old Cairo. I had difficulty finding him to take my leave of him. The Pasha had demanded six bags of money for no other reason than that the Patriarch had ordained two priests, one of whom, ordained against his will, had gone to a Turkish authority, an acquaintance of his, to complain that he had procured an order from the Pasha against him.

He is also required to provide the church of his residence, his clergy and the poor with what they need in such a way that they might be able to survive.

As for his age, he will be sixty-four, olive-coloured and fairly corpulent; with a full head of white hair; a man of property, respected, seemly, and well liked by his flock, as is appropriate. When I was in Cairo, he had been Patriarch for six years, and I pray to God for his continuing well-being.

## Chapter Two

In the previous chapter I wrote about the Patriarch, Now it is time to speak of the lower ecclesiastical orders, among whom bishops take precedence.

Bishops dependent on the Patriarch, both inside and outside Egypt, are ten in number. The first is the Bishop of Jerusalem, followed by Bahnasa, Atfih, the Fayum, Muharraq, Manfalût, Asyut, Abutig, Girga and Nagada, above Girga. Including the Metropolitan of Abyssinia, who is a dependent of the Patriarch, there are eleven.

The next rank<sup>22</sup> is that of *qummus*, followed by *qasis*, *shammas* and *agnostes* (lector and singer).

All these people are lowly, poor and simple. They are happy to have a *tabbakh*,<sup>23</sup> wooden container full of lentils, or chickpeas or other vegetables with bread in soup, white cheese with

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are described as 'rapacious,' and 'greedy dogs who devour turtles'.

<sup>22</sup> The Arabic forms may be rendered as *chief priest* (Coptic-Greek **ΖΗΓΟΥΜΕΝΟΣ**), *priest and deacon*, in that order. The fourth term is Greek.

<sup>23</sup> The word is certainly connected with cooking, but I do not know what it is meant to be, other than perhaps 'container', for which there is no evidence.

onions and radishes and dates. They are badly dressed in ragged and torn garments, mostly barefoot without shoes. They are content to get enough to keep a donkey, which they normally ride without reins or a halter. Weeks go by without their touching a penny and live only from the alms provided by the pious. Or they grow their own food or by some way they have learned to look after themselves and their families. They do not know what the world is and still less do they think about it. They simply take life as it comes. If you ask them anything, they reply, 'I don't know'. They can barely read. By birth they are country people, unable to talk about anything except vegetables, onions, garlic, linen, milk, butter and other rural topics. But as for their behaviour and Christian living, I can truthfully say that if they were not schismatics, they would be the best people in the world. They are kind, pious and never offend anyone except through the simplicity of their behaviour. Their heart is constantly directed towards God, with their prayers and sighs. Their hope is entirely in the mercy of God, whence one hears them say continually *God is merciful* or *God help us*. They tolerate any sort of insult from the Turks with the greatest patience for the love of Christ.

### Chapter Three

On Saturday at midnight the priest goes with his ministers to church, singing vespers, for about an hour. Few people attend because of the late hour. When the vespers are over, they fall asleep in the church. Those who do not wish to sleep smoke tobacco or drink coffee or simply chat.

Two hours after midnight they say matins and then the mass, holding hands as in the early church, and the mass is attended by many people. Their main ceremonies, which they observe on entering the church, are as follows.

Everyone, whether priest or lay person, removes his shoes on entering the church and kiss the ground before the *haikal*,<sup>24</sup> the chapel where the altar is located, sanctuary and the screen or rather the base of it. He then approaches the archpriest,<sup>25</sup> kisses his hand and inclines his head so that the priest might put his hand on it and give him the blessing. He does this all the priests and monks there. They stand in a choir around the *haikal*, propped up on a crutch. This done, he goes to venerate all the relics of the saints or martyrs in the church. They are usually

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<sup>24</sup> هيكل. Often translated as 'sanctuary'

<sup>25</sup> The hegumen

kept in small boxes on wooden boards fixed to the walls above the floor at a height where they can be reached with one hand. In front of them there are lamps and candles, constantly carried by Christians who light them in front of the relics, touching each of the boxes and kissing the hand that has touched them. Having visited all, he asks for a crutch and goes to one side to perform his devotions. It is a typical Oriental custom never to sit or kneel in church but to stand. Only when the homily on the Gospel passage of the day is read aloud, if it is too long, it is then permitted to sit on the floor.

When the Patriarch is present (not celebrating Mass), he sits on his throne above the priests, with a brass cross in his hand. Everyone who enters is required to bow to the sanctuary, prostrate himself, kiss the ground, rise, kiss the cross and his hand and allow it to be placed on his head. He then lets the priests and monks place their hand upon him, as we have said.

These then begin the Mass with great solemnity. The celebrant opens the door of the sanctuary, bows before it and kneels down, kissing the ground directly in front of his person, then to the right and then to the left. He then turns around and kisses it where he was standing, that is, he kisses the ground in the form of a cross. After entering the sanctuary he starts his prayers and the congregation responds. The deacon with the surplice hands the thurible to the celebrant, who censes the altar several times in the form of a cross and on every side. He leaves the sanctuary and censes everyone individually, praying. The congregation then make every effort to rub the incense into their faces, even the beard, I believe, as a sign of devotion.

