



COPTIC STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Since January 2006 four semesters of Coptic Language I and II have been offered by the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMEC) at the University of Toronto. This was made possible by the generous donations of St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, the Coptic Churches of Southern Ontario and a private donor. The instructor was Dr. Michael Khaler. About 35 students enrolled in these courses. They came from various academic streams, such as Egyptology and Patristic Studies. A number of students also enrolled as an elective from other disciplines (e.g. Biology, Sociology) or as audit students.

We have been most fortunate to have among us a leading Coptologist, Dr. Ramez Boutros. Dr. Ramez and his family immigrated to Canada this past summer and are settled in London Ontario. His wife, Dr. Inas Makar, a Pediatric Ophthalmologist is an Assistant Professor at the Ivey Eye Institute, University of Western Ontario. Dr. Ramez and Dr. Inas have two children: Haneen aged five and half and Adam is three and half.

Dr. Ramez, holds a BA in Architecture from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University (1982), a Diploma of Coptic Archaeology from the High Institute of Coptic Studies, Department of Archaeology (1987). He also acquired the Diplôme d'études Approfondie (1994) from the Institut d'études byzantines, University of Strasbourg II, France, and a PhD in Antiquity Science and Civilizations of Byzantium from the University of Marc Bloc, Strasbourg, France (2002) where he specialised in Coptic Archaeology in Egypt. His CV list of archaeological excavations, research, publications, lectures and presentations

at conferences covers 10 pages! He is currently engaged in several ongoing field and research projects.

In the fall of 2007, Dr. Ramez was accepted as Visiting Fellow at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, University of Toronto where he will be able to continue his research work and share his vast experience in Coptic Archaeological excavations. The University of Toronto Department of NMEC, has also accepted Dr. Ramez's proposal of two courses in Coptic Studies. The first course titled *Introduction to Coptic Studies* will be a second year offering Fall Term 2008. The second course entitled *Coptic Art and Archaeology* will be a third year offering Winter Term 2009. For details check website: www.utoronto.ca/nmc/ To note, funding is available for the first course only. Funding for the second course and beyond still has to be sought.



Friday May 19, 2006 presentation of the donation towards Coptic Language courses (2006-2007) from the Churches of Southern Ontario:

Right to left: Fr. Marcos Marcos, Protopriest, St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church (Scarborough), Fr. Ruies Awad, St George and St. Ruies Church (Toronto) and Fr. Boutros Philopos, Virgin Mary and St. Athanasius Church (Mississauga).

Interview with Dr. Ramez Boutros: It is a passion and not "just" a job.

In response to the question: What really led you to devote your career as a Coptologist?, this is what Dr. Ramez had to say: *The seeds of this interest I would say were planted when I was a student at the Faculty of Fine Arts studying Architecture. Our professors would ask us to go out in the "field" to draw sketches of ancient Coptic and Islamic monuments in Old Cairo. At the same time I was personally tutored by the world renowned Architect Professor Abdel-Wahed El- Wakil who was himself a disciple of Hassan Fathy, the "father" of the revival movement of traditional architecture in Egypt. His major architectural achievements were realized from the 1950s onwards. Dr. Abdel-Wahed used to take me on "photography tours" in Old Islamic Cairo. I also worked for him to document unique characteristics of Islamic monuments in the old City. This*



Right to left: Professor James Reilly, Chair , Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations and Professor Sue Howson, Vice Dean, representing the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Father Marcos Marcos said: *The re-instatement of Coptic Studies at the University of Toronto, we believe will enlighten students about the richness of our Coptic culture and civilization and contribute to the diversity of their experience. We feel humbled that as Coptic Orthodox Churches of Southern Ontario we have been part of this process.*

