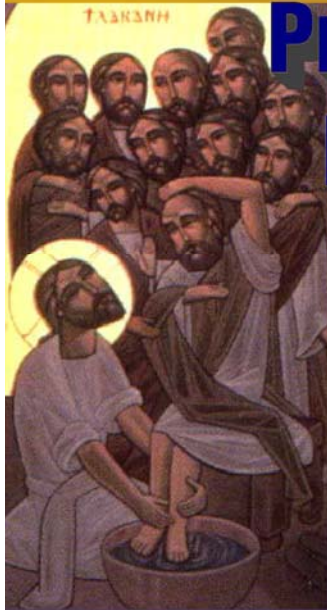




Servants' Preparation Program



Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the
Southern
United States

*"For I have given you an example,
that you should do as I have done to you"*
John 13:15

Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the Southern United States

HIS 103

POST CHALCEDON AND THE ISLAMIC ERA

**The History Of Christianity in Egypt
From 451 AD - to 1849 AD**

**Father Joachim Boutros
St Mark C.O.C. Fort Myers, Florida**

Servants' Preparation Program

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THE SITUATION AFTER CHALCEDON

The Council of Chalcedon held several sessions after passing its sentence on Abba Dioscorus, and discussed several worldly matters, one of which was: who among them would be first and have more prerogatives. Sadly enough, this revealed the unworthy intentions and ambitions of few among them, who quite obviously – wanted to bring the highly influential Coptic Church of Alexandria to a position of inferiority, so that Constantinople and Rome could gain superiority over it.

Before the Council wound up its final sessions, word came from Marcianus that he had ratified its sentence and decreed the exile of Abba Dioscorus to the island of Gangra – off the coast of Asian Minor. The imperial confirmation was necessary on account of the immense possessions administered by the Patriarch of Alexandria. And, with the ratification, the Emperor

The exile of Abba Dioscorus, did not stop many of his friends from remaining faithful to him, and keeping in touch with him either through correspondence or whenever possible, through personal visits.

Among those who corresponded with him was a bishop from Iberia (present day Spain) called Peter.

In the first letter he sent him, he gave him a full report of what happened in Chalcedon after his departure. The answers of Dioscorus to Peter were always full of the serene sense resignation of the person who felt he had done rightly and had stood up for his faith without bowing to worldly power. He also displayed a spirit of forgiveness for those who had wronged him and “spitefully used him and persecuted him”

Five years after this sentence of exile had been pronounced, St Dioscorus joined the ranks of the Church Triumphant.

During his exile, he had succeeded in winning many pagan residents of the island to the Christian faith, and a number of heretics to Orthodoxy – thus serving his Lord even unto the end.

But since the Heavenly Father never forgets love’s labour, even against all appearances, He raised for Abba Dioscorus loyal witnesses in different ages. Severus, Patriarch of Antioch in the sixth century said of him: “He was a martyr of Christ; he alone, refused to worship Baal in that false council”.

While Mar Zakareya, Bishop of Modally in Asia Minor, described him as “the man whose faith was like that of Athanasius, Kyrillos, and the other Church Doctors. And seeing that this intrepid man – Dioscorus – had trained himself from his tender years in the Orthodox faith, he refused to bow to the doubt-faced idol set up by Leo at Chalcedon”. Abba Petros, 27th Pope of Alexandria referred to him as “Christ’s loyal martyr”.

When Emperor Marcianus approved the Council’s verdict and banished Dioscorus, he sent a message to the Alexandrian people informing them of this verdict and telling them that he had appointed a man by the name of Proterius to occupy his chair. He also warned them against any disobedience.

Proterius was sent to Alexandria accompanied by imperial troops who had orders to punish all who refused to submit to him. But the Egyptians, far from being cowed, rose in rebellion, as was their custom when they felt strongly about anything.

The Bishops met in an emergency council and decreed their unanimous support of Abba Dioscorus, and their excommunication of Leo and his Tomos, the Chalcedon decrees, and Proterius. To counteract this measure, the imperial troops went to each bishop alone ordering him to sign the

Chalcedon decrees. But they all refuse to sign. And regarded Proterius as a foreigner who seized a See he had absolutely no right to occupy.

In the year A.D. 456, news came to Alexandria that Abba Dioscorus had passed into Heaven. Throughout the Apostolic See of St. Mark, all hearts were sad, aching at the lonesomeness of the departed Pope at the hour of his death.

The governor of Alexandria was out of the city when the sad news came. Seizing the opportunity, clergy and people held a meeting, and unanimously elected Timotheos, one of the Secretaries of Abba Dioscorus, to be the twenty-sixth successor to St. Mark.

Abba Timotheos and his Bishops, together they re-affirmed their excommunication of the Council of Chalcedon, and of all who accepted its decrees.

Emperor Marcianus ordered the exile of Abba Timotheos and his brother to the very same island of Gangra where Dioscorus had been exiled.

The Egyptians felt more outraged at this imperial arrogance. As their anger mounted in proportion to the tyrannous treatment, they decided to put an end to this tug of war. So they crowded around the palace occupied by Proterius, who became panic-stricken and fled to the baptistery of his church. In their fury they followed him and killed him.

In A.D. 474, Emperor Marcianus died heirless, the new Emperor, whose name was Basiliscus ordered the return of Abba Timotheos who took the chance to bring with him the body of Abba Dioscorus.

Pope Timotheus requested from the emperor the return of the exiled bishops. He called for a council that was attended by 500 bishops. In the council he confirmed the anathema against the Eutychian heresy and the rejection of the Tome of Leo.

Reconciliation among the churches of Jerusalem, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria was established and lasted for a number of years.

THE HENOTICON

On the 28th of July A.D 482, The emporor Zeno issued the "Henoticon," presenting a description of the religious situation in the East. It was a realistic report stating the condition of the church following the Council of Chalcedon. It said: *{For it happened that throughout the previous decades (years), time has witnessed generations pass away, some deprived of the baptismal renovation, others without participation in the divine communion to the point of departure, and tens of thousands of death have been recklessly inflicted to the extent that not only the earth, but the atmosphere has been polluted. Who would not pray that such things may be substituted for better ones?}*

Emperor Zeno, who began his royal rule by canceling the resolution of Emperor Basiliscus and sending the non-Chalcedonian bishops to exile, came to understand how the church in the East suffered bitterly from the persecution of the royal court. We do not forget that Zeno, later became amicable to the church of Alexandria, in particular to the monks of this church especially after his daughter Hilaria (Hillary) disguised in a monk's uniform and led an ascetic life.