Before the Gospel a story in Arabic is read from the Synaxary: this is a calendar devoted to the martyrs and saints of Egypt and the Levant held in great esteem by them and arranged by the days of the month, each day with its own story. I brought a copy back with me.

At the *sanctus* wooden boards are beaten above certain ebony pieces, called *nâqûs*,<sup>26</sup> of which they have plentiful supply. The sound produced is quite musical.

They do not keep or have preachers nor are those good priests suitable. Instead of the sermon, there is reading after the Gospel of a homily from a book called *tafâsîr*<sup>27</sup> (explanations), taken

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<sup>26</sup> Ar. ناقوس 'bells'

<sup>27</sup> Pl. of تفسير

one of the Fathers, such as Basil, Chrysostom, Cyril, Theophilus, Abbot Bussi<sup>28</sup> and people of that sort. For some time the Franciscans<sup>29</sup> have been preaching in Arabic among the Copts, and as a result they have been converting Copts to Catholicism with their exemplary lifestyle.

There is great confusion among the people in the details of practical worship, which are not fixed: one can enter, leave, eat drink, talk. For the most part I did not like it. Mostly because women were prevented from listening to the divine offices, such as those whose space was so far from the choir.

## Chapter Four

They believe that God is a unity in essence and a trinity in person, i.e. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Of Christ they believe and say that there is one nature, one will, one godhead in him and that his godhead is not distinct from his manhood. In this way they combine heresy with true Catholic faith. This is also the teaching of the Abyssinians, who are subject to the Patriarch in this as in other matters of religion. One day I was talking to some Coptic priests about this and there was an Abyssinian present. He boasted that there 70,000 convents in his country that held this belief of Dioscorus: anyone professing anything else risked losing his life.

Of the Holy Spirit they believe that it proceeds from the Father but not the Son.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in the Ethiopian liturgy published in Rome in 1548 it states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and one should know that *filioque* is an addition by Roman Catholics.

## §2 The Head of the Church

After their separation from the Roman Church they recognize only the Patriarch of Alexandria, even though the earliest Councils, which they still approve, especially the Council of Nicaea (Canon 37), confer primacy on the Roman Patriarch.

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<sup>28</sup> Perhaps this is meant to be Psoi, in which case the person referred to must be Psote Bishop of Psoi

<sup>29</sup> The Franciscans date back to 1219, when St Francis went to Egypt with the Crusaders. They seem to have become 'active' around 1630 and Wansleben may be a witness to the beginning of this activity.

<sup>30</sup> In the text often called the Niceno-Constantinople Creed (basically, an amalgam of the Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), the Holy Spirit is described as proceeding only from the Father. The phrase 'and from the Son' is a later Western addition. Wansleben's remarks about the addition of the *filioque* to the Ethiopian liturgy may be understood as the disapproval of someone who was still Lutheran, but this is mere speculation.



### §3 The Mass and their belief about Transubstantiation

The principal act of worship is the Mass, which is celebrated in Arabic, except for the Gospel and some other parts, which are read out in Coptic and Arabic.

Like the Abyssinians and in conformity with the Catholic Church, they believe that the bread and wine in the consecration is changed into the true body and blood of Christ our Lord. Their liturgy contains the express words 'conversion' and 'change', as can be seen from the following text, taken from the Ethiopic liturgy of the 318 Fathers assembled at the Council of Nicaea, which I have translated into Italian: *We therefore beseech you and supplicate you, Lord, to be kind enough to send your Holy Spirit to come down and shine on this bread and become the body of Our God and that the wine in this chalice be converted and changed and become the blood of Christ.* I will provide other clearer evidence in my Book of Synods<sup>31</sup> when, God willing, it is published.

When the priest raises the sacrament, all those in the congregation beat their chest, prostrate themselves and make the sign of the Cross, raise the cap a little and pray. These gestures are clear evidence that they adore the consecrated form.<sup>32</sup>

When the priest receives communion, he breaks the form of the bread into a cross, dips it into the wine and eats three pieces and also drinks three spoonfuls<sup>33</sup> of wine, distributing them also to his deacon. After washing the chalice several times, he drinks it and gives some of it the deacon. Finally he washes his hands in the patena and drinks that water. The Most Holy is not kept after the Mass and is not consecrated in private houses but always in Church.

Leavened bread is used for the Mass, which is called *qurbân*<sup>34</sup> after consecration, that is, communion or eucharist. Before consecration it is called simply *baraka*,<sup>35</sup> that is, blessing. The bread takes the form of round loaves costing a piastre or taler. They are prepared the evening before, as I have seen, and distributed among the congregation after Mass.

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<sup>31</sup> A summary of the contents of this massive work was published in *Conspectus operum aethiopicorum* 1671 while Wansleben was staying in Paris.

<sup>32</sup> The word here is 'spetie', which I take to be *species* see n.37.

