

Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrij al-Iskandarānī

DATE OF BIRTH About 1025
PLACE OF BIRTH Probably Alexandria
DATE OF DEATH About 1100
PLACE OF DEATH Probably Alexandria

BIOGRAPHY

Thanks to the researches of J. den Heijer, we may recognize Mawhūb (and not Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ) as the founder and first ‘general editor’ of the project that resulted in an Arabic-language compilation of materials known as *Siyar al-bīʿa al-muqaddasa* (‘Biographies of the holy church’), or more commonly as *The history of the patriarchs of Alexandria*. Here in *CMR* we have treated this compilation by *source*: see the entries for George the archdeacon, John the deacon, John the writer, and Michael of Damrū, bishop of Tinnīs. In addition to supervising the collection, translation, and edition of Coptic-language sources into a single Arabic work, Mawhūb began the process of keeping the work up to date by composing – now in Arabic rather than Coptic – the biographies of two patriarchs whom he knew personally: Christodoulos, the 66th patriarch (1046-77) and Cyril II, the 67th patriarch (1078-92); these biographies will be treated below.

Den Heijer has provided a thorough, carefully documented compilation of biographical data for Mawhūb (see den Heijer, *Mawhūb*, pp. 81-116, esp. pp. 86-93; also see his summary of this data in *The Coptic encyclopedia*). Here it may be enough to point out that Mawhūb was a member of a wealthy, well-connected, and influential Coptic family of Alexandria. He and other members of his family were financial administrators in the service of the Muslim authorities in the city: for a time, he and his maternal uncle were in the service of the emir Ḥiṣn al-Dawla, who served as governor of Alexandria in 1056-57; later, he and his brother Abū l-ʿAlāʾ Fahd were financial administrators for al-Awḥad, who governed Alexandria for his father Badr al-Jamālī (military governor of Egypt from 1074 to 1094). In addition to being at the hinge of Christian-Muslim relations in Alexandria, Mawhūb and his family were very much involved in church affairs; Mawhūb

himself was an ordained deacon. As a result, Mawhūb's biographies of patriarchs Christodoulos and Cyril II are full of 'I' statements: he knew everyone of note (in Alexandria, at least), had an insider's view of church politics, and was sometimes painfully caught up in Egypt's political vicissitudes.

A few incidents will illustrate the involvement of Mawhūb and his family in the affairs of his day. On one occasion (maybe around 1050), Mawhūb's father was imprisoned for 37 days while the Muslim authorities of Alexandria attempted to locate and take possession of the church's great relic, the head of St Mark the Evangelist. Later, when the oppressive vizier al-Yāzūrī (d. 1058) and other persecutors had passed from the scene, Mawhūb was part of a delegation that sought permission for churches to reopen. Partway through 'the great tribulation' (*al-shidda al-'uzmā*) of 1066-73, Mawhūb gave the recently ransomed and heavily indebted Patriarch Christodoulos some relief by himself paying the 350 dinars that the patriarchate owed annually to the churches of Alexandria. And while Mawhūb portrays the Armenian general Badr al-Jamālī (r. 1074-94) in a positive light for bringing stability to Egypt after years of terrible crisis, he and his brother appear to have been among those punished (with a large fine and, in the brother's case, a savage beating) for serving Badr's son al-Awḥad, who in 1084 had revolted – unsuccessfully – against his father. In 1091, Mawhūb and his family – he was married with at least one son, Yūḥannā – were being 'shaken down' for an impossible sum of money by a Coptic financial official and his associate, when (by a miracle of God, Mawhūb tells us) the two oppressors were arrested and executed.

Notices in *The history of the patriarchs* give some details about the project that is Mawhūb's great legacy. The project to create a comprehensive history of the Coptic Church was launched at the Monastery of St Macarius in 1088; it may have had the official backing of Patriarch Cyril II, who was then present at the monastery. Mawhūb and his collaborators, foremost among them the deacon Abū Ḥabīb Mikhā'īl ibn Badīr al-Damanhūrī, then sought out sources in various monastery libraries, and after a labor of collating, translating, and editing, produced what is now considered 'part one' of *The history of the patriarchs of Alexandria*. When this was completed, Mawhūb added the two *Lives* that are treated below.

Mawhūb shows himself to be a practical-minded individual, who knew how to use his connections and personal fortune to help his community deal with periods of arbitrary rule and political chaos.

But he was also a pious Copt, who relied on the prayers of the holy monks, turned to the Virgin Mary with weeping and supplication when his own resources were exhausted, and traveled the country seeking out holy men and relics (and has left lists of these, giving a precious picture of the Coptic 'sacred geography' in the late 11th century).

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

- A.S. Atiya, Y. 'Abd al-Masīḥ and O.H.E. Khs.-Burmester (eds), *History of the patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, known as the History of the holy Church, by Sawirus ibn al-Muḳaffa'*, bishop of al-Ašmūnīn, ii, pt. ii, Cairo, 1948, pp. 159-61 (Arabic text), pp. 241-44 (English trans.) (on the project of compiling an Arabic-language history of the church; for other short notices giving information on the progress of this work by Mawhūb and his collaborators, see den Heijer, *Mawhūb*, pp. 95-109)
- A.S. Atiya, Y. 'Abd al-Masīḥ and O.H.E. Khs.-Burmester (eds), *History of the patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, known as the History of the holy Church, by Sawirus ibn al-Muḳaffa'*, bishop of al-Ašmūnīn, ii, pt. iii, Cairo, 1959, pp. 163-232 (Arabic text), pp. 245-369 (English trans.) (Mawhūb's *Lives* of patriarchs Christodoulos and Cyril II; see den Heijer, *Mawhūb*, pp. 81-116 as a guide to the biographical information contained therein)