Nobody knew anything about her until she had healed her only sister from sickness. The Emperor then, gave generously to the monasteries in Egypt.

In that proclamation Zeno ignored the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. In the meantime he took the positive side to confirm the unity of the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ without reference to any particular text.

The "Henoticon" contained:

1. The Nicene Creed is the only creed approved by the 150 Fathers of Constantinople and by the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus; aiming to taking the church back to pre-Chalcedonian theology.
2. Both Nestorius and Eutyches are anathematized and the twelve articles (anathemas) by St. Cyril were accepted.
3. He positively confirmed : [We confess that the Only Son of God, God Himself, who really became incarnate as our Lord Jesus Christ; He who is consubstantial with us as to the manhood; He who came down and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and of Mary the Virgin "Theotokos;" He is one Son and not two. For we affirm the Only Son of God both the miracles-Worker and the suffering which He endured voluntarily in the flesh. We do not at all accept those who make a separation, or introduce in confusion or fantasy. Since the true and sinless incarnation did not introduce any addition to the Son, the Trinity continued to be Trinity even when God the Word, one of the Trinity, became incarnate.
4. After the "Henoticon" had called for the reform of the church, an anathema was imposed on [all who have held or now hold or at any time, whether in Chalcedon or in any other synod, whatsoever, any different belief], and in particular Nestorius and Eutyches and their followers.

The Pope of Alexandria signed that proclamation explaining to the clergymen and the people in Alexandria the theological concept it bears. Some people had requested that the Henoticon should be clear with regards to the anathema against the Tome of Leo and the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon and assuring the one nature of Jesus Christ.

In fact the Henoticon did not return to the persecuted non- Chalcedonians their rights. It only allowed them the freedom of practicing their spiritual and ecclesiastical activities without being obliged to accept the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon. Therefore they welcomed it, not for the theology it bears, but because it gave them the freedom to work regardless of the clear tendency it bears towards the thought of those who believed in one nature.

This Henoticon gave an opportunity for the four main Sees of the East to unite. The See of the west in Rome didn't occupy itself with that matter. The delegates of Rome expressed their line of thought in the meeting of the Council of Chalcedon held on the 22nd of October A.D 451, saying that the East should accept Rome's point of view or else withdraw, leaving Rome on her own.

The Fathers of the Council didn't stand passively, but expressed their discontent.

On the 28th of July 484, Filex III of Rome called a synod of 27 bishops and excommunicated Pope Peter of Alexandria and Patriarch Acacias, yet they didn't give the matter any attention.

In spite of the death of Acacias in 489, Pope Peter III in 490 and Zeno in 491, Emperor Anastasius I (A.D 491-518) held to the Henoticon.

The Patriarchs of Constantinople had to sign it when they were being ordained. This continued until the death of the emperor in 518. In that period St. Severus of Antioch (512-518) appeared as one of the most famous theologians on the subject of the one nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church of Alexandria lived in peace together with the other Sees in the East, and had a loving relationship with Emperor Anastasius.

This lasted until the enthronement of Justinian when the troubles newly began..

THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA IN THE REIGN OF JUSTINIAN I

In the year Pope Timothy was ordained (A.D. 519), Anastasius died and Justinian became emperor. He inclined towards Chalcedonianism, yet his wife, Theodora the pious, played the role of trying to appease him at several occasions. Thus his era was characterized by periods of trouble and periods of rest.

Once, as Justinian entered the church with bishop John the Cappadocian, some Chalcedonians shouted against St. Severus of Antioch and demanded his trial, while others shouted with applause as a reaction to the former disapproval. The emperor then convened a council to settle the matter.

When the Pope of Alexandria learned about the emperor's intention, he didn't go to that council. The emperor commanded that he would be put under arrest, and sent him to exile. A troop of soldiers entered the church by force while the people gathered in support of their pope.

The matter developed into a battle between the armed soldiers and the unarm congregation. The soldiers killed many of the people then arrested the pope and sent him to exile. The emperor imposed an alien patriarch named Apollinarius. Later on the Pope came back but he was hiding and running from a city to another running from Justinian.

Same strategy was adopted by Justinian with pope Theodosius (the 32nd pope) He ordered him to endorse the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon, promising to appoint him a pope all over Africa. The Pope considered these promises devilish and refused to sign. The emperor then summoned him and received him with a great welcome and tempted him six times but the Pope refused. The emperor then imprisoned him in Constantinople and ordained an alien patriarch (Paul El-Tanisi) and sent him with an entourage of soldiers. The alien bishop remained for a whole year without any of the congregation to pray with him except the ruler and the soldiers. He often heard slogans like, "down with the traitor! down with Jude the alien!," so he asked the emperor to relieve him. The Pope remained in prison for 28 years until he died in A.D 567.

THE SECOND COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (A.D 553)

Emperors used to interfere in the theological discussions and resorted to violence in handling them. The Easterns, meanwhile, were concerned with the discussions because they affected their faith and life and created an atmosphere of tension that prevailed the empire. There existed three groups that could not be under-estimated:

1. ***The non-Chalcedonian group.*** Who didn't bear any authority yet they represented a theological power that could not be resisted. According to Prof. Meyendorff the Chalcedonians didn't have enough theologians capable of arguing with them. This group gained strong popularity particularly in Egypt and Syria. The people and their pastors suffered the bitterness of persecution which created tension against Byzantium and a national tendency to liberate their countries at least to be free in choosing their patriarch and bishop.
2. ***The Chalcedonian group.*** who represented the authority, were supported by the royal court and the rulers.
3. A third group who wanted the church to go back to pre- Chalcedon, not to be asked to accept the Chalcedonian resolutions or to anathematize them, but just to ignore them. Because of this tense atmosphere, emperors even those who were Chalcedonian tried to find solutions for the sake of unity of the empire and internal peace. One of these efforts was Zeno's Henoticon which Anastasius bound himself by.

Yet Justinian I thought that he was capable of bringing back the unity to the empire by condemning the "Three Chapters (*Tria Kephalaia*)." These chapters were the writings of the semi- Nestorian authors and were included in the documents of the Council of Chalcedon [the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa.]