<sup>33</sup> The word here is 'cucchiarate'

<sup>34</sup> قربان

<sup>35</sup> بركة

hostelry. This would be a profanity. If wine is not available, *zabîb* (dried grapes)<sup>36</sup> are soaked and the juice is pressed from it. Because ordinarily a pitcher of water is kept in the sanctuary to dilute the wine and wash the chalice, they regard it as sacred. The Patriarch then enters the sanctuary, or in his absence another priest, when the Mass is finished. He washes his hands with that water and then wipes his face and beard once. He then moves to the door with his deacon, who is holding a Cross. The Patriarch touches with his bathed hands the face of all those who approach in a throng to kiss the Cross, which is held by the deacon, and the Gospel, which is on a nearby stool. Everybody having been touched in this way, the Patriarch leaves the sanctuary, sits down and breaks some of the *baraka* into pieces and distributes them and the recipients kiss his hand. The Mass is then finished. This will last from 2 am to 1.30 pm. If it should happen that the intended celebrant has suffered from some pollution during the night, he is unable to celebrate Mass on the following day. The celebrant is also prohibited from smoking tobacco for twenty-four hours.

#### §4 Their Confession and Communion

They do not confess and do not receive Communion except during the Great Fast, and lay people receive Communion *sub utraque specie*.<sup>37</sup> The wine is received on a spoon,<sup>38</sup> the spoon of the Cross, because it has a cross at the tip of the handle. Young people (as will be said later) receive Communion after having been baptized.

#### §5 Reading the Bible

The Bible in Arabic is read by everyone. However poor one may be, if one can read, one has the Gospels and the Psalms at home.

#### §6 Holy Days

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<sup>36</sup> زبيب

<sup>37</sup> This phrase refers to the Catholic practice that only priests would receive bread and wine (*sub una specie*) at Communion and the laity only bread. Lutheranism abolished the practice and insisted that everybody receive both (*sub utraque specie*). Whether this observation is to be taken as an expression of Wansleben's Lutheranism I cannot say.

<sup>38</sup> A. J. Butler *The ancient Coptic churches of Egypt* vol. 2 (1884) p. 40 describes this utensil and provides a drawing on p. 41. The Arabic word is ملعقة. Butler writes that the Coptic words are **†ΚΟΚΛΙΑΡΙΟΝ** and **†ΜΥΣΤΗΡ/†ΜΥΣΘΗΡ**. The first of these is **κοχλιάριον**. The second two are forms of **μύστρον**.

In addition to each Sunday throughout the year Saturday is also celebrated. Work of any sort, however small, is not performed. There is no fasting on those days, unless they are in Lent. This custom is taken from the book called the Didascalia,<sup>39</sup> a copy of which I brought back with me. It is in Arabic. This is not done in imitation of the Jews but only, as they say, to perform the commandment of Christ our Lord and the apostles.

They also celebrate the whole Passion Week, which we call Holy Week. After that Resurrection Week. Then they celebrate Pentecost, the Nativity, the Epiphany, the Purification, the Transfiguration, St Stephen the Protomartyr, all the apostles and many other confessors, whose lives are recorded in order in the Synaxary mentioned earlier.

Like the Abyssinians they especially revere the Virgin, in whose honour they celebrate 32 Feasts a year. I have placed here the catalogue of these for the greater satisfaction of the curious, in the order that I found in an Ethiopic book in the Convent of the Abyssinians in Upper Egypt, in the Qusqam desert near Muharraq.<sup>40</sup>

In the month of Nehasse (August)  
the 7th is the Conception of the Virgin;  
the 16th the Assumption;  
the 21st another feast.

In the month of Meskerem (September)  
the 10th commemorates an icon of the Virgin in Zidonia that miraculously became flesh. The story is found in the Ethiopic Book of Miracles of the Virgin, which I copied in the above-mentioned Monastery of the Abyssinians, the same book also in Library of the Great Chancellor of France, Mgr Pierre Séguier.<sup>41</sup> I was witness to a curiosity connected with what I have just said: I happened to be at Cluny for the summer in order to see this famous monastery and the church, and among the relics I found some liquid that had been distilled from the imagine. The inscription of the bottle ran: *Of the liquor that flows and appears from the icon of the Virgin, transformed into flesh by the will of God, there is an icon of this at*

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<sup>39</sup> A work concerned entirely with Christian practice that was superseded by the Apostolic Constitutions cf. the edition of both texts published side by side of F.X. Funk *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* 2 vols. (1906)

<sup>40</sup> For contextual information cf. The Claremont Coptic Encyclopaedia 'Deir el Muharraq'  
<http://cdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cce/id/2132>

<sup>41</sup> Born 1588-died 1672. After the death of Cardinal Richelieu he became the 'protecteur' of the Academie Française in 1642

*Sardiniaca, beyond the city of Damascus in Paganía (the land of the pagans)*. It is clear from this inscription that there is a mistake in the Ethiopic book, where Paganía is to be read instead of Zidonia:

the 21st is the Feast of the Virgin.

In month of Tykmet (October)

the 22nd is the Feast of the Virgin.

In the month of Hydar (November)

the 6th is the Feast of her entry into Muharraq in the desert of Qusqam;

the 21st is a Feast of the Virgin.

