

The History of the Coptic Church, Part I:

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It has been said that a nation without a history is a nation without a future. Let us thank God for the history of our Coptic Church written in the blood of our Fathers who were martyred to preserve the faith they ardently confessed.

The Origin of Egyptians

The first to settle in the land of the River Nile's Valley was "Egypt", the son of Ham, the son of Noah. Egypt and his children including Asian tribes came to the Nile River Valley through the Suez isthmus and settled there. Thus the land became known as "Egypt" and the people Egyptians.

In the Old Testament, the Nile Valley was also called Egypt. However, in Coptic language, it was called "Kimy" which is derived from Ham, the father of Egypt, or may be derived from "Kam" which means black referring to the color of its land.

Later on, the Greeks called the Nile Valley "Algyptos" which was derived from the hieroglyphic word "HAKAPTAH" which is the "GOS PTAH of Minf", the capital of ancient Egypt.

When Islamic Arab occupied Egypt, they called it "Kift" which is the nearest city to the Red Sea and means "Home of Coptic's", so the words "Coptic" and "Egyptian" have the same meaning.

In Egypt, many cultures were established since 5000 BC to the time of the first family at 3200 BC. Before the time of families, Egyptians invented the hieroglyphic language, which was first expressed by pictures. Then the hieroglyphic alphabet was written. Also, Egyptians invented the solar calendar system during the time of King Zoser of the third family upon the counseling of his minister "Imhotb."

The Time of Families

An ancient Egyptian priest called Maniton (280 BC) recorded the history of ancient Egypt and the time of families that governed Egypt unto "thirty" families beginning with the first family and ending with the thirty families during the time Alexander the Great occupied Egypt in 332 BC. All writings of Maniton were preserved in the Library of Alexandria that was burned in the seventh century. Also most of the events and families of ancient Egypt were recorded on the walls of the temples.

The first king of the first family was the King Mena who united upper and lower Egypt under one authority and one central government. This was the first government the world knew existed.

The Old Nation State (2780-2280 BC) includes the families from the second to the tenth. The capital of Egypt was Manif. The first king of the third family was Zoser. The first king of the fourth family was Sinfro. Its kings also were Khofo, Kefra, Mankara who were the builders of the pyramids of Giza.

The Middle Nation State (2280-1567 BC) included the families from eleven to seventeen. During the time of the 12th family, our father Abram visited Egypt as it was recorded on the walls of the temples. Asian tribes came to Egypt asking for food during starvation in Palestine (Genesis 12: 10-20).

In 1675-1567 BC Hexos came from Asia and occupied Egypt. The tribes became known as “Shepard kings.” During their time, Joseph, the son of Jacob, reached his prestige as the second in command of Egypt. Also during this time, Jacob and his sons came to Egypt and settled in the Land of Goshen near Afras City, which was the capital of Hexos kings, the governors of Egypt.

The Recent Nation State (1567-1085 BC) included 18th, 19th, and 20th families. The first king of the 18th family was Ahmos the 1st that drove Hexos out of Egypt (1570-1547 BC). Ahmos was the king who didn’t know Joseph as mentioned in the Holy Book of Exodus (1:8). During this period of time, God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt through the Passover. The king during that time was the King Ammohotob, II reigning in the middle of the 15th century before the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ as mentioned in the Holy Book of Exodus (2:15).

The Late Families Era (1085-332 BC) included the families from the 21st to 30th families when Alexander the Great occupied Egypt. From the 21st family, Solomon, the King, married an Egyptian princess who was the daughter of the king of Egypt at that time, Opsosms (525 BC).

Persians occupied Egypt establishing the 27th family. At the end of the Persian occupation, the Egyptian princess established families 28, 29, and 30 in Upper Egypt until Alexander the Great occupied Egypt in 332 BC.

Alexander the Great (332-330 BC) drove the Persians out of Egypt with military force. Alexander the Great established the City of Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea. After the death of Alexander in Babylon in 330 BC, his empire was divided into states for his generals. Egypt was under the authority of Patlimos, the First, who established The Library of Alexandria. The Old Testament was translated into the Greek Language by 70 Hebrew priests that became known as the Septuagint (the word means seventy).

The Roman Invasion (31 BC)

The Roman Senate Council sent a fleet under the leadership of Octavian, which met the fleet under the leadership of Mark Antony and his friend Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt in Ektioum on the coast of Greece. In this war, Octavian defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra. Mark Antony and Cleopatra then escaped to Alexandria.

In Alexandria, Cleopatra accepted the suggestion of Octavian and killed her friend Mark Antony. From that time, Egypt became a Romanian state. Octavian changed his name to Augustus Caesar in 27 BC and became the highest governor of the Roman Empire. During Augustus time, our Lord Jesus Christ was born of St Mary, the holy virgin, by the Holy Spirit.

When Augustus Caesar occupied Egypt and added it to the Roman Empire, its population was 8 million and its capital was Alexandria. Although most Egyptians at that time were native Egyptians and spoke the Coptic language, the governors’ tribunal was formed of Greeks and Jews who spoke the Greek language and had a limited relationship with the native Egyptians.