In A.D 553 the Council convened in Constantinople and affirmed the anathemas of the "Three Chapters". It also affirmed the emperor's anathema against the Origenists and Origen's writings. But this council failed and didn't achieve what it was targeting especially that this council did not provide comfort to the people of Alexandria while their legitimate Pope spent the greater time of his papacy in a prison in Constantinople.

Even when Paul El-Tenaisy, the alien patriarch, died, another named Apollinarius was ordained by the emperor's command. This man entered Alexandria in the uniform of a military commander and gave his orders to the people to assemble in the church. He then took off the military clothes and put on the priestly clothes and read to them the imperial decree.

At that time cries of protest were heard aloud as the alien patriarch ordered the soldiers to use force and many were martyred. People called that day "The Massacre"... at that time the emperor was about to depart. Some historians assure that Justinian acted in good faith, but what happened to the Copts stirred them up against Byzantium.

THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA AFTER THE JUSTINIAN ERA

Emperor Justinian died on November 14th, 565. He was succeeded in turn by Justine II (565-578), Tiberus (578-582), Maurice (582-602) and Phocas (602-610).

They all followed in the line of Justinian I in supporting the alien patriarch who represented the Byzantine authority not the ecclesiastical ministry. The tension between the Egyptians and the aliens was rather slight during the days of Justine II and Tiberus, though the legitimate pope was unable to enter Alexandria. Yet no sooner was Emperor Maurice seated on the throne of Constantinople than the tension became more severe, this matter pushed the Egyptians to rebel against the emperor.

Three Egyptians, Mina and his two brothers Abuskhayron and Jacob led a revolution that triumphed over the Roman forces. The emperor then asked the alien patriarch Eulogius to negotiate a reconciliation with the leaders and with a deceptive plan he could be able to arrest and behead them.

This picture shows the ecclesiastical, psychological and national situation of the Copts. They were under pressure from Byzantium as a result of interference in their faith and deposal of their legitimate popes.

Emperor Phocas was so much more oppressive than other emperors that the bishops were obliged to escape from the cities to the deserts to practice their worship and minister by letters.

In spite of that Pope Anastasius, the son of a noble family in Alexandria was ordained during his reign. The ruler was unable to send him away from Alexandria and the Pope faced the threats with indifference. He was able to ordain a large number of priests and regain some Churches from the Chalcedonians.

The alien patriarch Eulogius sent a message to Emperor Phocas informing him that the Pope had held a council in which he condemned the Council of Chalcedon and excommunicated its supporters. So the emperor commanded the ruler to confiscate the church of "SS. Cosman, Damien, their mother and sister" and to put more pressure on the Egyptians. The ruler acted by entering the church accompanied by Eulogius and a battalion. The congregation revolted and many fell dead, so the Pope was obliged to withdraw to the desert of Shiheet.

THE INVASION OF THE PERSIANS

The Persians immigrated to Egypt. They were fond of destruction for the sake of destruction. They destroyed the monasteries and dispersed the hermits then entered Alexandria where the king announced his desire to meet with all the people of the city to put the basis of mutual understanding. They were about 800,000 persons whom his army massacred on that day.

Egyptians remained under the persecution of the Persians who were themselves sun worshipers but who oppressed the Egyptians and Syrians and commanded them to accept Nestorianism. When they refused they fell victims of their brutality. This lasted until Emperor Heraclius came and expelled them from Egypt in the year 625AD.

THE ARAB CONQUEST

The conquest of Egypt by Amr ibn al As and his army, between 639-41, has left its mark upon the country and the world until today.

On the 12th. December, 639, Amr arrived in Egypt with an army of about 4,000 horsemen. They wished to capture the Babylon-in-Egypt (Bab al Yun) fortress, just north of present day Cairo, in order to advance up the Nile to Alexandria.

The army was reinforced in June, 640, bringing its number up to between 8000 to 12,000. The Arab and Byzantine armies met on the Heliopolis plain where the latter were defeated and retreated back to Babylon. After a six month siege the fortress fell on 9th. April, 641. The Arab army then proceeded to Alexandria which surrendered and a peace treaty was signed in November, 641, giving them control over most of Egypt.

Babylon became the Arab capital and was renamed Al Fustat (present Old Cairo).

Amr built the Amr ibn al As Mosque there, which is named after him, though it was not finished until 711 after he had died. It still exists today.

Amr chose al-Fustat for his capital. He had made a pact with the Copts by which he promised to leave them unmolested and grant them the freedom of worship on the condition that they pay the tribute fixed at two dinars per capita for men between the ages of fifteen and fifty; and one dinar per capita for the women of the same age exempting those less than fifteen and those above fifty. He relegated the administration of the provinces to their leaders and granted them the right of their own legal and judicial systems. Hearing that Abba Benyameen and the majority of his Bishops had retreated to the monasteries, 'Amr asked Sinutius, the foremost Coptic leader, to request them to return to their Sees. Later, 'Amr asked to meet the Alexandrian Patriarch, after which meeting he told his men, "Verily, I have not seen a man of God so upright and so majestic in all the provinces through which I passed."

The Arab armies did not force those they conquered to become Muslims - Christians and Jews are recognised in the special status of 'People of the Book'. By mutual agreement the majority of Christians - both Byzantines and Copts - agreed to continue practicing their faith by paying a type of 'poll tax' ('Gezya').

The Coptic Patriarch and other religious leaders were allowed to practice and the churches that the Byzantines had taken were returned to the Copts.

Jean Maspero regards that the secret behind the Arab Victory over the Byzantine army lies in the following reasons:

1. Emperor Justinian had concealed the system of unified leadership in Egypt lest the army commander might lead an independence movement, so he abolished the civil unity previously kept by the Romans. This resulted in Egypt being ruled by five dukes directly appointed by the emperor. Everyone had his own independent civil and military authorities and none cared to support the other.
2. The army was burdened by police duties and by helping the tax collectors and interfering in the church disputes for the benefit of the empire. There was no combat army or a military leader in Egypt. Most of the soldiers were from the simple inhabitants of Egypt who never practiced any military training or worked under a true leadership.
3. The spirits of the Byzantines declined after they learned about the Arab victories over the Persians.

4. The orientalist Alfred J. Butler² thinks that there was not a single Copt (probably from the military point of view) in the battlefield and that it is wrong to assume that the Copts were at that time capable of assembling or negotiating with the Arabs.

Indeed the Copts were suffering from the Byzantine colonialism, but never calculated liberating themselves from that rule by negotiating with the Arabs.