In the month of Tahyβas (December)

the 3rd is the Feast of her entry into the Jerusalem Temple;

the 21st is the Feast of a miracle that she performed in Egypt at the monastery of Kalamun;<sup>42</sup>

the 22nd commemorates the gift a garment to Decisius the Bishop that had not been made by the hand of man and an episcopal seat reserved for Decisius:

the 28th is the Vigil of the Birth of Our Lord;

the 29th is the Nativity.<sup>43</sup>

It is to be noted that these days of the week are in accordance with the Abyssinian calendar, in which each month has thirty days, like that of the Copts, with five extra days called 'epagomenal days'. They start the year on the 28th of August, so they do not correspond exactly to our days. The table included here may help to understand the calendar.

I also have to point out that those days for which I have given no feasts, I found them in the manuscript mentioned without any reason why they were celebrated. But in my opinion they were celebrated for some mystery of the life of the Virgin or for some other miracle performed by her on that day.

## §7 Baptism

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<sup>42</sup> A. Alcock *The Life of Samuel of Kalamun* (1983) p.100

<sup>43</sup> There are several more pages of this list that I have decided not to translate. The English translation resumes with the text on p. 166 of the original.

Baptism is performed after midnight, at the end of which Mass is celebrated with many prayers spoken and sung in both Coptic and Arabic. After a little singing the deacons bring the children to the altar, where they are anointed for the first time with *myron* (chrism) in the belief that at that moment the child becomes a new spiritual man.

This done, singing resumes, and after a second anointing with 37 crosses made for the whole of their life, which serves as exorcism. They resume singing and, each time that a similar thing is done, the women present start to shriek as a sign of joy, according to the custom of the country.

Meanwhile the sacristan puts the water in the baptismal font, about an arm deep, to which the priests, having completed their functions in the choir, move. The baptizing priest blesses the water and pours in the chrism, mixing it with the sign of the cross. He then takes the child by the right arm and left leg with one hand and the right leg and left arm with the other hand, in the form of a cross. He then immerses the child twice up to the neck and the third time entirely. The child is then swathed in a white garment, while the priests continue to sing and read and the women to shriek. Finally the priest blows<sup>44</sup> into the child three times without being seen so that he receives the Holy Spirit, as they say and believe. This marks the end of the baptismal ceremony.

After the baptism the child is given communion, in the following way. The priest dips his finger in the chalice and puts it in the child's mouth, but does not give him any of the consecrated bread on the grounds that the child is unable to digest it and that, where the blood of Christ is, there is also the body. When this is over, many wax candles are lit and a procession is made through the church with singing. The deacons carry the children in their arms, preceded by the priests; others, men and women, follow, the women shrieking in the finest concert. The procession over, the parents eat together. The evening before there is dinner for everyone present, without tobacco and coffee.

I attended a baptism from beginning to end, where I was told that the children were six months old and that those aged six years were little angels. Many die unbaptized and go to Hell. They excuse themselves by saying that it is necessary for the children to be a little strong

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<sup>44</sup> The practice of insufflation ( a form of exorcism) is mentioned as early as the 4th cent. by Cyril of Jerusalem in those lectures given to catechumens known as *Mystagogicae*.

to be baptized. They do not normally give baptism in case of necessity but rather simply anoint the child.

### § 8 Circumcision

They normally practise circumcision, but at will: there is no prescription. I have met an equal number of people circumcised and uncircumcised. They also practise female circumcision. The Turkish women do it at home or in the baths.

### §9 Marriage

Lay priests can set up a household with an unmarried woman, but on the death of the first wife they may not remarry.

Generally people marry when they are young. I myself attended a marriage service where the bridegroom was twelve and the bride nine. When I asked the father of the bride why he had married his daughter to the boy at so young an age, he replied that he had wanted the boy. When I further asked if the boy would be able to perform his conjugal duty,<sup>45</sup> he replied that there was no doubt that he would do what the other married couples did. They left the choir and went to sit with the women. At this point a woman came and gave the bride a piece of sugar with . . .<sup>46</sup> over rose water. She repeated this three times and each time the bride gave the sugar to the bridegroom, who took it from her with his mouth, and he did the same to the bride. Each time one of them took the sugar, the women present cried out jubilantly in the usual way. They distributed sugar to those standing by, spraying water in their faces. This triple aspersion of rose water signified the brevity of matrimonial joy, they reckoning that it lasted no more than three days.

The Copts also have a quite bizarre marriage custom, which was told to me on good authority: after having been joined in matrimony, they spend the first night without consummating it and consummation takes place on the following night. Two people with staves are stationed before the bedroom door, who wait a little and ask the couple three times at short intervals if they have carnal knowledge of each other. If the bride does not reply the third time, the door is opened. If it has been bolted, they force it open and give the bridegroom a sound thrashing.

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<sup>45</sup> Lit. *se quello potesse rendere il debito alla sposa*

<sup>46</sup> *verciarui*. I am unable to find this word or anything like it in the dictionaries I have consulted.

