



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COPTIC STUDIES NINTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF COPTIC STUDIES CAIRO, EGYPT - SEPTEMBER 13-20,2008

The Ninth International Congress of Coptic Studies was formally opened on Sunday 14 September with a specially recorded message from His Holiness Pope Shenouda III in the auditorium of Anba Ruweis Land. His Holiness welcomed to Egypt the 125 scholars and over 25 countries and all other participants. His Holiness said that he has followed closely and with great satisfaction the efforts of scholars in the field of Coptology and extended his best wishes for their deliberations and continued contributions.

The International Association for Coptic Studies (IACS) gathers Coptologists every four years in a different country. The meeting this year was particularly significant because it marked the 100th anniversary of the founding the Coptic Museum in Cairo, by Marcus Simaika Pasha. It was also 34 years ago (1976) that the IACS met for the first time in Cairo. The congress was hosted by H.H. Pope Shendouda III. St Mark's Foundation for the Study of Coptic History was responsible for local arrangements. Dr. Ramez Boutros, University of Toronto was the Secretary of the Congress and will be responsible for the coordination of the publication of the congress papers.

Several distinguished speakers addressed the gathering on the opening day. Following His Holiness's message, His Grace Anba Bishoy, Secretary to the Holy Synod and Abbot of St. Demiana Monastery also welcomed the participants. His Grace elaborated on the importance of Cairo as the host city and the venue of the meeting on the Anba Ruweis Land. Professor Theofried Baumeister,



President of IACS followed by pointing out how the field of Coptology has expanded since 1976 as may be evidenced by the number of scholars and range of disciplines of study in the programme of this congress. He especially welcomed the ever growing number of Egyptian scholars. Mrs Hoda Garas, Vice-President of St. Mark's Foundation for the Study of Coptic History (SMF) gave an overview of the role SMF has played the past ten years to promote Coptic studies: since 2002 four symposia have been organised to study monasticisms and Christianity in the Wadi el Natrun, Fayoum, Sohag regions and the most recent one earlier this year in the Naqqada region. The SMF has also produced 10 publications. Mr. Gamal El Ghitany, Chief Editor of *Akhbar el Adab* (Cultural News) received several ovations when he stressed that Coptic history does not belong to a short period or a special group of people. Coptic history he emphatically said belonged to all Egyptians and the history of Egypt in its entirety. He also underlined that

Coptic history must become an integral part of the school curriculum in Egypt. Fanaticism, he believed would be overcome if all Egyptians recognized Coptic history as their heritage. Furthermore, he felt that the safety and greatness of Egypt depended on the acceptance and knowledge of this history. He concluded with the recommendation that the Coptic Encyclopaedia should be translated into Arabic.

Professor Stephen Emmel, Secretary of the IACS followed Mr. Ghitany with a powerpoint recollection of the beginnings of the association pointing out to the growing interest of scholars around the world – membership in the IACS since 2004 has risen from 200 to 297 members this year. This growing interest he however regretted was not matched with a growth institutional offerings in Coptology. Dr Fawzy Estaphanos, President of SMF was the final speaker. Eight years ago at the Seventh IACS International Congress in Leiden, Holland he expressed the dream that the next congress would be held in Cairo. He thanked everyone who helped make this dream come to a reality. Finally, a very special feature of the opening programme was the David Ensemble Choir performance of hymns/alhan in Coptic and in Arabic under the direction of George Kyrollos. The solo rendition of "O Lord of Hosts" (otherwise known as "Epchois" in Coptic) by a female member of choir was especially inspiring.

We began each day in plenary sessions with a two hour critical reviews of research and publications in different disciplines of Coptology since the

last congress held in Paris in 2004. The bibliography handouts are in themselves an invaluable resource for research and education and are now available in St. Mark's Coptic Museum's Reference Library. The topics of these literature and research reviews were as follows: A Century of the Coptic Museum, Coptic Archeology, Coptic Bible, Coptic History, Coptic Linguistics, Coptic Literature, Coptic Papyrology, Copto-Arabic Studies, Egyptian Monasticism, Gnostic Studies and Manicheism, Late Antique and Christian Art, and Christian Nubia.

