
**Ecclesiastical Warfare:
Patriarch, Presbyterian, and Peasant
in Nineteenth-Century Asyut**

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The Confrontation

In March 1867, Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Demetrius II departed Cairo for Upper Egypt aboard a Nile steamer lent to him by the Khedive Isma'il. Representatives of the American Presbyterian mission at Asyut relate in their 1867 Annual Report that, during his tour of the south, the Patriarch engaged

not only in ordering the burning of Bibles and other religious books, excommunicating those suspected of Protestantism and other acts of what may be called ecclesiastical warfare, but also bastinading by the hands of Government soldiers, imprisoning and severely threatening those who had thus fallen under his displeasure, and entering into intrigues with the local governors for the accomplishment of these purposes.¹

In May, the Patriarch had the agent of the Akhmim mission station, Girgis Bishetly, seized from his home by a government soldier and the Coptic shaykhs of the town. When

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Bishetly was called into the Patriarch's presence, the former was struck in the face by Demetrius himself, whereupon Bishetly was "ordered to be banished from the town immediately, and should he refuse to go, killed and thrown into the Nile."² The agent of the mission station was apparently pursued by a mob as he was returned home to gather his affairs, and suffered beatings throughout. Only with the support of the local chief of police was Bishetly able to convince the Patriarch to permit a last night's stay at Akhmim. The next morning, he was removed from the town, as ordered. Through the American Consulate, the Presbyterians launched a protest against the removal, but Isma'il refused to act, citing a reluctance to involve himself in matters of faith.

A straightforward deportation of mission personnel was attempted in Qus at the end of September. In accord with a Khedival order dispatched by telegram, Fam Stefanos, Anton Matta, and Bassiely Basada were detained by the Governor of Qina and placed upon a boat. That boat, manned by a large contingent of soldiers, was apparently headed to the White Nile, the principal site of banishment for 'incurable' criminal offenders. However, four days after departure, the boat and detainees were held at Esna, and then permitted to return to Qus, again upon the order of the Khedive. At the request of the Presbyterians, British Consul Thomas Reade had spoken with government officials to secure the release of the converts.³

Reconceptualizing Reform and Resistance

Aside from the dramatic events of his 1867 tour of Upper Egypt, Demetrius is deemed scarcely worthy of mention in the historiography of the modern Coptic Christian community of Egypt. Samir Seikaly's 1970 *Middle Eastern Studies* article,

‘Coptic Communal Reform’ — still among the only discussions of the dynamics of Coptic communal affairs during the nineteenth century to have appeared in English — is a case in point.⁴ Seikaly approvingly cites the claim of the nineteenth-century Coptic lay reformer, Mikhail Abd al-Sayyid, that Demetrius’s tenure was “one of darkness, in which a black cloud shrouded the community, reducing it to a state of total inactivity.”⁵

The inactivity of Demetrius is set in stark contrast to the reformist zeal of his predecessor, Patriarch Cyril IV, who “simply felt, where others were oblivious, the deep degradation in which the community, particularly the clergy, were steeped.”⁶ Indeed, according to Seikaly, the ‘enlightened’ Cyril fought clergy ‘from the lower classes of the community’ in the name of conquering ‘ignorance’ and ‘passivity,’ resurrecting a ‘fallen’ Church, and restoring Copts, as a community, to their ‘rightful’ place within Egypt.

Cyril is known among Copts simply as Abu Islah, or the ‘father of reform.’ Despite his brief seven-year tenure, he is reputed, to this day, to have rescued the Coptic Orthodox Church from oblivion through ‘modernization.’ During that tenure, Abu Islah ordered a review of the revenues and expenditures of the Church endowments, and the development of a registry of all such endowments; founded a department of legal affairs within the Patriarchate; sought to institutionalize compensation for the priesthood, and demanded that, in return, Coptic priests attend theological classes and ‘debates’ each Saturday, under his supervision.⁷ Perhaps most significantly, he is said to have defended Copts’ emerging ‘rights of citizenship,’ insisting upon Coptic representation in local government councils, the officer corps of the army, and state schools of medicine and engineering.⁸

To my mind, the rhetoric of Coptic ‘reform’ and ‘modernization,’ as deployed by Samir Seikaly — as deployed by virtually all historians of the Coptic community for that matter — conceals networks of power, and in turn forestalls a range of important questions. How did the ‘lower classes of the community,’ to which Seikaly refers, view their purportedly ‘corrupt’ Church? How did that Church serve their needs, both material and spiritual? What was the nature of the ‘ignorance’ and the ‘passivity’ the ‘reformers,’ such as Abu Islah, condemned? What forms of knowledge and of action were of value in the eyes of the ‘reformers’? Finally, just how did the ‘revival’ and ‘reawakening’ of the Coptic Church and community serve the social, political, and economic interests of their advocates?