Egypt was the breadbasket for Rome. Wheat was the most important crop grown in Egypt and presented to Rome. Rome’s population was near one million and as the food shortage in Rome grew, the empire needed Egypt’s exports. Due to the fear of riots which almost always followed food

shortages, the emperor Augustus gave the order to the governor of Egypt to send a shipment of wheat to Rome every year whose average was “850,000 ards” (Egyptian measure of wheat).

The Emperor Augustus gave the Jews of Alexandria Roman citizenship as they also did the Greeks. Thus, giving them freedom of worship and their own judiciary. In fact, the Jews at that time were great in number and education as reported in the Holy Book of Acts (6:9). So it was expected that the Holy Family during its presence in Egypt would stay with Jewish colonies, which had settled in Egypt at that time.

Emperor Augustus divided Egypt into 3 administrative divisions; Upper Egypt, Middle Egypt, and Lower Egypt (the Delta of the Nile River). An administrative governor without any military power governed each division. Each was under the direct leadership of the Emperor. Emperor Augustus built many successful projects in Egypt such as Roman camps, new water reservoirs, new roads, and the digging of new water channels that would eliminate mud making to make the land more productive for cultivation.

By this brief description, it would appear that the Romans established a good administrative authority and successful engineering of projects throughout the land overall producing great quantities of food for Rome. However, it brought about social and economic failure in Egypt among most of the Egyptians who were the true owners of the land.

It was at this time, that many Egyptian cities and villages were blessed by the visit of the Holy Family in its flight from Palestine, escaping the unfair rule of Herod, the King.

Prophecies of the Old Testament About Egypt and Egyptians

The Holy Bible did not talk about any nation more than Egypt except Jerusalem that is the symbol of Heavenly Jerusalem. This is because of the staying of the Jews in Egypt for 430 years as it is written in the Holy Book of Exodus (12:40-41), then God by His strong and Almighty hand took them out safely through the blood of the Passover’s lamb which was a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ’s blood and this occurred on the night of 15th of the Hebrew month, “Nissan.” By this, the Israelites became free from the devil’s power through the Lord Jesus Christ’s blood of which the lamb’s blood became a symbol of general world power and the house of slavery from which God delivered His people.

Inspiration About Egypt

This is a message about Egypt. “The Lord is coming to Egypt, riding swiftly on a cloud. The Egyptian idols tremble before Him, and the people of Egypt lose their courage” (Isaiah 19:1).

“When that time comes, there will be an altar to the Lord in the land of Egypt and a stone pillar dedicated to Him at the Egyptian border. They will be a symbol of the Lord God Almighty’s presence in Egypt. When the people there are oppressed and call out to the Lord for help, He will send someone to rescue them” (Isaiah 19:19-20).

The luminous soft cloud, which our Lord Jesus Christ was riding, was His mother, St Mary, the Virgin, who is more than the clouds in her purity and holiness. The altar is the Christian Church, which was built by St Mark, the Apostle, instead of idols that were destroyed in front of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came to Egypt with the Holy Family. This altar is the monastery of El Mohark in Assuit governate, which is the midpoint of Egypt from north to south and from east to west. In the monastery

of El Mohark, also known as the Monastery of St Mary, the Virgin is an altar upon which the Divine Liturgy is prayed every day, which is the extension of the cross's sacrifice. By this we see that the prophecy of Isaiah had come to be.

Egypt was the Refuge and Shelter for the Hungry and Persecuted

Our father Abraham went to Egypt because of severe starvation in the land of Israel (Genesis 12:10). When his brothers persecuted Joseph he found himself in Egypt eventually second in command to the pharaoh himself. Our father Jacob came with his children because of severe starvation in Canaan (Genesis 42-47) and there they became a great people. God sent them Moses to be their leader and his brother Aaron to be the first priest and right hand for Moses to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt after their staying there about 430 years.

Jeremiah the Prophet, willingly came out of Egypt to accompany the Israelites after encouraging his people to not escape to Egypt. The Lord spoke to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 43:8 and 44:3) about all the Jews residing in Magdal, Nof, Tahfanis, and fetors land.

Then the Holy Family came to Egypt escaping from Herod, the King, and visited many Egyptian cities and villages in the North and South of Egypt as said by Hosea the Prophet, "The Lord says when Israel was a child I loved him and called him out of Egypt as my son" (11:1). So St Matthew, the Apostle, considered this prophecy was special to the Lord Jesus Christ that had been done with His blessing coming with the Holy Family to Egypt and establishing the Christian Church in Egypt by St Mark, the Apostle, as inspired by Isaiah the Prophet. "The Lord will reveal Himself to the Egyptian people and they will acknowledge and worship Him and bring Him sacrifices and offerings" (Isaiah 19:21) and "The Lord Almighty will bless them and say I will bless you, Egypt, my people" (Isaiah 19:25).