As for Al-Muqauqus who conferred with the Arabs, his behavior remains a mystery. Many scholars think that he was the alien patriarch as mentioned in one of the rare Coptic documents discovered and referred to by Amelineux: [As for Al-Quqious the alleged bishop, whose heart was filled with hatred reached Fayoum, and when Father Samuel realized that he was going to die he said to him, "You too the deceitful Caledonian (Chalcedonian.) Butler tackled the problem of the name "Al-Quqious," showing that it's not a Coptic name. And that his name is derived from his native land because he came from the land of Qolchice (Cyrus the Colchian).

Burning the Library of Alexandria

Professor Iris Habib Al-Masry⁶ says that the Caliph Omar-Ibn Al-Khattab was not happy with Amr because he was expecting Amr to provide him with larger amounts of money than he actually did. In one of his fits of anger at Amr, he appointed Abdallah Ibn Said governor of Upper Egypt and limited Amr's authority to Lower Egypt. Amr did not accept that and resigned from his position as governor of Egypt.

Before he departed, Byzantium sent her navy to take Egypt back.

A fierce battle occurred and both sides suffered immense losses in lives.

Amr was victorious and he vowed to destroy the fences of Alexandria and ordered to burn the city.

With regards to burning the Library of Alexandria, we find in the writings of the Persian traveler, Dr. Abd-Al-Latif Al-Baghdadi (1231 A.D.) and also of the Syrian prelate Bar Hebraeus that Amr used the contents of the library as fuel in the public baths at the orders of Caliph Omer Ibn-Al- Khattab who said that if the contents of the library agreed with the Quran (the Islamic book), they were unnecessary, hence superfluous, and if they disagreed let them be burnt.

This opinion provokes discontentedness among the Islamic circles which think that this never happened.

THE CENTURIES FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE TENTH

By the Arab Conquest of Egypt, the yoke of Byzantium was removed from the Copts with regard to the heavy taxes. More important still that they obtained the right to choose their church leader, allowing him to practice his pastoral duties.

The church restored from the state many church buildings and the Copts started repairing what was destroyed. Friendship prevailed in the relations between Pope Benjamin and Amr ibn al As. The rulers who came in succession over Egypt bore a spirit of indulgence, like Maslama at the time of Pope Aghathon who resorted to seven bishops to help him handle the problem of the city of Sakha where some people set fire to a number of government employees. Indeed they succeeded in bringing back security.

God granted the bishops the gift of healing those who were wounded and punish the aggressors. However, Dr. A. S. Atiya mentions an important point, that is the fear of the Caliphs lest the rulers of Egypt would separate and rule Egypt independently. This made the Caliphs refrain from allowing the rulers of Egypt to stay in their posts for a long time.

According to the tables compiled by Stanley Lane-Poole, Egypt was ruled by 108 rulers over 226 years. That extended until the Tulunids Era (869-905) which marked the first Muslim rulers to administer independently, followed by the Ikhshids (935-969).

The average period of each ruler was about two years, so short a period that each ruler was never concerned about the welfare of the public or the future growth of the land resources. The sole matter that concerned them was how to send the largest amount of tribute to the Caliph, apart from what he collected for himself. For example Abd-Allah-Ibn-Saad, the first ruler after Amr collected two million dinars over what Amr used to collect.

This weakened the potentiality of the country and the Egyptians could not afford to pay. The ruler therefore began to ask the clergy and the monks to pay tribute which they calculated according to the (*Hijrah*) moon calendar and not to the Coptic solar calendar.

Five rebellions took place in the period between 739 and 773 as a result of the intense oppression exerted in collecting tributes and taxes. Some Muslims took a part in those rebellions side by side with the Copts. Probably the most serious of them was that which broke out in 831 during the caliphate of Al-Mamun. He was obliged to go to Egypt when peace returned to the country in order to appease its people. Financial oppression was renewed in 869 when Ahmed Ibn-Al-Mudabbir, the last of the Abbassid rulers counted the clergy and imposed a certain amount of money upon the Pope.

After Egypt became a Province and for the next 200 years it was ruled by Governors, appointed by the Caliphs, using the local structures that they found.

In the 8th century the Umayyad Dynasty was defeated by the Abbasid and they moved the Caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad. During the Abbasid rule there was less control over Egypt and as it declined, in the 9th. century, local dynasties arose to control the country. Most of the population had become Muslims and many Copts had converted, in order to avoid the 'poll tax'.

Slowly the Arabic-Islamic influence grew in the country as other Arab peoples moved into Egypt. The Coptic language remained the language of most of the country until the 10th.-11th. centuries, but gradually Arabic began to take over. The first complete Arabic texts in the Coptic Church began to appear in the 13th. century and Coptic became purely a liturgical language.

The Tulunid Dynasty

In 868 Ahmad ibn Tulun became the Governor of Egypt based at Al Fustat. He initiated autonomy for the country which lasted until the end of the Tulunid Dynasty in 905. He was Egypt's first Turkish ruler.

Baker regards that the history of Islamic Egypt started by the Tulunids when Ahmed-Ibn-Tulun separated the country (Egypt) from the central authority. He was not so much interested in abusing the country as he was in its welfare. He changed it from a subordinate governorate to the center of a great empire and the situation in the country improved.

The Tulunids wanted to take the Coptic people to their side, so they treated them favorably, although the Pope was imprisoned during this era. Some account to the fact that Ibn-Tulun took every chance to impose fines on the Pope to keep the church in a state of poverty and deprive him from any public leadership.

Therefore he treated the Coptic people indulgently while he treated the Pope with occasional rigor. In any case the Tulunid era - short as it was marked by indulgence with the Copts generally.

The Ikhshidid Dynasty

Then, for the next thirty years, Egypt came under Baghdad's direct control. The Ikhshidid Dynasty began when Muhammad ibn Tughj was made Governor in 935. Both of these Dynasties were Sunni Muslims and they revitalized the country by reforms and developing the agricultural wealth. They too had a degree of autonomy but this only lasted until the Fatimid conquest in 969.

THE FATIMID ERA

THE BENEVOLENCE OF THE FATIMID

The Fatimid era is considered as one of the best Islamic eras for the Copts - During which they enjoyed much freedom in practicing their worship. They also had tremendous artistic activities of which splendid traces fill the Coptic Museum. Moreover, they were allowed to assume important stately positions, and among them were found many famous writers, scribes and physicians.