Timothy Mitchell’s *Colonising Egypt* affords a conceptual framework with which to address such questions — with which to step beyond the ubiquitous rhetoric of Coptic ‘reform’ and ‘modernization,’ toward the matter of power.⁹ As Mitchell recounts, by the nineteenth century, Egyptian state administrators were convinced that control of space and time could afford control of the social behavior and economic production of Egypt’s inhabitants. By thrusting peasants and laborers into institutions within which space and time were tightly controlled, such as the army or schools, the administrators aimed to produce disciplined, industrious political subjects.¹⁰ According to such logic, as the ‘subject’ of the Egyptian state developed that sense of discipline and industry — internalized discipline and industry as values — the element of control disappeared from view. The power that had apportioned time and space purportedly became no longer visible.¹¹

The interest I have developed in Demetrius initially stemmed from his apparent failure to meet the standard for

‘reform’ and ‘enlightenment’ — or, in the alternative language Mitchell advances, for industry, discipline, and order.¹² I began to wonder whether one could, in fact, view Demetrius as an agent of resistance in the face of the rise of industry, discipline, and order as values within the Coptic community — particularly in light of his renowned 1867 attack upon the American evangelical missionaries of Asyut, quintessential agents of the ‘colonisation’ project Mitchell describes. Indeed, through their educational efforts, such missionaries aimed to accustom the Copt to the industry and discipline that were, according to evangelicals, the hallmarks of a ‘Scriptural order.’¹³

Since my initial encounter with Demetrius, though, research in the archives of the United Presbyterian Mission and in travel accounts of the period have prompted a considerable revision of my suspicions about the Patriarch and the reasons for his journey.¹⁴ There exists resistance in the documents, but scarcely the sort of resistance I had anticipated. There was no defiant rejection of industry, discipline, and order, but rather, a distinctly practical manipulation of institutions intended to instill such values — specifically, the ‘modern’ schools established by the American mission in Asyut. The agents of that manipulation were Coptic peasants; their aim, to avoid the *corvée*, or forced labor.¹⁵ That manipulation prompted the intervention of Patriarch Demetrius II, with the support of Khedive Isma‘il. In a sense, the American mission, the Coptic Patriarch, and the Egyptian Khedive were all, by the 1860s, part of one ‘discursive field,’ concerned, as they were, with the inculcation of industry, discipline, and order among peasants.¹⁶ The Patriarch’s ‘persecution’ of the Americans and their converts was, thus, not about resistance to industry, discipline, and order, but about *who* was to transmit such distinctly ‘modern’ values to Egyptian peasants.

Mission Motivations

Why was the conversion of Egypt — and of the Copts in particular — of such importance to evangelical missionaries? The comments of nineteenth-century evangelical travellers to Egypt afford a relatively lucid answer to that question. Egypt was the land of bondage, the site of the deliverance through Moses of the chosen people. Egypt was the land of refuge, the site to which the Holy Family fled with the Saviour to escape Herod. Finally, Egypt was the land of the primitive Church, an Apostolic Church, the site of conversions to Christianity at the hands of Mark the Evangelist himself. Ussama Makdisi has noted with reference to Syria, “Unlike Africa and the New World, the natives were part of a history the missionaries claimed to share and, even more, to represent.”¹⁷ Such was emphatically the case in Egypt.

The glories and grandeur of the primitive Church figure prominently in nineteenth-century evangelical writings. As the 1839 Egypt installment in the Popular Geographies series reports, “In the earliest period of the Christian era, Alexandria became the stronghold of the true faith, which the number of ruined churches and convents scattered throughout the land attest to have had many followers.”¹⁸ One could indeed label mission an effort to excise centuries of division from the history of Christianity, to resurrect that primitive Church, faithful to the teachings of the Scriptures.¹⁹ The resurrection of the glories and grandeur of the primitive Church, as the evangelicals perceived them, demanded the imposition of ‘order’ upon the ‘fallen’ Coptic Church.