Secondary

- J. den Heijer, *Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarriḡ et l'histoire copto-arabe. Étude sur la composition de l'Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie (CSCO 513)*, Louvain, 1989, esp. ch. 3, pp. 81-116. See den Heijer's bibliography for the earlier studies that led up to this monograph, and for a useful summary of biographical data concerning Mawhūb, see:
- J. den Heijer, art. 'Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrij al-Iskandarānī', in *CE*

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Siyar al-bī'a al-muḳaddasa, 'Biographies of the holy church', 'The history of the patriarchs of Alexandria, *Lives* 66-67'

DATE 1094 or shortly thereafter

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

Mawhūb's Arabic *Lives* of patriarchs Christodoulos and Cyril II (*The history of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Lives* 66-67) provide a rich picture of a tumultuous period in the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church and of Egypt in general (and Alexandria in particular), from the point of view of a well-connected bureaucrat and churchman who was personally involved in many of the events he narrates. These *Lives* can be read for political history: we learn about the oppressive measures of the vizier al-Yāzūrī (in office 1050-58) and other officials; political chaos and famine during the 'great tribulation' of 1067-73; the arrival of Badr al-Jamālī and events during his 20-year rule. Mawhūb does not neglect to inform his readers about the wider horizon of events, e.g. the arrival in the Levant of the Seljuk Turks under Alp Arslan in 1071.

Patriarchs Christodoulos and Cyril II often seem to have a rather limited role in the affairs of their day. Indeed, Mawhūb highlights both the role played by his own class of Coptic lay notables and the importance of holy monks; he is especially enthusiastic in his description of the monk Bisūs, about whom he relates about a dozen miracle stories. Still, Mawhūb does his best to portray both patriarchs in a positive light. In passages that may echo older accounts of patriarchs meeting Muslim authorities, Mawhūb recounts meetings between each of these patriarchs and Badr al-Jamālī – although in the case of Patriarch Cyril's meeting it is *Badr* who speaks by divine inspiration! This, incidentally, points out an important feature of Mawhūb's understanding of history: both God and the devil are at work in the world – and either may work through human beings, whether Christian or Muslim.

Mawhūb's biographies are both a monument of and a witness to the Arabization of the literature of the Coptic Orthodox Church. While the work bears witness to the fact that the Coptic language was still read and spoken by monks and lay notables, it was itself composed in Arabic, and it reports on the canons that Christodoulos and Cyril II promulgated in that language (shortly after 1046 and in 1086 respectively).

SIGNIFICANCE

The *Lives* of patriarchs Christodoulos and Cyril II are important sources for our knowledge of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt, and Egyptian history in general for

the years 1046-92, a tumultuous period in which a major breakdown in order (from 1066-73) led to the establishment of a new pattern of rule by powerful military governors, beginning with Badr al-Jamālī.

MANUSCRIPTS

See den Heijer, *Mawhūb*, pp. 18-27. For *Lives* 66-67, it is worth mentioning an ancient dated MS in addition to that which serves as the base for the printed edition:

MS Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate – Hist. 12 (Simaika 597, Graf 501) (1275; contains *Lives* 66-72)

MS Cairo, Coptic Museum – Hist. 1 (b) (Simaika 94, Graf 134) (13th-14th century; base MS for the edition of *Lives* 66-67 by Atiya, ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, and Burmester)

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

Atiya, ‘Abd al-Masīḥ and Khs.-Burmester (eds), *History of the patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, ii, pt. iii, pp. 163-232 (Arabic text), pp. 245-369 (English trans.) (from MS Cairo, Coptic Museum – Hist. 1 [b])

STUDIES

M.N. Swanson, *The Coptic papacy in Islamic Egypt*, Cairo, 2010, ch. 5

J. den Heijer, ‘La rébellion de l’émir Al-Awḥad (477/1084). Étude comparative des sources historiques’, in J.-Y. Empereur and C. Décobert (eds), *Alexandrie médiévale 3 (Études Alexandrines 16)*, Cairo, 2008, 171-81

J. den Heijer, ‘Wādī al-Naṭrūn and the *History of the patriarchs of Alexandria*’, *Coptica* 2 (2003) 24-42

J. den Heijer, ‘Le patriarcat copte d’Alexandrie à l’époque fatimide’, in C. Décobert (ed.), *Alexandrie médiévale 2 (Études Alexandrines 8)*, Cairo, 2002, 83-97

B. Voile, ‘Les miracles des saints dans la deuxième partie de l’Histoire des patriarches d’Alexandrie. Historiographie ou hagiographie?’ in D. Aigle (ed.), *Miracle et karāma*, Turnhout, 2000, 317-30

J. den Heijer, ‘Considérations sur les communautés chrétiennes en Égypte fatimide. L’état et l’église sous le vizirat de Badr al-Jamālī (1074-1094)’, in M. Barrucand (ed.), *L’Égypte fatimide. Son art et son histoire*, Paris, 1999, 569-78

M.J. Saleh, ‘Government relations with the Coptic community in Egypt during the Fāṭimid period (358-567 A.H./969-1171 C.E.)’, Chicago, 1995 (Diss. University of Chicago)

- J. den Heijer, 'Une liste d'évêques coptes de l'année 1086', in C. Décobert (ed.), *Itinéraires d'Égypte. Mélanges offerts au père Maurice Martin, S.J.*, Cairo, 1992, 147-65
- M. Martin, 'Une lecture de l'Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 35 (1985) 15-36, pp. 25-27
- B. May, 'Die Religionspolitik der ägyptischen Fatimiden, 969-1171', Hamburg, 1975 (Diss. University of Hamburg)

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