Al-Muizz conquered Egypt in 972 and established the Fatimid empire. Since he was afraid of the Syrians' attack on Egypt, he has left Tunisia and founded Cairo as the capital of his empire which extended from Morocco to Syria.

During his reign, Egypt flourished economically and artistically. Since he was known for his knowledge capabilities along with broadmindedness and justice, he was able to channel all energies to work for his empire, and an atmosphere of security spread all over the country. He allowed the Copts to rebuild and renovate their churches, and he chose a Copt, Abu-Al-Yomn Youssef to administer collecting taxes from Egypt and from Palestine.

His son and successor, Al-Aziz (976-96) continued his father's policy of religious tolerance. As a result, the Copts were able to live in peace, their incomes increased, they prospered and became able to pay the taxes with ease and satisfaction. They built numerous churches and renovated the monasteries.

Because of the sympathy between Al-Aziz and his princes, and between him and the Copts, a Jewish minister called Ibn-Kelsus, said spitefully that whoever wishes to succeed should convert to Christianity, which is the religion of both truth and gain.

One of those who wined Al-Muizz's favour and honor was the Coptic physician Abu-Al-Fath Mansour Ibn-Makhashar.

CALIPH AL-HAKIM (996-1020)

The Fatimid era was darkened by Caliph Al-Hakim, who was known for his brutality towards all, even the muslims, and his bizarre actions. He lived during the first seven years of his rule with justice, although his personality was obscure and he was schizophrenic.

He used to ride a grey donkey during the night and climb the Muqattam hills pretending that he was practicing astrology. Then he started to be aggressive against all. For example, he confiscated the shoes of all women to prevent them from going out, and prevented them from looking through the windows or staying on the house roofs.

He ordered the killing of all the dogs, and forbade slaughtering cattle except during the Islamic feast of Al-Adha (Redeeming day).

He also forbade selling beer and wine, left the vines to dry and poured the honey in the Nile. After three years he concentrated his violent acts on the Copts (and the Jews):

1. He ordered the Copts to wear black garments and forbade them to wear soft or colored clothes.
2. He prevented any Muslim from working as a servant in a Coptic household, or a boatman on a ship that belongs to a Copt.
3. Every Copt had to wear a five pounds wooden cross.

4. He beheaded his Coptic minister (Vizier), Fahd Ibn- Ibrahim, and fired the Copts from the government posts. An order was given to destroy the churches and confiscate their property. These acts agitated the populace against the Copts; they used to insult them kill them, and plunder their belongings.
5. He summoned Ghabriel Abu-Nagah, a Coptic archon and requested him to deny his Christ in order to appoint him his Vizier (minister). When he refused, an order was given to be logged one thousand lashes, but he died half way through scourging.
6. He summoned ten Coptic archons and ordered them to renounce their faith and to accept Islam. When they refused, the soldiers fell on them heavily with lashes. Six of them were martyred, one died after renouncing his faith and the other three declared their penance after Al-Hakim's death.
7. He imprisoned Pope Zakaria, and ordered to release hungry lions to kill him, but they did not approach him. Al- Hakim supervised keeping the lions hungry and threw the Pope again after staining his garment with blood. Once more the lions did not hurt him, so Al-Hakim released him.
8. He ordered his Coptic scribe, Ibn-Abdoon, to sign on his behalf a decree for burning the church of the Resurrection. The scribe signed cowardly, however, after few days he was fired from his job and his properties were confiscated.
9. The Coptic scribe, Bakira, did not bear anymore to see all these atrocities. He quit his work at the Caliph's court and went to the Caliph's palace carrying his cross. At the door he shouted: "Christ is the Son of God." Al-Hakim summoned him and ordered him to renounce his faith. He refused and was imprisoned, and a steel chain was put around his neck.

Bakira stood praying fervently in joy. One of his friends, called Mina came and asked him if he wished to convey a message to his family, upon which Bakira said, "Tell them to be in peace since I shall be among them tonight." Indeed, Al- Hakim released him and he went around encouraging the afflicted. Three days later, everything changed and AlHakim allowed the Copts to carry on with their affairs in freedom.

Al-Zahir (1020-1036)

He was tolerant, he allowed those who renounced their faith under pressure to return to Christianity, and declared that conversion to Islam must not be by force but voluntarily. This unique declaration is considered to be the most important event of his era.

Al-Mustansir (1036-1101)

During the era of Al-Mustansir (1036-1101) the Fatimid state became weak. The Turkish mercenaries plundered the Caliph's palace, and he became in need of money, Pope Christodoulos was imprisoned at that time.

Al-Aamer (1102-1131)

He was tolerant towards the Copts, and he used to visit the monasteries. On the other hand, he ordered that every Copt had to pay a tribute, regardless of the rank.

Al-Hafez (1131-1149)

During the reign of Al-Hafez (1131-1149), Bahram the Armenian was appointed as a minister (Vizier) but when Radwan took Bahram's position, he afflicted the Copts severely.

Generally speaking, we may say that the Fatimids were known for their tolerance. However, towards the end of their era their kingdom was weakened, they entered into war against Europeans in Syria. This was costly for them, and was a reason for oppressing the Copts.

THE CRUSADES

The First crusade (1096-1099) commenced at the end of the Fatimid age. This and Mamluk's are considered the worst ages the Copts had lived through.

The Copts' position, during the ages of Crusades, may be summarized as follows:

1. An Italian monk, Peter the Ascetic, succeeded in enraging European's kings and princes to prepare an army bearing the banner of the cross with the purpose of freeing the holy lands from Muslims' hands. Hence, Barons' armies whose number was about half a million horsemen at that time were sent to raid these lands. Nevertheless, they lacked congruence of leadership, diplomacy and knowledge of the environments of the countries they were attacking. Let alone the personal ambition of European nobles who in fact aspired to become rulers of rich countries of the East under the cover of defending the holy lands.

Alexius the emperor of Constantinople thought that these raids could fortify his kingdom. The Caliph Al-Afdal, also thought of it as a buffer against the Saljuks' expansionism (Turkic-Tatar tribes), but they soon found out how wrong they both were.

As for the Copts, they were the victims of all these raids. On one hand as the Muslims saw the invaders carrying crosses on their chests, they assumed that the Copts would side with the invaders, especially that the Muslims coincidentally were imposing heavy tributes on the Copts.