The apportionment of space in Coptic churches was, for a number of Western travellers, emblematic of that ‘fall.’ Andrew Paton perhaps best captures the notion, in his *History of the Egyptian Revolution*:

On one occasion I determined on attending Divine service on Palm Sunday in the Coptic cathedral, where the patriarch was to officiate. Plunging into the Coptic quarter, I passed through a succession of crooked lanes, and at length arrived at the temple of this ancient people, which was undistinguished by any architectural decoration, — a truly remarkable lapse in the external circumstances of a nation, when we think of the colossal magnificence of the Pharaonic and the elegance of the Greek periods of Egyptian architecture.²⁰

The approach to the Coptic church is a source of frequent bewilderment and consternation to the travellers, particularly in Cairo: Paton notes that one can scarcely distinguish a church, in architectural terms, from the prevailing confusion of edifices.²¹ Western travellers had a particular interest in scrutinizing the traditions and practices of their persecuted Coptic ‘brethren,’ but there remained the perennial problem of finding the churches of such ‘brethren.’

Upon entering the Coptic church, evangelicals are immediately struck by the darkness therein — one that reflects, in their eyes, the poor state of Coptic spirituality. They can scarcely fathom the lack of pews in the church, particularly given the length of the services, and mock the staffs upon which parishioners could lean for support. The church services were, in evangelical eyes, scarcely ‘functional,’ ‘ordered’ affairs themselves. The travellers and missionaries consistently report their dismay with the marked lack of decorum, the irreverence of Coptic congregations. Paton recounts of the service he attended, “there was much general conversation and whispering, and at one moment a most audible discussion between the deacons as to the forms of the service.” As the

Gospels were read to the congregation, the din reached such heights that the priest was reportedly forced to exclaim, “There is no hearing on account of this noise.”²²

Yet, of greatest concern to the evangelical was the ‘superstition’ in which the Copts were steeped. The facet of such ‘superstition’ that drew by far the most vitriolic comment, was monasticism. Evangelicals could scarcely conceive of how cloistering oneself in an austere desert convent could serve the purposes of the Lord. Of the monks of the White Convent, near Edfu, one evangelical traveller characteristically remarked in 1838, “Banished from the world, with scarcely an idea beyond the trifling occupations of their nearly useless days, — and living almost in ignorance of the doctrine of the Holy Religion, which, amidst many corruptions, has been handed down to them from so remote a period, — they are indeed objects of pity.”²³ Devoid of ‘function,’ the monastic life was thoroughly reproached.²⁴

For the evangelicals, though, not merely the monks, but all the Coptic Orthodox of Egypt, were ‘dupes of superstition.’ Although members of an Apostolic Church, they had lost the purity which, the evangelicals believed, must have characterized their forms of worship long prior. They had developed superstitious customs with no basis in the Scriptures and, thus, corrupted the faith. For instance, evangelical travellers are struck by the Copts’ attachment to particular holy sites, and by the extent of pilgrimage to such sites. The focus of the evangelical attack is not the notion of pilgrimage — for the travellers were, indeed, pilgrims themselves — but the criteria for the selection of such sites. Whereas the Copts revered particular sites in light of tradition, ‘scientific’ topographical observation and close reading of the Bible directed the evangelical. The latter frequently engaged in

frenzied debates as to whether the landscape of a particular site adhered to that described in the Scriptures.²⁵

The simplicity of the doctrine — the text and only the text — is striking on the surface. Yet, why was the replacement of ‘superstition’ with the text of such urgency? Why was ‘superstition’ such a great threat to the missionary cause? As long as there remained ‘superstition,’ the missionary could not ‘capture’ the Copt, could not grasp or control the individual. ‘Superstition’ was a region to which the missionaries had no access — and thus, they sought to eliminate or, at least, domesticate ‘superstition.’ The means to the realization of that vital task was the text.²⁶

According to evangelical rhetoric, freedom to read the Scriptures and the right of private judgment were vital. Yet, could the evangelicals, in fact, forsake all such mediation? They could not, and would not. Mindful that the Copt revered the Scriptures and bowed to proofs rooted therein, the missionaries sought to retain interpretative control of that sacred text. Indeed, interpretation of the Bible was an ideal means by which the missionaries could control the body and mind of the Copt. The right of private judgment was an illusion, after all, for the missionaries developed subtle techniques of interpretative control. The printing press was one critical tool. The missionaries believed, however, that the thousands upon thousands of tracts they produced and distributed would not suffice to spread the lessons they drew from the Scriptures to the mass of Copts.

Spiritual supervision in the path to conversion was vital. Only with such spiritual supervision could the missionaries attain the control of the text they desperately sought. Yet, the overwhelming impression of Coptic education, through *kuttabs*, was one of utter confusion and indiscipline. The *kuttabs* were, in missionary eyes, characterized by mere ‘rote’ learning.