## §10 Consecration or rather ordination of priests

I have no special knowledge of the consecration since only those who have been ordained are allowed to enter the sanctuary. I had no way of seeing or finding out about this rite. However, the ordination is performed by the Patriarch with great solemnity. Since they have no right to enter, or a limited right, sometimes only four to eight times, in the face of great inconvenience, they have to be almost day and night in the church and they cannot attend to their work. No one presents himself for the priesthood, but they are forced by the Patriarch, sometimes with threats. Thus, in 1664 in Old Cairo, I saw that, when the Patriarch was performing an ordination, he forcibly put the shirt on one of them. He resisted with all his might, but it was not enough because the other priests were helping the Patriarch and he retired to a corner of the church, crying his heart out. He did not turn in any way to put his hands on anyone to exercise his sacred order nor did he wish to accept the congratulations of the people rejoicing at his ordination.

The result was that this priest went that same evening to a Turkish official of his acquaintance and complained of the outrage perpetrated on him by the Patriarch. The latter received an order from the Pasha to pay six bags of dinars or else the church in which the incident had taken place would be demolished. He hid himself in an uninhabited house and required the priest to be unfrocked. How the matter of the punishment went I cannot say, because I had to leave Cairo at that time.

## §11 Their fasts

The Copts have four major fasts a year. The first is before Christmas, in December, of 24 days. The second the Great Fast, *sôm al kabir*, of 55 days. The third is that of the disciples of Our Lord, *sôm al talamîdh*, which starts on the third day of Pentecost, of 31 days: I happened to be in Upper Egypt at this time and was obliged to observe it so as not to cause offence. The fourth is the Fast of the Virgin in August, the *sôm al 'adhra*, of 15 days. All fasts are observed rigorously: they abstain from meat, milk, eggs and eat only lentils, peas and other legumes.

In addition they fast every Wednesday and Friday to 9 pm, when they drink coffee with a biscuit and smoke, with fish for dinner. On Saturday they do not fast. When I told them that

Catholics fasted on that day, they were surprised and found it very strange.<sup>47</sup>

## §12 The icons in the churches and veneration of them

They do not have statues in their churches, but pictures only, such as those of Our Lord, the Virgin, St George, the angels Michael, Raphael and Gabriel. They venerate them, with kisses, candles and lamps.

They believe that God works His grace through them, and this forms a great bond of attachment to them. In Old Cairo, in the Monastery of St George, there is an icon of the saint, in front of which I myself saw a lunatic presented who then recovered his reason. It is generally believed to have worked many miracles, and there is a proverb: *If you are mad, you must be taken to St George.*<sup>48</sup>

As the devotion felt by this people towards the Virgin, Queen of all the Saints, is very singular, icons of her are particularly revered by them. Lamps burn continuously before them, decorated with flowers and drapes. They worship, pray and, when sick, anoint themselves with the oil of these lamps. which they burn before them and receive grace. There are many icons of the Virgin in Egypt that I have seen. I found two Ethiopic books in manuscript that related miracles and acts of grace performed by them. The books were read out in church on the feasts of the Virgin and, if they were not read out on those days by some oversight, the penalty was excommunication. And, lest it may seem that I have been negligent, I will present some clearer and more conspicuous books for the satisfaction of the Catholic reader which I have translated into Italian.

In the said Book of Miracles of the Virgin, number 12 relates the Patriarch of Alexandria was Gabriel (84th) and the abbot of the Monastery of Kalamun in Egypt was a profoundly holy man called Solomon, there was an icon of the Virgin extremely well known throughout Egypt for the miracles and acts of grace that it performed. Once, certain Arabs went to Upper Egypt on business and, by the special providence of God, chose a route that took them past the

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<sup>47</sup> I do not understand this. There is, as far as I know, only one Saturday in the year when Catholics fast: Holy Saturday.

<sup>48</sup> I am not familiar with this proverb.



monastery. When they knew that there was such a miraculous Virgin there, they stopped to see it and were taken to the monastery. Solomon the abbot received the Arabs with great kindness and took them to the icon, asking them first to be kind enough to do before it all that he did, and they promised that they would. The abbot then uncovered the icon and knelt three times before it, and three of them did the same, but the fourth refused. Instead he broke out into diabolical imprecations against the icon and the Virgin, contemptuously turning his back on it. He then suddenly started to poke out his tongue a couple of inches, grinding his teeth and screaming like a man possessed. He became deathly pale. When his companions saw this, they tearfully begged the abbot to pray for their companion. He then took the oil of the lamp and anointed his tongue with it and the tongue returned to its place. They then all heard a voice coming out of the icon, which said that the abbot should not be offended by these imprecations because her beloved Son had decided that he would die a sudden death as soon as he was back home, which happened as predicted.