On the other hand, the Latins viewed the Copts (miaphysites) as outcast schism and in general worse than heretics in their view. That was the reason why subsequent to their occupation of Jerusalem, the Crusades disallowed the Copts from going on pilgrimages to the holy city as Copts were considered atheists.

Renaudot reported that a Coptic historian complained about this treatment of the Copts saying that the Copts sorrow was not less than that of the Muslims. He also wrote: ..."Whose right is it to prevent the Nazarene Copts from pilgrimages to Jerusalem or from coming near the city? The Crusades hated the Copts as if they had deviated from the steadfast faith.

Furthermore, the Crusade wars exhausted the resources of these countries which resulted in raising their spending dramatically and henceforth led to raising the taxes in general and more persistently on the Copts.

The tribute ranged between 3,000 to 6,000 dinars for the enthronement of the Pope with the fear that it may still not be ratified by the Caliph. In this rather difficult atmosphere it was highly possible to elude to the Caliph that the Copts give churches' collections to help the Europeans.

2. Subsequent to the peace agreement between Shawer, the Egyptian ruler and the Europeans, they both reneged on their promises.

Jerusalem's Latin King Amalrich as he invaded Egypt through Bilbeis, he killed all its natives, enslaving women and children. He killed the Muslims and the Christians indiscriminately. When Shawer sensed the danger approaching, he poured 20,000 barrels of tar on the city of Fustat (Egypt's capital for three centuries), and had his men inflame it with 10,000 torches.

The inferno went on for 54 days. The majority of the inhabitants were Copts, they lost all their possessions. As a whole Egyptians felt that their capital had been destroyed because of the betrayal of the Europeans and Shawr (Fatimid vizier).

Therefore many joined up with Shirkuh who brought with him a young nephew by the name of Saladin (Salah-Al-Din the Ayyubid), to defeat Shawar and take his palace in two days time.

Shirkuh acknowledged through this event - the burning of Fustat - that the Europeans did not distinguish between Muslims and Copts, and that many Copts had been martyred by the Europeans, and also their Crusade had been burnt down by them, but he still acted violently against the Copts.

3. In the period between the Fatimid era and the beginning of the Ayyubid rule, Egypt suffered from troubles, and famines; the Copts were laid off from their jobs, banned from riding horses and forced to wear certain clothes and a heavy tribute beyond their potentialities was imposed upon them.

It was so much that some in Upper Egypt had to enslave themselves to survive and many others denied their Christ. At that time the orders were given to destroy St. Mark's Cathedral with the excuse that the Crusades could take shelter in it when they land at Alexandria. St. Mark's Cathedral was unique in its art and size. The Copts in vain offered to pay 2000 dinars to save it.

In the year 1173 a raid attacked Nubia (south of Egypt), destroyed St. Simon's monastery near Aswan and another near Ihrim. Monasteries' inhabitants were arrested including the Coptic bishop, and were sold in the slave market.

The destruction prevailed over the city of Quft in Upper Egypt which was leveled to the ground.

4. In Salah El-Din's era stability and justice were restored along with generosity and abundance which made all Egyptians, both Christians and Muslims, cherish him and become loyal to him. In his era the Copts enjoyed peace for the following reasons:
 - a. He ended the confusion and vandalism which prevailed at the end of the Fatimids.
 - b. He abolished the various "Crescent" taxes which were imposed by the last caliph of the Fatimids.
 - c. Although on the first of his appointment by the Caliph Al-Adid as a minister, replacing Shirkuh, he gave orders banning the Copts from all government jobs, he soon realized how efficient and capable the Copts were and that they did not pose any danger to his rule as the Prime Muslim leader in the Middle East. He selected a Copt Safi-Al-Dawla Ibn Abi Al-Ma-al, surnamed Ibn Sharafi - as his private secretary, who loyally served him until the day of his death. He also had many Copts as friends, and readmitted the Copts to the government jobs.

Moreover, he returned to them their properties which were previously confiscated. These are the things that made some historians view his dismissal of the Copts at the onset of his era as a clean up against Fatimids then against the Copts. Besides, he felt that the eastern Christians in general are those who, through their persistence against the Crusades, enabled him to regain Jerusalem.

Furthermore, in his raid on the holy lands, he was accompanied by a large entourage of Copts as his clerks, workers and craftsmen, as a result he granted them "Deer-Al-Sultan" (Al- Sultan Monastery), and allowed them the pilgrimage to the holy lands after they were disallowed under the Crusades.

- d. His citadel on the Moquattam Mountain, which was designed by two Coptic architects Abu-Mansour and Abu Mashkour, became the main government office and remained as such until Ismail built "Abdeen Palace" in 1874. The Copts also contributed to many magnificent works in all aspects of art. Although they did not obtain the same concessions as they did under the Fatimids, they however enjoyed peace and security.

5. In spite of the ease, with which the Ayyoubids were characterized, the two Crusades waged by Jean De Brienne and king Louis IX left deep scars on the Copts. On one side the Crusader treated the Copts as atheists.

When the First Crusade occupied Damietta they ordained a metro polite from the Latin Church of Rome. They took the liberty to kill the Copts regardless of their age or sex. On the other side, when the Crusade reached Damietta's Shore violent strives took place in Cairo because the public thought that the Copts allies themselves with the Crusaders.

During these strives the ruler pressed the Copts - including the clergymen - to pay for the war exuberant sums. When the soldiers were sent from Cairo to Damietta they had immense hatred to the Crusaders, they avenged by robbing the churches that paced by and destroying them.

Because of many hardships some Copts had to flee from Egypt. The Nubian king "El-Nagashi" gave a permission to "*Labilela*" to accept 10,000 Copts to refuge in his country.

As the King "Al-Malek" regained Damietta he realized the true position of the Copts, he brought them closer and restored what was taken from them. He visited with his entourage many monasteries in the Secits Desert. Hence, congeniality prevailed between Muslims and Copts. As for the Muslims they appreciated the Copts and appointed Henein Ebn Isaac as "the chief physician of his time."

The Mamluk's Era

Started in 1250, they were originally slaves who were set free. They committed massacre after massacre among themselves. However they finally united to face their common enemy.

The Mamluks and Turks were not afraid of revolutionary movements by the Copts. They realized this from their long experience since the beginning of the Crusaders. They were all assured that the Copts were peace-lovers. The Copts never took advantage of the Crusaders neither did sympathize with the western invasion against their Muslim brethren in Egypt.