'Ritualistic' recitation of sacred texts without comprehension drew much evangelical comment, for such recitation was a further field of 'superstition,' a field devoid of utility and order and, hence, a field the missionaries could scarcely infiltrate and control.²⁷

Enlightenment or Exemption?

As a result, the Presbyterians inaugurated 'modern' schools — the principal vehicle for the inculcation of the values of industry, discipline, and order.²⁸ The 1863 Annual Report of the Presbyterians refers to a boys' school and a girls' school in Alexandria, and both a boys' school and two girls' schools in Cairo — one in Azbakiyya, and one in Harat al-Sakka'in. By 1865, however, the reach of Presbyterian schooling had extended to Upper Egypt. In March of that year, a boys' school was inaugurated in Asyut with a meager seven students; within eight months, attendance had expanded tenfold. One Miss McKown established a girls' school as well. Bible stories were the substance of that school's lessons: the 1865 Annual Report relates that the students

seldom failed in giving an accurate and most graphic account of the story in their own words after it had been read and commented upon, and they used to say that their native mothers at home were always pleased to hear them repeat what they learned at school, and that they were as much interested in these Bible stories as they were themselves.²⁹

Girls' schools were frequently of greater importance than boys' schools in such mission projects, for reasons Mitchell recounts in *Colonising Egypt*. Indeed, if state bureaucrats could

‘order’ family life in the way they had ordered their army, hospitals, and schools, they could realize their aim of inculcating industry and discipline to an unprecedented degree. In ordering family life, they sought to control the environment within which children were raised. Schools could have but little effect in rendering children industrious and disciplined, if such values were rejected in the Egyptian home. Egyptian mothers had unmediated access to Egyptian children in the fundamental years of child development — and, hence, were potentially vital bearers of the modernizers’ message.³⁰ Miss McKown was no doubt delighted that, through her school, she had managed to penetrate the home, and reach ‘native mothers’ with Bible stories framed as parables endorsing the values of industry, discipline, and order.

The question of how the ‘native mothers’ received and interpreted the parables remains, however, unanswered. I would venture that such mothers, and Coptic peasants in general, were not mere passive receptacles for ‘modern’ values.³¹ How is one to ‘get at’ peasant perceptions of the mission project? In fact, evidence as to such perceptions pervades the mission reports. In 1865, the Asyut station admitted that the peasants’ principal reason for dispatching their sons to the mission school “was to secure immunity for their boys from the oppressive exactions of the Viceroy.”³² The principal such exaction was the *corvée*, or forced labor, as the missionaries continued:

When the orders were sent to Upper Egypt summoning five sixths of the peasants out to labour at the railway which is to be made from Cairo to Esneh, no exception was made, or allowed when solicited by us, in favour of the boys at our schools. The Viceroy’s orders were urgent and the Sheikhs of the villages in order to furnish the quota

demanded of them, obliged the parents to withdraw their children from our school.³³

Peasant and, in turn, missionary frustrations with the *corvée* become a consistent theme in the mission reports. In 1867, the year of the Patriarchal tour of Upper Egypt, the Asyut station related: “When the boys found that by remaining at our school they became liable to be seized by the sheikhs of their villages and sent to the government works, they left, and went to the Coptic school where they were sure of procuring exemption from the government levies.”³⁴

A Foreigner Among the ‘Fellaheen’

Lucie Duff Gordon, a noteworthy participant in the London cultural scene of the 1840s and 1850s, had landed at Alexandria in October 1862, dispatched to Egypt in the hope that the climate would ease her struggle with tuberculosis. Rather than remain in Alexandria or Cairo, Lady Duff Gordon became, during her seven-year stay in Egypt, a renowned resident of Luxor. Though Duff Gordon had extensive dealings with local Copts, she stood in stark contrast to the preponderance of Western travellers to Egypt, animated as they often were by evangelical sentiment. She apparently embraced a Muslim name and developed close relations with the *‘ulama* of Upper Egypt.