In the same book, number 14 relates that at the time of the same Patriarch in the same convent there was a monk who looked after the church. After the other monks had said compline, they retired to their cells, while he went into the church secretly and prayed before the icon of the Virgin, kneeling before her three hundred times, each time saying: *Lord Jesus Christ, show me your face and the face of your holy Mother Mary.* He did this continuously for six years, without anyone's knowledge. At the end of the seventh year, on the eve of a feast of the Virgin, 21st December, while in the fervour of devotion, he saw the Virgin, immeasurably resplendent, and she said to him: *Why have you taken so much trouble and begged my beloved Son to show you His mother. Here I am. Look at me. I am the mother of life, and my Son has ordered me to come to you and do what you ask.* He replied: *Most holy Virgin, I ask for nothing other than that you be kind enough to intercede with your Son on my behalf that he may be favourable to me.* The Virgin replied: *The Lord has received your petition, and in another two days you will be with me where I am.* When the monk saw the outstanding splendour and heard the voice, he fell to the ground as if dead. The Virgin took his hand and raised him up and she disappeared. The monk then returned to his cell and was immediately overcome with a powerful fever. He summoned the Bishop, who happened to be in the monastery, and confessed to him everything that had happened to him. On the third day he died in a holy state.

In the same book miracle 3 tells the story of how in the Monastery of Adawiya<sup>49</sup> (near Cairo on

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<sup>49</sup> Spelled 'Aduvie'. Between Ma'adi and Tura, well known for the quality of its limestone, used extensively for example in the 3rd Dynasty Step Pyramid of Djoser, the monastery was endowed by a woman from Maghreb

the east bank of the Nile) a feast of the Virgin was celebrated every year on 10th August. In the days of the abbot Riskela, a native of Cairo, a great crowd of men and women came to celebrate the feast, wearing their best clothes. The Arabs in the countryside saw this and decided to attack them and rob them of their clothes. After vespers there was a solemn procession with the icon of the Virgin. After the prayers and hymns everyone went to sleep on the roof of the church, this being customary in Egypt, in the open air. The Arabs climbed on to the roof and stole all their belongings and garments. Riskela heard their moans and cries and, having realized why they were crying, he went down with all the monks to the icon of the Virgin and they kneeled, begging the Virgin to avenge this outrage, otherwise nobody might come again to celebrate her feast. While the monks were praying, they heard a ring at the church door. It was the Arabs, dazed, bringing back all their clothes. The monks marvelled and asked why, and they replied that they had become blind and crippled, completely unable to move. They had heard a voice that said: *If you do not return their belongings to the people who have come to my feast, you will not only remain blind and crippled but the Ruler of the earth will have you hanged as thieves.* They understood this and returned what they had stolen. They all went to the icon to thank the Virgin and to beg for the safety of the Arabs, who came before her and converted to Christianity, giving thanks for the restoration of their health and becoming lifelong servants of the monks.

I could also relate other similar miracles, if there were need, but I have to pursue my story and will deal with them at a more convenient and opportune time.

### § 13 How the Copts bury their dead

The following ceremonies are observed in burial. If the deceased is a person of quality, he is placed in the middle of the church, with many torches surrounding him. The priests recite the Office of the Dead in accordance with their rite. When the body is consigned to burial, a woman dances around and sings, in accordance with the observation I have made. The other women wail in the customary manner and some touch hands. I will not go into the ceremonies practised by the Turks.

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called al 'Adawiya in the early Fatimid period cf. Abu Salih *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* ed. and tr. B.T.A. Evetts (1896) p. 136

At the conclusion of the funeral that I witnessed, there was a gathering on the roof of the church of those who had attended. Each one was given a bowl of peas with a little meat and as much bread they wanted, and men and women mixed freely, though there were two hundred of them.<sup>50</sup> The Patriarch and other priests with leading Copts went into a separate room, but one more stately than the others. I was also invited and placed next to the Patriarch.

This custom of inviting people to baptisms, funerals and before to receive Communion is only an ancient custom re-introduced by the Church, in particular that which is done before Communion in imitation of the Last Supper. See for example *Corinthians* 11, 20-21, where the Apostle corrects errors made in Communion and in the public meals just mentioned. These gatherings are called 'agape' by the Fathers, that is, charity, symbols of brotherhood and union of the soul. They are mentioned in St John Chrysostom in his sermon on the words of Paul *oportet haeseres esse*<sup>51</sup> and Tertullian in ch. 39 of his *Apologia*.

A month later they celebrate the obsequies and say a solemn Mass for the deceased, with the Office of the Dead in public in the church.

## Chapter Five

Egypt is the source and origin of the monastic life, from where it has spread all over the world. Reason requires us to say something about it and we will say something of the state in which we found it.

But as nothing lasts forever in this world and things change with time, we see that the same religions, initially very fervent, became so ordinary and change their appearance so much that we no longer recognize them for what they once were. I can truthfully say the same of what I observed in Egypt. The religious of today are so different and far from that sanctity that was professed of the ancient Fathers. It would be no exaggeration to speak of the difference between night and day. The monasteries which were once so highly regarded for their holiness and were sometimes the home of such illustrious men, virtuous and sanctimonious, have been reduced today by the most pitiful people in the world.

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<sup>50</sup> There is no hint of impropriety here,. In texts of an earlier age those who assembled ostensibly to commemorate a martyr but in fact to indulge in all manner of improper behaviour were castigated (ΝΕΣΒΗΥΕ ΕΤΕΜΩΦΕ ΕΤΟΥΕΙΡΕ ΗΜΟΟΥ ΖΗΝΤΟΠΟΣ ΗΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ 'the inappropriate things that are done in martyrs' shrines') cf. E. Amélineau *Oeuvres de Schenoudi* vol. 1 pp. 197ff.