All the Mamluks cared for was to make use of the Copts' artistic, administrative and financial abilities. This era was known for its severe poverty and confusion along with the involvement in wars which exhausted the country's financial resource. Therefore, the Sultan had sometimes to resort to a Copt to run the financial affairs and tax collection in the meantime, however, he also resorted to abuse the Copt's wealth.

There were some moderate Sultan as Qalaun and his son Al-Ashraf Khalil who restored the Copts to their positions subsequent to laying them off. This whole era however, is considered a chaos for Egypt in general and for the Copts in particular. Henceforth the Copts lived in isolation from the rest of the world. Ethiopia's kings, however, had to resort from time to time to pressing the Sultans to deal kindly with the Copts.

The Muslim historian "Al-Makrizy" and also the Coptic historian Al-Mofadal-Ebn-Abi El-Fadel both reported that in Pipurs' era, in 1265, a large number of Copts were brought around to be burnt alive near the citadel. It took quite an effort to get the Sultan to agree to accept a heavy tribute from them instead.

In 1301 as a Morocan minister visited Egypt, while the Copts were then living in peace, he provoked the king Al- Nasser Ibn Qalaun to humiliate the Copts, by closing their churches and forcing them to wear blue turbans and sacks around their waists.

The year 1320 was one of the worst years for the Copts. The Muslim historian Al-Maqrizy (1364-1442) reported in bitterness how the churches were destroyed and the worshipers were killed, and how the general atmosphere was charged against the Copts throughout the country. All the energies in the country were directed towards humiliating the Copts in every way. Al-Maqrizy reported these events with great sorrow.

During the reign of Al-Nasser Mohamed Ebn Qalaun, the Aragon Spanish government sent emissaries to the Sultan appealing to reopen the Melkites' churches and to free a Spanish person who was detained in Egypt.

The Sultan at first agreed to both requests. However, shortly after he went back on his word and demanded a ransom otherwise he would bring the hostage back into captivity before leaving Alexandria. The emissaries refused to pay the ransom and further they kidnapped the Sultan's emissaries to Spain. So the Sultan was enraged against the Copts, laying them off their jobs because they were Christians as the Spanish were.

As King Al-Saleh II came to power, he was extremely malicious, not only against the devout Copts but also against those who had denied their Christ and converted to Islam. He appointed Alaa-El-Dine Ibn Zenbour as his vizier (minister) for he was converted to Islam together with his whole family. But as the King later was told that Alaa's Islam was only superficial, he had Alaa, his family and servants all tortured until he knew all about Alaa's properties, then he confiscated them and exiled Alaa to Quos, in Upper Egypt.

He also destroyed many churches and monasteries and confiscated all church properties. Besides he had Pope Mark IV jailed and tortured, and ordered all local governors to lay off the Copts from their jobs.

The Nubia's king intervened and had the Pope set free. During the papacy of Yuanis (John) X, the Crusaders in 1365, confiscated the properties of both Muslims and Christians alike. The daughter of a priest by the name of Girgis Ibn-Fadel, had to offer all she owned in order to save the Church. Also the authorities summoned the Pope to the court where he and his companions were severely humiliated and lost all their possessions.

So every time there was a foreign attack on Egypt, the Copts suffered heavy afflictions.

During the papacy of Matthew (Mathewos) I, the Europeans waged a raid on Alexandria where they looted, vandalized and took women as hostages and fled. Prince Yalbougha was enraged against the Copts, seized the abbot (President) of St. Anthony's Monastery and some of his monks and took them to Cairo.

On the way they were beaten, humiliated and were not given food or drink. When they asked for some water he mocked them snobbishly. The elder St. Markos the Antonian who was among them raised his eyes to heaven and said, "For you refused to give us water, the Lord will do so Himself." As soon as he finished these words heaven actually poured rain and they all drank. However, Yalbougha's heart was not changed, but by the time they reached "Atfeeh" the Sultan had decreed to free them.

As for Sultan Barquq (1382-98), he trusted Pope Matthew I. It was said that he consulted the Pope prior to accepting the "Sultanship," and they continued to have a good relationship, so much that the Sultan asked the Pope to mediate between him and king David of Ethiopia.

Also when the mobs were enraged and wished to burn the "*Muallaqa*" (Suspended) Church and Shahrān Monastery alleging them being repaired, the Sultan sent their designate "Four Islam Judges" who found all allegations were unfounded.

At the end of their era the Mamluks were preoccupied with external wars and domestic strives themselves which diverted their attention away from the Copts, who together with their Muslim brothers - were relieved during the era of Qansuh Al-Ghuri.

THE TURKISH ERA

By the time Selim I (the Turkish Sultan) seized power in Egypt in A.D. 1517 after he had conquered Toman-Bay, the era of the Mamluks "Circassians" came to an end.

Selim I removed from the Mamluks the public authority and government leaving for them the regional and local authorities.

The Turkish era is known for its tyranny, violence and utter destruction of the Egyptian civilization by moving the skillful artists, laborers and craftsmen to Turkey. This changed Egypt from an empire to a subordinate country subject to foreign rule, thus losing its prestige.

The Turks had two objectives: secure their authority and collect money from all Egyptians and Copts in particular, therefore, they reorganized the state as follows:

- a. The "Pasha" was given the authority to collect the tribute. His term did not last long for fear that he might seize the government. This put the Pasha in the position of money collector on account of the public welfare.
- b. The army had an independent council.
- c. The Mamluks remained to manage the affairs of the local regions and look after collecting revenue for the governing authorities and for themselves as well.

Whenever the governor conveyed by "Al-Bab-Al-Ali" [the Turkish Sultan] showed any weakness, the Mamluks held monopoly over the actual authority.

Under such circumstances Egypt survived three centuries in political disgrace, scientific and financial poverty and social inferiority to the extent that an English writer said that they (the Turks) left nothing on the map of Egypt other than the eternal pyramids.

We can imagine the situation of the Copts in such a crucial age from the following examples:

- 1- Sultan Soliman son of Selim the conqueror resorted to a Jewish astrologer who advised him to kill all the Nazerites in the East because they represent danger for his kingdom, but byruz Pasha the minister brought the sultan back to his senses. This happened during the time of Pope Gabriel VII (1525-1568).