In a May 1867 letter to her husband, Alexander, Duff Gordon notes, “All the Christendom of Upper Egypt is in a state of excitement, owing to the arrival of the Patriarch of Cairo, who is now in Luxor.”³⁵ Perhaps of greatest interest in Duff Gordon’s account of the Patriarch’s visit is her insistence upon the complicity of Demetrius with the Khedive Isma‘il in attacking the Presbyterians — a complicity argued in the

mission reports. In that May letter, she continues, “He has come up in a steamer, at the Pasha’s [the Khedive’s] expense, with a guard of cawasses [Turkish gendarmes], and, of course, is loud in praise of the Government.”³⁶ She concludes, “Evidently the Pasha is backing up the Patriarch who keeps his church well apart from all other Christians, and well under the thumb of the Turks.”³⁷ In a subsequent letter to her mother, Duff Gordon declares, “The Patriarch has made a blunder with his progress. He has come ostentatiously as the *protégé* and *pronem* of the Pasha, and he has ‘eaten’ and ‘beaten’ the fellaheen [peasants].”³⁸

In the mission school, peasants discerned a vehicle not for enlightenment, but for exemption. In his support for the 1867 Patriarchal tour, the Khedive was sending a message to the peasants — that they could not escape his reach, least of all at a time during which he desperately needed their labor. Indeed, *corvée* labor was a theme upon which Demetrius forthrightly played during the tour:

After upbraiding them for their ingratitude to him for having, through his influence with the viceroy, secured a grant of land which had enabled him to open a school in Asyut, which his highness had, at his instance, taken under his special patronage, by granting exemption from the government levies to all children of the peasantry attending it; he told them that if they persisted in the obstinate opposition to his desires in this matter, they would have cause to repent when repentance would avail them nothing; their sons would be sent to the army or the railway works, and they themselves would be put in shackles and sent to the galleys, or banished to the White Nile.³⁹

Upheaval in Upper Egypt

Accounts differ as to the balance of ambition and profligacy in Sa'id and Isma'il that prompted them to amass vast public debt during their rule of Egypt — debt that grew from £3,293,000 upon Sa'id's death in 1863 by an average of £7,000,000 each year until, in 1876, Khedive Isma'il suspended payment of Treasury bills in an implicit declaration of bankruptcy.⁴⁰ Beyond a doubt, however, is the spirited role Europeans played in the growth of that debt. European penetration of the Egyptian economy developed, in earnest, from the moment Sa'id permitted foreign merchants direct interaction with Egyptian cultivators. That penetration accelerated with the advent of the American Civil War, as cotton came to flow from Egypt to Europe, Britain in particular, at an unprecedented rate. By 1865, Egypt was ranked third, behind France and India, as a source of British imports, having advanced in the list from sixth in 1861, sixteenth in 1854.⁴¹ Foreigners flooded into the country — 43,000 in 1863, 56,500 in 1864, and 80,000 in 1865.⁴²

Sa'id and Isma'il encouraged Egyptian integration into the world economy through infrastructure development; telegraph, railroad, and canal projects were undertaken. European entrepreneurs struggled fiercely for the contracts and concessions the Egyptian rulers' offered, yet were united by one aim — in David Landes' words, “to exploit the needs of Egypt and the weakness and ignorance of the Egyptian government.”⁴³ Such projects required funds, and European usurers swiftly came to the prosperous Egyptians' aid. Landes points to the words of an 1863 *Times* advertisement, placed by the Egyptian Commercial and Trading Company: “As it is well ascertained that in Upper Egypt and the Sudan, cultivators and traders can afford to borrow money at 4 and 5 per cent per month

and still amass wealth, the field of operations is almost illimitable.”⁴⁴ However, the client most sought after was the Khedive himself, and the terms of the loans Isma‘il contracted were no less scandalous. According to Alexander Schölch, between 1862 and 1873, £68.4 million in loans were contracted, only two-thirds of which in fact reached the Khedive; in 1873, a loan of £32 million yielded a mere £11 million in cash.⁴⁵

Lady Duff Gordon speaks at length to the distinctly practical impact such decisions had upon the peasants of Upper Egypt. In a February 1863 letter to her husband, there exists a degree of hope that Isma‘il might break the cycle of debt Sa‘id inaugurated: “Everyone is cursing the French here. Forty thousand men always at work at the Suez Canal at starvation-point, does not endear them to the Arabs. There is great excitement as to what the new Pasha will do. If he ceases to give forced labour, the Canal, I suppose, must be given up.”⁴⁶ Despite that initial hope, Duff Gordon’s *Letters from Egypt* swiftly becomes a chronicle of the desperation into which Isma‘il was willing to thrust his ‘subjects.’ In a particularly poignant passage from a May 1863 letter to her mother, Duff Gordon explains, “the Europeans applaud and say, ‘Oh, but nothing could be done without forced labour,’ and the poor Fellaheen are marched off in gangs like convicts, and their families starve.”⁴⁷