<sup>51</sup> I Cor, 11,9

I will sketch as briefly and truthfully as I can the life of the religious who live in them . IT is well-known that all religions usually consist principally in the observance of three essential vows: chastity, poverty and obedience. Although the monks observe obedience and poverty as I shall describe and live a celibate life, I have nonetheless seen that in the monastery of Muharraq and in that of the Abyssinians not far away there are many women, young and old, who mix with the monks the whole time. One may wonder what sort of chastity it is that a monk may observe who has the opportunity to lose it so readily.

The vow of poverty is well observed but more out of necessity, I believe, than because of the vow. They are poverty itself, wretched and so badly dressed and so filthy that I found it difficult to be near them. When I reached the above-mentioned monastery, one of them asked me for my shoes, one wanted a ribbon around his cap, another something else. To keep my temper I had my hand on my purse so that I could give them a small amount to buy tobacco. Indeed there was one who went about quite naked. One can thus wonder what sort chastity does these monks practise, given the said nudity. Others are so badly dressed that they have difficulty covering their private parts, and they are in constant contact with women.

To describe their dwelling and cells, to get some real idea of their poor and deplorable state, it will be enough for me to say that they are made of earth and that normally have low and small doors that one has to bend down to enter them. They have no windows. Some are quite open above. Some have partially broken walls. Some are full of infection and filth. When I opened the cell in the Abyssinian monastery that the abbot had assigned to me as living quarters (and it was one of the better one), I was overcome by the vision of a host of nights that filled me with such horror and terror that I almost returned to Manfalût, whence I had come.

As for the vow of obedience, valued by all monks as most essential and practised by all others, I can say that I found not the slightest trace of it with them, because I constantly noted that each one did as he pleased, with no regard for the abbot or any rule.

There is only one order of these monks, that left to them by their patriarch, Anthony,<sup>52</sup> whose monastery is far from Cairo towards the Red Sea (that is, the Levant), about six or seven days

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<sup>52</sup> Probably a reasonably common misunderstanding, based on ignorance, in 17th cent. Europe. What follows is quite at variance with the previous description of the Upper Egyptian monasteries.

travel, in a fearful<sup>53</sup> place, far away from the 'practice of men', in which alone (and perhaps also that of St Macarius the disciple of Anthony) people live in the most rigorous observance of rules. There people live in common, observe silence, women are kept away from the monastery, meat is not eaten but only fish and eggs, or rather greens, honey, legumes and dried fruit. The Divine Office is recited punctually at the appointed times. They are a bit more civil than in other monasteries, less ignorant. For the rest, there is nothing but the greatest ignorance and barbarism in all the other monasteries. The monks live more like animals than human beings.

The clothing that distinguishes monks from priests consists of the cap of black cloth, which just covers the head of the monk.<sup>54</sup> It is worn under the turban, as if it were a beret, and is called kalasue. Behind the cap is something like a scapular from the same cloth, a palm wide that reached down to the knees but under the tunic, so that it could not be seen from the outside. They still carry a crook, on which they lean while praying or assisting in the Divine Office.

## Chapter Six

Having decided to acquire accurate information about the condition of the Coptic Church,<sup>55</sup> I was curious to know how many monasteries and churches there were in Egypt. This is what I discovered.

At Cairo, in the establishment of the Syrian monks (since there are no longer brothers of this nationality in Egypt, the establishment of the monks of St Macarius is used)<sup>56</sup> in the street called *Harat al Maks*,<sup>57</sup> I gathered that some of the most observant Copts assembled there to thank them for their efforts. Among them was the abbot of the Monastery of the Virgin in the desert of Macarius, and I asked them about all the churches and monasteries in the country. I was the director and president of this meeting. The monks told me of the daily life of the monastery, and the others examined the truth of what the speaker had said. I left them to settle the matter among themselves and then wrote (in my language) what had been decided

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<sup>53</sup> *horrido*.

<sup>54</sup> The usual English expression is 'skull cap'.

<sup>55</sup> The Italian is a little more floral, but I believe this to be the gist of it.

<sup>56</sup> There is a monastery known as the Syrian Monastery in the Wadi Natrûn: it was probably founded in the 6th and was bought by Syrian merchants in the 8th cent. and Europeans in the 17th cent. report that there were no longer Syrian monks living in it.

<sup>57</sup> The district known as al Maks was a harbour area where taxes (Ar. maks) were levied. It is first mentioned an 8th cent. Arabic text (Papyri Schott Rheinardt texts), thus predating Fatimid Cairo by more than a century.

as true, as did the abbot in Arabic. This was how a list of the convents was made.

