

Abbasid Dynasty

751-870 AD

Objectives

- ❖ To learn about the “Church History” and the “Islamic Invasion”.
- ❖ Egypt ruled by the Abbasid Dynasty.

References

- ❖ CD Audio for HG the late Bishop Youannis of Gharbeya

Scriptural Verse

- ❖ “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16: 33)

Lesson Outline

- ❖ Egypt now gets a taste of a Shiite Dynasty. The Abbasids (related to the uncle of Mohammed) take power from the Umayyads by killing all but one of the men from the dynasty.
- ❖ They did this because of the corruption and degradation that the Umayyads were bringing on Islam.
- ❖ To further distance themselves from the former ruling family, the Abbasids moved the seat of the Caliph from Damascus to Baghdad.
- ❖ Initially, it started with good relations with the Copts.
- ❖ Again, the biggest problem was the Waly’s (Caliph or governor) greediness.
- ❖ 46 Walys governed Egypt during these 117 years.
- ❖ 24 Of them were during the reign of Caliph Harun El-Rashid (Caliph for 23 years)
- ❖ The Caliph feared the separation of Egypt if any Waly were to stay a long time and may succeed to attract the people around him.
- ❖ Soon, as before, the collection of the gezia (high taxes imposed on Christian to let them live) promoted serious injustice for the Copts.
- ❖ One episode stands out when Prince Ibrahim sent Lazarus, a Nestorian, with some men to Egypt with orders to collect the columns and marble from the churches to decorate the Palaces of the Caliphs and princes.
- ❖ The group marveled at the building of St. Mena at Maryout (near Alexandria, Egypt) and its ornaments and the beauty of its columns and colored marble.
- ❖ So, they destroyed the church and took all its beautiful structure.
- ❖ Pope Joseph mourned this day and night as he took care to restore the church.
- ❖ The Lord struck Lazarus with a plague in Alexandria and he became very poor.
- ❖ Pope Yusab (Joseph)’s response: “Who is he that resists the Lord? For he shall be crushed.”
- ❖ During the period 725-825 AD, there were 7 major Coptic revolts.

- ❖ Done in protest of the injustice of the Walys.
- ❖ The last revolt ended with a horrible massacre.
- ❖ During this time:
 - ❖ Women were forced to wear prostitutes' attire, men had to wear odd clothes and to ride donkeys only backward (facing back of donkey).
 - ❖ Large houses of the Christians were seized and turned into mosques.
 - ❖ The tax went sky high.
 - ❖ Great numbers of Copts were kicked out of their jobs.
 - ❖ While some churches were destroyed, others were banned from praying in them.
 - ❖ Fear of persecution and not being able to pay these high taxes led many Christians to convert into Islam and hence the number of Muslims exceeded the number of Christians.

Why the change in demographics?

- ❖ 4000 soldiers came with their leader Amr Ibn El Aas in 641 AD
 - ❖ Another 4000 were sent by Caliph Omar.
 - ❖ Arabs are immigrating because of the wealth achieved by the first comers.
 - ❖ During this period, the Walys each brought their contingent of soldiers, families with Turk slaves who all stayed even after the Waly left.
 - ❖ Obaid Allah Ibn Alhabhab, a tax collector, in 728 brought 3000 Arabs by permission of Caliph Hesham Ibn Abdallah – where they stayed east of the Delta.
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- ❖ This last influx of Arabs had a catastrophic and lasting impact on Coptic Egypt.
 - ❖ These people mingled with the Copts and worked in the farms and lived in Egyptian villages.
 - ❖ This was a change from the other immigrants who did NOT mingle with the Natives but rather lived in their own cities.
 - ❖ Omar didn't permit any immigrant Muslims to work as farmers or to own lands but to focus on war and politics.
 - ❖ Because of this "separation", they had no real influence on Copts by spreading religion or language.
 - ❖ With this new group sent by Omar, however, all was about to change.
 - ❖ After the initial invasion, the Arabs used translators.
 - ❖ Many Coptic words were mingled with Arabic due to the enslaved Coptic women serving in the houses of Arabs.
 - ❖ Some of these words are used until now.
 - ❖ In 706 AD during the Caliph Alwalid Ibn Abdelmalek, the Arabic language became the official one.
 - ❖ In order to keep their governmental jobs, Copts learned Arabic.
 - ❖ Coptic names of cities changed to Arabic.

- ❖ There was an order to translate Christian and Coptic books into Arabic to review its contents.
- ❖ Arabic was the language of politics, administration, culture and Muslim religion; while Coptic was still used by the Egyptians in the villages for at least 4 centuries after the invasion.
- ❖ In a serious precedent, the Caliph El Hakim Bi-Amr Illah issued a decree to stop using Coptic even in houses or public places and to cut the tongues of those who refused to speak Arabic over Coptic.
- ❖ To the extent that Churches would be destroyed if Coptic could be heard outside.
- ❖ In the 12th century, Pope Gabriel issued an order to read scripture in Arabic after Coptic in churches.
- ❖ Coptic language stayed in use for communications in lower Egypt until 17th century and until 16th in upper Egypt.
- ❖ In 18th century, Copts wrote in Arabic letters, while it stayed in use as Church's language.

Conclusion

- ❖ In 706 AD during the Caliph Alwalid Ibn Abdelmalek, the Arabic language became the official one. In order to keep their governmental jobs, Copts learned Arabic.

Activities / Discussion Points

- ❖ Have a print out for the most important points to be given to the youth to avoid distraction and to help them to follow easily.