Selections from subsequent letters Duff Gordon penned will suffice to demonstrate how, through the 1860s, the plight of the Upper Egyptian peasant steadily deteriorated. In December 1865, to her husband: “From the Moudeeriat of Keneh only, 25,000 men are taken to work for sixty days without food or pay; each man must take his own basket, and each third man a hoe, not a basket.”⁴⁸ In October 1866, to her husband: “the new taxes and the new levies of soldiers are

driving the people to despair, and many are running away from the land, which will no longer feed them after paying all the exactions, to join the Bedaween in the desert, which is just as if our peasantry turned gipsies.”⁴⁹ In April 1867, to her husband: “All this week people have been working night and day cutting their unripe corn, because three hundred and ten men [of Luxor] are to go to-morrow to work on the railroad below Siout. This green corn is, of course, valueless to sell and unwholesome to eat; so the magnificent harvest of this year is turned to bitterness at the last moment.”⁵⁰ Finally, in May 1867, to her husband: “When I remember the lovely smiling landscape which I first beheld from my windows, swarming with beasts and men, and look at the dreary waste now, I feel the ‘foot of the Turk’ heavy indeed.”⁵¹

Contending for Interpretative Control

In an October 1867 letter, Lady Duff Gordon confessed, “we all wonder why the Pasha is so anxious to ‘brush the coat’ of the Copt Patriarch.”⁵² To my mind, particularly in light of the current state of the historiography about the nineteenth-century Coptic community, transposing the figures in Duff Gordon’s query seems appropriate. Why would Demetrius, given the purportedly retrogressive, doctrinaire, and sectarian attitude attributed to him with such breezy confidence by the current historiography, develop an alliance with the Khedive as ‘unholy’ as that described to this point — one which ultimately served to undermine whatever autonomy he enjoyed vis-à-vis the state, and whatever credibility he enjoyed vis-à-vis his parishioners? Can one only explain Demetrius’s conduct in this context with reference to a narrow-minded, instinctive bigotry? I would argue, in stark contrast and, admittedly, in rather speculative terms, that Demetrius was far

from retrogressive, doctrinaire, or sectarian — that the reform movement Cyril inaugurated never withered under his successor's leadership. Indeed, I would venture that one can explain Demetrius's conduct in 1867 with specific reference to a continuing commitment to 'reform' — that is, to the values of industry, discipline, and order.

To demonstrate the continuity between the tenures of Cyril and Demetrius as Patriarch, I propose to focus upon the trajectory of the educational reform inaugurated by the former. Madrasat al-Aqbat al-Kubra, known variously as the Great Coptic School and the Coptic Patriarchal College, which commenced instruction in 1855, is emblematic of that reform.⁵³ Coptic historians laud the 'sound pedagogical approach' the School embraced — a phrase one can interpret as denoting a shift from recitation to the printed text.⁵⁴ Apart from thorough, grammatical instruction in both Coptic and Arabic, the School offered lessons in Turkish, English, French, Italian, history, arithmetic, geography, and science. The curricula of the School were under the strict supervision of the Patriarch, and he carefully monitored the progress of each class of students.⁵⁵ One historian memorably notes that Cyril had himself supervised the construction of the School, adjacent to the Patriarchal residence. Cyril admitted students of all faiths, and frequently invited foreign travellers and residents to visit the School, to examine his students.⁵⁶

The Great Coptic School was neither closed nor neglected in the years following Cyril's death. Dor Bey, author of *L'Instruction publique en Égypte*, makes explicit reference to his satisfaction with the state of the School in that 1872 text.⁵⁷ In an effort to conform to Coptic historiographical trends, J. Heyworth-Dunne, author of the magisterial *Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, makes a concerted effort to conceal Demetrius's role in Coptic educational efforts

during the reign of Isma‘il: “The Copts are recorded as having opened 23 schools in Cairo, Alexandria, Asyut and al-Gizah; the exact date of the establishment of their schools is not given but 1873 appears to have been the date of the recommencement of the reform policy, and the schools were opened between that date and 1878.”⁵⁸ Reform and the year 1873 are intimately linked in the Coptic historiography, for 1873 was the year of Demetrius’s death.

Yet, the most revealing clue as to the values that animated Demetrius’s conduct in 1867 is the fact that he responded to the mission effort at schooling in Asyut by immediately founding a rival school — and not a *kuttab*, but a ‘modern’ school.⁵⁹ Indeed, according to the 1865 Annual Report of the Presbyterians, the schoolmaster the Patriarch ultimately chose to employ in his Asyut school had not only received his education in the Presbyterians’ mission school at Cairo, but “uses the same books in his school that we use in ours and pursues the same course of study that we do.”⁶⁰ Accordingly, I am inclined to view Demetrius as no less committed to ‘reform’ than his predecessor. Though perhaps less imaginative than Cyril was as to how one might deploy interpretative control of the Scriptures, he was hardly remiss in recognizing and reacting to threats to that interpretative control. In short, Demetrius understood the power of the ‘modern’ school.