The sultan imposed such huge sums of money on the non-Muslims, that the Pope was obliged to flee to St. Anthony's monastery. He kept praying bitterly that God might be merciful to His people, and he passed away there.

- 2- Sultan Murad forced Pope Yuanis the fourteenth to pay a surtax he had to collect during his pastoral voyage for the purpose of visiting his people and collecting the tribute.

At that time the Turkish rulers tightened control over Christians in Nubia through terrorism, and relieving the people of their money. Many were obliged to immigrate, others fell martyrs and the rest denied their faith. As a result Christianity disappeared from Nubia.

- 3- In December 1582 Yuhanna Al-Qaliubi the monk from Anba Pishoy's monastery was martyred, when one of the governors arrested him while coming out of the monastery and tried to force him to deny his faith.

When the monk refused he stabbed sharp knives into his hands and put fire into his shoulders, mounted him on a camel's back and handed him to the mob to show him around the city. At last he tied him up to a wood beam and kept torturing him until he died.

- 4- When Pope Matthews III was installed in 1631 somebody slandered him at Khalil Pasha's the governor that the Pope ignored him by not paying the tribute of his installation. When the Coptic archons heard of that they requested to meet the governor; so he levied on them four thousand piastres to be paid immediately. They borrowed the amount from a Jew until the Pope was able to pay it back after his trip to upper Egypt.

The governor destroyed the great church at Mehalla-Al- Kubra and built a school in its place.

- 5- Pope Mark VI was imprisoned and the governor announced that he was the heir of any Copt. In order to inherit he killed one or two every day. His victims reached about one thousand and two hundred who were killed leaving behind them widows and orphans without any inheritance.

- 6- In the time of Anba Matthews IV a tax was levied on every man (Copt) getting out of home. The Copts were subject to two kinds of taxes: one, which was a small amount to be paid either to the mosques, or the Sheikh Al-Bakry (descendent of Abu-Bakr Al- Saddiq), or to some nobles (the sadat). The second was to be paid to the sultan's coffer.

In 1664 the governor issued a decree to consolidate both taxes into one tax to be paid to the sultan. The governor would pay the share of the mosques and the nobles, then deposit the rest into the sultan's coffer after deducting his personal share.

He established a fixed tax on everybody regardless of the individual capabilities, so the poor had to escape to the mountains in fear of the whip of the governor and his followers.

- 7- In the time of Pope Yuanis VI the governor issued a decree that every Copt should hang two sleigh bells around his neck before entering the public bath and wear a black turban.

A Copt was not allowed to wear clothes made of broadcloth or wool, and the Coptic ladies had to wear black not white garments. The Pope urges the rich to help the poor.

- 8- In the time of Pope Peter VI a discussion erupted in 1719 putting the country in a state of semi-civil war. In that period the Mamluks enjoyed strong influence while the governors appointed by Turkey lost their prestige.

The land suffered from anarchy, looting and plundering. Everybody - Muslim or Christian felt insecure. In Alexandria the Copts fell subject to heavy fines, churches were destroyed and many had to flee from the city. This situation remained for 78 years until the French Campaign came to Egypt.

Periods of stability were very rare and lasted for short.

- 9- In the days of Pope Mark VIII, although Hassan Pasha the Turkish designee was busy fighting the Mamluks especially Murad Bey and Ibrahim Bey, he issued very harsh decrees against the Copts.

He ordered any Copts not wearing the clothes designed for the Copts to be stoned.

THE FRENCH EXPEDITION

France wanted Egypt for commercial reasons, as a source of grain and raw materials, and strategically to threaten British interests in the North Africa and to block the overland route to India. Napoleon Bonaparte arrived with a French invasion force at Alexandria on the 1st. July, 1798. They took the city and then defeated the Mamluk army at Shubra Khit and Imbabah, entering Cairo on the 25th. July.

The French managed to control the country from the Nile Delta in land as far as Cairo, but Upper Egypt remained in the hands of the Bedouins and the Mamluks.

The population of Cairo, lead by the Ulama from the Al Azhar mosque, rebelled against the French on the 21st October. Britain and the Ottomans joined forces to drive Napoleon from Egypt. Nelson and the British fleet destroyed the French ships at Abu Qir on the 1st August, 1798.

This cut Napoleon and his army off from Europe. The Ottomans had declared war on the 11th September and in an attempt to delay their forces Napoleon invaded Syria.

He failed at Acre, Palestine, and began to retreat on the 20th May, 1799.

Eventually he left Egypt with a small company of men on the 22nd. August. General Jean-Baptiste Klèber was left in charge of the remaining troops.

Klèber was assassinated and command went to General Abdullah Jacques Menou, a convert to Islam. A combined Anglo-Ottoman force accepted the surrender of the French at Cairo on the 18th. June, 1801, and Menou surrendered at Alexandria on the 3rd. September.

The last French troops left Egypt at the end of the year.

After the French withdrawal from Egypt an Ottoman military force remained in order to keep control of the country and to stop a revival of the Mamluks, who had established themselves in Upper Egypt. Khusraw Pasha was appointed as the Viceroy.

MUHAMMAD ALI

When the Ottoman forces moved into Egypt (1801) they brought troops from Albania and amongst them was Muhammad Ali (1769-1849), who had risen to the rank of Commander by 1803. He led the movement of Egypt's independence of the Ottoman empire.

Using his political and leadership skills and despite the opposition from the Ottoman authorities, Muhammad Ali was appointed Governor of Egypt in June, 1805.

Ali began to revive Egypt and to build its autonomy Muhammad Ali brought Upper Egypt and the Mamluks under his control by March, 1811.

He re-initiated the policies of Ali Bey al Kabir to form an independent Egypt and began to build upon the country's agricultural riches with the promotion of crops specifically for export.

The surplus income was used to develop irrigation systems, canals, factories and the military. Britain worked to maintain the Ottoman Empire as a means of having some influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East.

This policy continued until the First World War but it was threatened when Muhammad Ali tried to break from the Ottoman Empire by invading Syria in 1831.

Several European powers supported the Ottomans and the Egyptian army retreated back to Egypt while Muhammad Ali was forced to accede to British demands.

Later he had to agree to the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of 1838, which opened up Egypt to free trade and led to the decline of the local textile industries. With the Treaty of 1841 Muhammad Ali was only left with Sudan and the hereditary Governorship of Egypt.

The era of Mohammed Ali is considered the end of the Ottoman empire in Egypt and the beginning of the Modern Egypt.

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