Cairo being the capital city of Egypt, this will be my starting point for the enumeration of the churches and monasteries, upstream and downstream on both sides of the Nile.<sup>58</sup>

The churches in the middle of Cairo are as follows:

in *Harat Zuweila* there is a church of the Virgin, the Patriarchal church, and above that two other churches, one of the Abyssinians and one of the Armenians, all three in the same compound:

in *Harat al Rûm* there is a church of the Virgin, designated as the Patriarchal residence;

in Old Cairo there is a church of St Menas;

in *Harat al Patrak* there are two contiguous churches, St Mercurius, residence of the Patriarch, and St Shenoute, one of the four principal saints of Egypt;

in *Qasr al Shama'*<sup>59</sup> there is a church of the Virgin;

in *Mu'allaqa* there is an ancient church of the Virgin;

in *Qasr al Rihân*, a church of St George. Beneath the church is a grotto, in which Our Lord Christ was hidden with His mother Mary when fleeing from the persecution of Herod. I visited it with particular devotion. There is also a church of St Barbara.

Nearby, in *Darb al Taqa* is a convent for nuns and a church dedicated to St George with the miraculous icon we spoke of earlier.

Outside of Old Cairo, among the ruins of that city, which properly form mountains broken pots and rocks,<sup>60</sup> there are three churches in a row: Babylon al Darag (of the Virgin), John of Abukir and Theodore. I slept one night in the latter and found myself in the baptism ceremony I described earlier.

It may be noted that Babylon is an ancient underground church from the time of the Apostles, about which Copts told me stories worthy of further examination. They believe it to be the church mentioned by St Peter in his first letter.<sup>61</sup> Around it is a church St Michael the

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<sup>58</sup> The language used by Wansleben is rather more copious, but this is the gist.

<sup>59</sup> Babylon, a Roman fortress at the border between Lower and Middle Egypt, where Nile vessels were obliged to pay a toll. Its name may be Egyptian: *pr-h'py-n-iwnw* 'the Nile house of Heliopolis', a metropolis of great antiquity (*Iwn*), which is some distance from the Nile. The Arabic name 'Castle of the Beacon' suggests that there may have been a fire burning on the top of it as a signal to river traffic.

<sup>60</sup> Fustât.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Pet. 5, 13

Archangel.<sup>62</sup>

## Chapter 8

The Turks genuinely allow each person a free conscience, not only in Egypt but in all their countries, provided it does not affect them. Nonetheless they often deprived Christians of their best churches and monasteries. Some years ago the Monastery of the Raven in Manfalût was turned into a mosque.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly the late Pasha Ibrahim, three years ago, built a mosque in the village of Matariya<sup>64</sup> outside Cairo five miles away where there was a small chapel; behind it a porphyry<sup>65</sup> appeared to foreigners, on top of which the Virgin used to stretch out the clothes of the baby Jesus to dry them after washing. Nearby is the spring that miraculously started to dispense water, thanks to the omnipotence of Jesus, when on His arrival in Egypt he was suffering from great thirst. To this day it still dispenses water so sweet that surpasses in goodness all other waters, whether from the fountains of Cairo or the Nile itself. The Pashas themselves, notwithstanding the distance from their castle or being enemies of Christians and their things, used this water in their refectories. Past the chapel the way leads down to a garden with the fig tree behind which, according to an ancient tradition, Our Lord hid during the persecution by Herod. Opening in the trunk by itself the fig wove spiders' webs so thick and old in appearance that they concealed Our Lord from his enemies as they went by and did not look for him. Today no Frank<sup>66</sup> is allowed to visit these places since it is now a mosque.

The Turks also took the Church of Anastasius in Alexandria from the Copts and turned it into a mosque. They make no effort to restore churches fallen into ruin as a result of penalties. Indeed, the Christians are not keen on removing the spiders' webs for fear that Turks find them attractive.

Moreover, the Turks tax the churches and monasteries heavily, as happened with the

<sup>62</sup> What follows on pp. 203 to 222 (which contain Chapter Seven) is essentially a list of churches and monasteries outside of Cairo. I have not translated them for the simple reason that I am unable to identify many of the places, written as they are in an Italian transliteration. Wansleben uses the terms *Levante* (east) and *Ponente* (west) to situate them geographically. It might perhaps be interesting but time-consuming to identify these places and ascertain the state of them, or even perhaps whether they still exist.

<sup>63</sup> Not listed in Abu Salih *Churches*

<sup>64</sup> Not far from Heliopolis and traditionally one of the resting places of the Holy Family during their flight from Herod.

<sup>65</sup> I do not understand this.

<sup>66</sup> The non-discriminatory Arabic term for foreigner.

Abyssinians in Cairo fourteen years ago. The Pasha of that time, out of a certain apprehension he felt towards them, threatened to take away their churches if they did not pay a certain large sum of money. They were forced to sell the property of the church and their manuscript books to pay this tax, These books, about forty of them, had been sent by Father Eleazar, a Capuchin, to Mgr Pierre Séguier the Great Chancellor of France, in whose house I saw them. That is also the reason why I was able to find almost no Ethiopic book in Cairo, except for four in the possession of the Father, which I copied. These taxes gradually began to annoy the Christians so much that they were no longer able to resist.<sup>67</sup> The number of Coptic churches is constantly being reduced, and I have no doubt that the Turks will soon confiscate the remainder. The Franks are in a better situation than the Copts, because the Turks not only allow them to attend church services with harrassing them, but they also more respect for the missionary Capuchins and Franciscans, who both have their chapels behind their place of residence, each wearing the dress suitable to their order.

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<sup>67</sup> I take this to mean conversion.