I can scarcely resist concluding my discussion of the Patriarch with one final ironic hint of his ‘reformist’ tendencies. According to Andrew Watson, the principal chronicler of the American Mission in Egypt during the nineteenth century, the man Demetrius employed to draft his denunciation of the missionaries was a graduate of a mission school himself. Watson declares, “It is full of misrepresentations and violent vituperations, but it is well conceived and well calculated to effect the end intended.”⁶¹ That Church and mission were in

contention is beyond dispute — but they were contending in one ‘discursive field,’ aspiring to distinctly modern forms of power, and deploying distinctly modern techniques of control to realize that aspiration.

Notes

¹ The Archives of the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America are housed at the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Here, I have drawn only upon the annual reports of the Egypt Mission, bound into a series of volumes entitled *Egyptian Missionary Association Minutes*, reference VMX48 Eg98ma. All subsequent references to this work are denoted *Minutes*.

² *Ibid.*, 181.

³ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴ The historiography of the modern Coptic Church and community in the English language is severely underdeveloped. For the political sensitivities behind this state of affairs, refer to Paul Sedra, “Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: Coptic Christian Communities in Modern Egyptian Politics,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10, 2 (1999), 219-223. The principal early works are Edith L. Butcher, *The Story of the Church in Egypt*, volume II (London: Smith and Elder, 1897) and Montague Fowler, *Christian Egypt: Past, Present, and Future* (London: Church Newspaper Company, 1901). The works of Otto F. A. Meinardus, covering virtually all facets of Church and community, both ancient and modern, are worthy of attention, particularly *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1970) and *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999). Among analytical works of the past thirty years, beyond Seikaly’s pioneering article, there are Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The Political Situation of the Copts, 1798-1923,” in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, volume II (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982) and Subhi Labib,

“The Copts in Egyptian Society and Politics, 1882-1919,” in Gabriel R. Warburg and Uri M. Kupferschmidt, eds. *Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan* (New York: Praeger, 1983). Theodore Partrick Hall has recently published a broadly synthetic history of Church and community entitled *Traditional Egyptian Christianity: A History of the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Greensboro: Fisher Park Press, 1996).

⁵ Samir Seikaly, “Coptic Communal Reform, 1860-1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 6, 1 (January 1970), 250.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁷ Iris Habib el-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisa al-Qibtiyya*, volume IV (Alexandria: Maktabat Kanisat Mari Girgis, 1975), 326-327.

⁸ J. Heyworth-Dunne, “Education in Egypt and the Copts,” *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte* 6 (1940), 104; el-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisa*, vol. IV, 334.

⁹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁰ For the army, refer to *Ibid.*, 35-40. For schools, refer to *Ibid.*, 64-78.

¹¹ The ‘purportedly’ qualification is critical: Khaled Fahmy and Gregory Starrett are among the scholars who have demonstrated the limits to this ‘colonising’ project’s success.

¹² The persistent contrast between Cyril and Demetrius in Coptic historiography is strikingly akin to the persistent contrast between Abbas and Sa‘id in Egyptian historiography identified by Ehud R. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹³ I pursue this line of argument at length, with specific reference to Church Missionary Society work in Cairo, in “John Lieder and his Mission in Egypt: The Evangelical Ethos at Work Among Nineteenth-Century Copts,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (forthcoming). For the

notion of a 'Scriptural order,' refer to Robert Glen, "Those Odious Evangelicals: The Origins and Background of CMS Missionaries in New Zealand," in Robert Glen, ed. *Mission and Moko: The Church Missionary Society in New Zealand, 1814-1882* (Christchurch: Latimer Fellowship of New Zealand, 1992), 21.

¹⁴ The United Presbyterian Church of North America emerged from the fusion in 1858 of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Associate Presbyterian Church of North America. Both Churches had had missionary arms. For a general account of early American mission work abroad, refer to *History of American Missions to the Heathen, from their Commencement to the Present Time* (Worcester: Spooner and Howland, 1840). In Egypt, American mission work began with the arrival in Cairo of the Reverend Thomas McCague in November 1854. Within five years of the Presbyterians' arrival, they had converted four — two Egyptians, an Armenian, and a Syrian — and within a decade, sixty-nine 'natives.' Within twenty years, in 1874, the Presbyterians could boast seventeen mission stations, two ordained pastors, eight theological students, fifty-seven native teachers and helpers, six organised congregations, and 596 communicants. Among published accounts of the Americans' work, most detailed is Andrew Watson, *The American Mission in Egypt, 1854 to 1896*, second edition (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904). Among the broadly synthetic accounts are Robert Young, *Light in Lands of Darkness: A Record of Missionary Labour* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1883); Charles R. Watson, *In the Valley of the Nile: A Survey of the Missionary Movement in Egypt* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908); and Earl E. Elder, *Vindicating a Vision: The Story of the American Mission in Egypt, 1854-1954* (Philadelphia: Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1958).