The scope and concrete examples of the growth in research numbers was particularly encouraging. For example, in the field of Papyrology, in 2004 there was 136 publications and 59 authors; in 2008 there are 190 publications and 76 authors. Each plenary presenter also identified 'neglected' areas of research, thus posing a challenge and research opportunities to all present. One of the recurring comments, if not pleas, was the importance of encouraging young scholars, especially Egyptians to engage in research, as well as to make available opportunities to pursue Coptic studies in universities.

Plenary sessions were followed with thematic panels in three parallel sessions three times a day (11.30am-1.00pm; 2.30-4.00pm and 4.30 to 7.00pm). It was certainly a challenge to select which panel to attend! A review of the 125 papers presented at the congress is impossible. As one participant said it was an intensive university course in Coptic studies. Themes of the panels followed in more detail the topics of the morning plenary sessions.

Thirty-three Egyptians living in Egypt and abroad presented papers - the largest number since the creation of the IACS. They were Coptologists, university professors, museum curators, university students and tour guides. Significantly papers were presented by two Coptic Bishops, H.G. Martyros (Cairo) and H.G. Beemen (Naqqada) and four monks: Fr Angelos el

Naklony, Fr Bigoul al Suriyani, Fr. Maximous al Antouny, Fr. Zakarai al Baramousy. Egyptians were presenters in following topical panels: Architecture and Archeology, Monasticism, Saints and Monks, From Coptic to Arabic in Medieval Egypt, Shenoutian manuscripts, Art, Language and Linguistics, and Contemporary Coptic Expressions. Among these presenters were about four Muslims who gave papers in areas of museology, interpreting ancient manuscripts on saints and Coptic medicine among other topics. From our Museum, Helene Moussa gave a paper on the icons by Marguerite Nakhla at the Zamalek Church and Carolyn Ramzy's paper was titled "An Alternative Coptic Museum Narrative: The Ethnomusicology study of Taratil." Sandy Saad also attended as a participant - in preparation for the next congress where she will surely present a paper! Both Sandy and Carolyn received funding to attend the congress from the University of Toronto. Ghada Boutros, who completed her doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto on second generation Copts in our Toronto churches also gave a paper.

The congress programme also included "practical" educational experiences. We visited the recently renovated St. Mina Church and Monastery in Fum al-Khalig with its magnificent collection of 18th and 19th century icons. Next we visited the Coptic Museum where we



Opening of Congress head table: H.G. Bishop Bishoy (left) and Professor Theofried Baumeister (right).

were welcomed, among others, by Mr Youssef Simaika, the grandson of the founder Marcus Simaika Pasha. The Coptic Museum was reopened after extensive renovations in 2006. Visitors to this Museum can only leave enriched by the vibrancy of Coptic history and civilization particularly facilitated by the thoughtfully planned display of artifacts and accompanying information.

There are no words to express the hospitality and professional service of the staff and volunteers of the Bishopric of Ecumenical and Social Services (BLESS) and the Centre of Pope Shenouda III, for Organization, Information and Technology and other volunteers who ensured the best possible environment to deliver papers. H.G. Anba Discorus' generous gifts of books on Coptic icons and manuscripts to each presenter was greatly appreciated. To conclude, this memorable week, on the final evening, conference delegates and guests were invited by St Mark's Foundation for the Study of Coptic History to a "thousand and one nights" banquet at the magnificent and historic Mohammed Ali Palace.

BUSINESS MEETING OF THE IACS

On Saturday 20 September the IACS members met for a general business meeting and the election of the new Board of Directors. St Mark's Coptic Museum has formally accepted as an Institutional Member. The following actions were also taken:

1. A telegramme was sent to President Moubarek urging him to ensure that Coptic studies be offered in Egyptian universities.
2. A letter of appreciation was sent to Dr. Zaki Hawass, Secretary General, Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities congratulating him for the outstanding renovations of the Coptic Museum.
3. The 10th IACS congress in 2012 will be held in Rome hosted by the University of Rome.
4. The 11th IACS congress in 2016 will be held in Los Angeles hosted by Claremont College.