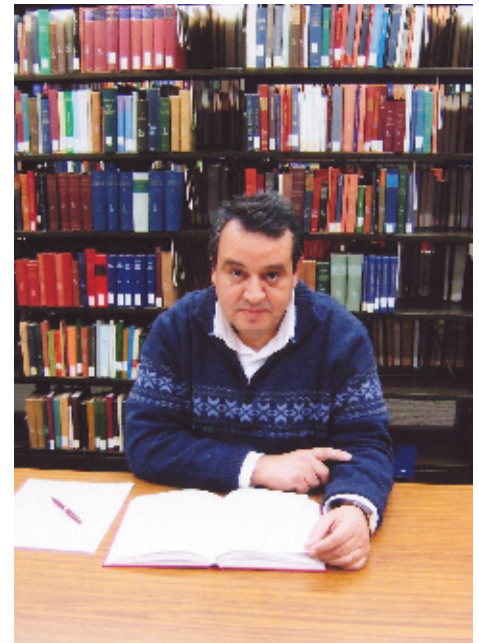
exposure imbued in me a love and deep appreciation for the beauty and skill of ancient architecture.

After I graduated and completed the military service requirement, I worked with different construction companies. Soon after, I decided to pursue my deep seated interest by enrolling in the Institute of Coptic Studies, Department of Archaeology at the Coptic Patriarchate. I followed the full set courses towards the Diploma: Coptic architecture, archaeology, ancient Egyptian and Coptic languages, theology, and history. It is there that I was again influenced by one of the instructors, Abouna Samuel al-Souriany – the late Bishop of Shebeen El-Quanater and its dependents. He was an architect before he joined the priesthood and had an unquenching passion for Coptic Archaeology. We would go out on field trips into the desert on a tractor and draw sketches of ancient churches and monasteries. With him we visited and studied almost all Coptic monuments in Egypt in the two volumes he published (*Guide to Ancient Coptic Churches & Monasteries in Upper Egypt, Cairo, 1990; A guide to Ancient Churches and Monasteries in Lower Egypt, Cairo and Sinai, Part II, Cairo 1996*). I remember writing these words in his obituary book: "Father Samuel succeeded to pass on his flame and passion for Coptic architecture to all his students." It is a passion to which I want to devote ALL

of myself. It is not "just" a job. And then I was most fortunate to meet international Coptologists at various meetings and specially when I was employed as a "Field Architect" and later on as Researcher by the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology (IFAO) from 1990 until my recent immigration to Canada. At IFAO, I was surrounded by professionals who supported, guided and challenged me to deepen my scholarly work. A turning point, however was when I worked on my own project: the study of a Christian pilgrimage site in Middle Egypt called Gebel el-Tayr. In the summers of 1990 & 1991, I lived for four months in the midst of the community to gather architectural, archaeological and ethnological material. It really opened my eyes and made me realise how important it is to have direct contact with the site – the land. My field experience I firmly believe informs my scholarly work.

And now in Canada...

The next few months, I am taking the time to learn more about the Canadian university system, Coptic collections in Canadian Museum and Canadian culture. My association with the Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies is giving me the opportunity to continue and share my research, as well as learn from the works of other scholars. I look forward to the fall when I will also learn from and with the students in my classes. As I observe it, there is a big challenge ahead: Learning about Coptic civilization is an essential thread of Egyptian and world civilizations for all students. It is also important for



Dr. Ramez Boutros:
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Coptic youth to have the opportunity to learn about our rich legacy whether they will become future Coptologists or for their personal growth. The Royal Ontario Museum with its vast collection of Coptic textiles, the University of Toronto Malcove Collection, and the collections in the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal and at St. Mark's Coptic Museum, amongst other institutions offer us the opportunity to fill this gap of knowledge. It is very encouraging that the Coptic Churches in Southern Ontario have supported the initial opportunity to study Coptic Language at the University of Toronto's and that the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations has been so receptive.

Activities Highlights

† University of Toronto First Annual Coptic Studies Symposium - Coptic Heritage and Ancient and Modern Civilisations will be held on Saturday 29 March, 2008 from 8.30am – 5 pm at the The Kofler Pharmacy Building auditorium, 569 Spadina Ave, Toronto. The Coordinator of the Colloquium is Dr. Ramez Boutros. For more information: www.copticmuseum.canada.org or www.utoronto.ca/nmc/

† On six Thursdays starting with March 20 and ending on May 1, Dr. Helene Moussa is teaching a course entitled "Coptic Icons: Spirituality, Art and History" at the University of St. Michael's College Continuing Education Department, St. George U of T Campus. For more information: www.copticmuseum-canada.org under "Special Events" or www.utoronto.ca/stmikes