¹⁵ The work of Khaled Fahmy has had a great influence upon my thinking as to resistance in the Egyptian context, particularly his *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and "The Police and the People in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Die Welt des Islams* 39, 3 (1999).

¹⁶ To argue that there existed such a 'discursive field' is not to dismiss the critical differences in interest and vision that separated such actors.

¹⁷ Ussama Makdisi, "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity," *American Historical Review* 102, 3 (June 1997), 689.

¹⁸ Popular Geographies, *Egypt: A Familiar Description of the Land, People, and Produce* (London: William Smith, 1839), 131-132.

¹⁹ Makdisi, "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible," 683.

²⁰ Andrew Paton, *A History of the Egyptian Revolution*, volume II (London: Trubner, 1870), 281-282.

²¹ For further such comments, refer to Amelia Cary, *Chow Chow: Selections from a Journal Kept in India, Egypt, and Syria*, volume II (London, 1857), 85-86.

²² Paton, *Egyptian Revolution*, vol. II, 283.

²³ Miss Platt, *Journal of a Tour Through Egypt, the Peninsula of Sinai, and the Holy Land in 1838, 1839*, volume I (London: Richard Watts, 1841), 180.

²⁴ For a particularly strong attack, refer to William Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean* (London, 1822), 128-129.

²⁵ John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), 184.

²⁶ For the link between textuality and political authority, refer to Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 154.

²⁷ For an instance of such comment, refer to Robert Maxwell MacBair, *Sketches of a Missionary's Travels in Egypt* (London, 1839), 151-152. For Western perceptions of 'rote' learning in Egypt, refer to Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), particularly 35-39. The most incisive analyses of *kuttab* learning are Dale F. Eickelman,

Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁸ For the development and structure of ‘modern’ missionary schools in Cairo, refer to Sedra, “John Lieder and his Mission in Egypt.” The article examines how Anglican missionaries put into practice elements of the monitorial system of education described at length by Mitchell in *Colonising Egypt*.

²⁹ *Minutes*, 131.

³⁰ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 111-113. For a critical expansion upon Mitchell’s argument, refer to Omnia Shakry, “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt,” in Lila Abu-Lughod, ed. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³¹ For the manifold snares facing analysts of peasant social movements, refer to Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). By far the most influential and provocative analysis of peasant political action remains James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). For a comparable analysis undertaken in the Egyptian context, refer to Nathan J. Brown, *Peasant Politics in Modern Egypt: The Struggle Against the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

³² *Minutes*, 130.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

³⁵ Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt*, reprint of 1902 edition (London: Virago, 1983), 349.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 350.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 351.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 354-355.

³⁹ Watson, *American Mission*, 204.

⁴⁰ Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, volume I (London: Macmillan, 1908), 11-12.

⁴¹ David S. Landes, *Bankers and Pashas: International Finance and Economic Imperialism in Egypt* (London: Heinemann, 1958), 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁵ Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians: The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt, 1878-1882* (London: Ithaca, 1981), 44 and 47.

⁴⁶ Duff Gordon, *Letters*, 40.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 365.

⁵³ Cyril founded six schools in all, four at Cairo, one at Mansura, and one at Bush. Among them, the two girls' schools Cyril founded — both at Cairo — merit particular mention. According to el-Masri, *Qissat al-Kanisa*, vol. IV, 320, they were developed with the aim of cultivating 'proper' mothers for Coptic children.

⁵⁴ Seikaly, "Coptic Communal Reform," 249. For the implications of the rise of print, refer to note 27.

⁵⁵ Mounir Shoucri, "Cyril IV," in Aziz S. Atiya, ed. *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 678.

⁵⁶ Heyworth-Dunne, "Education in Egypt and the Copts," 103.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁸ J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, reprint of 1939 edition (London: Frank Cass, 1968), 420.

⁵⁹ For the distinctive character of 'modern' schools, refer to notes 27 and 28.

⁶⁰ *Minutes*, 129.

⁶¹ Watson, *American Mission*, 205.