



## Fifth International Symposium on Early Christianity and Monasticism — Aswan & Nubia Region (January 31 – February 4, 2010)

Since 2006 international symposia have been held every other year to study Christianity and monasticism in different regions of Egypt. The first was held at Al-Surian Monastery and was followed by Fayyum, Sohag & Akhmim, Naqqada. This year's symposium was in Aswan and also included Nubia. The symposia are co-organized by the St. Mark's Foundation of the Study of Coptic History and the St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society (Los Angeles). The main objective of these symposia is to exchange and document new knowledge and archeological findings. Papers of each symposium are published and available in St. Mark's Museum Reference Library.

Twenty-eight scholars presenting papers came from Australia, Egypt, England, Holland, Germany, and Poland — seventeen were Copts including two bishops and three priests. H.G. Anba Serapion, Diocese of Southern California and Honolulu represented H.H. Pope Shenouda III. His Eminence Metropolitan Hitra hosted the symposium and gave a detailed account of the "Modern History of Christianity in Aswan and the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral." The symposium was held in the new compound of Deir Abba Hitra within walking distance of the ancient monastery's archaeological site — on the opposite side of the Nile River bank of the city of Aswan. For no historical reason, the monastery has been incorrectly referred to at St.

Simeon's monastery. St. Hitra, a fourth century hermit, is commemorated on the 12th day of the Month of Kiak.

Papers covered topics such as archaeology, art history, hagiography, and the restoration, preservation and reconstruction of archaeological sites and their art. Since cultural and social frontiers are more fluid than political frontiers, discussions often centered around identifying the historical and cultural links and distinctions between Coptic and Christian Nubian art. A general concern was the rapid deterioration of paintings and the ancient churches, and monasteries in the area due exposure to the elements and graffiti from visitors. The programme included field trips to archaeological sites and a special treat was a visit to the Nubian Museum. Attending these symposia is equivalent to an intensive university course. It is a unique privilege to be able to learn first-hand about new and "revised" knowledge about our cultural heritage. The opening ceremony was attended by the Governor of Aswan, the Imam of Nubia and a range of dignitaries from Aswan, the region, and Nubia, and was particularly striking. It started with the national anthem led by children from the Sunday Schools of Aswan — sung in Arabic and Coptic! This was followed by a half hour dramatic "panoramic history" of Egypt parade by the same



*The Church — archaeological site of Deir Anba Hitra*

children between the ages of 10 and 15 dressed in period costumes. They started with our roots in ancient Egyptian history, including the unification of upper and lower kingdoms, followed by the different powers that ruled Egypt as the ancient Egyptian dynasties declined, the advent of the Holy Family in Egypt, St Mark the Apostle, the caliphate rule, and ending with a "5 year Symposium birthday cake"! They certainly made a powerful and timely statement about of the central place of Copts in Egypt's history.

*Helene Moussa*



*Opening Ceremony — Sunday School children singing the National Anthem*

## *Waterloo Region Museum to feature Kitchener Coptic Community*

The Region of Waterloo is building a state-of-the-art new home, the Waterloo Region Museum. Capturing in architecture the vision of bringing history alive, the impressive structure will showcase and preserve local history, from First Nations roots and the arrival of early settlers to the many cultural and diverse groups that have shaped the Waterloo community as we know it today. The 47,000 square foot facility will showcase the Region's history for students, residents, businesses, and tourists.



Ms. Catherine Blackburn from the Ontario Museum Association has been assigned to research, plan, organize, and assist with aspects of the museum exhibition programme focusing on multi-cultural communities in Waterloo Region. She is conducting historical research, identifying themes and developing interpretive messages and storylines. Dr. Helene Moussa was invited to introduce Ms. Blackburn to the Coptic Church in Kitchener – as one of the sixty multicultural communities to be studied and eventually to become part of the exhibition. Fr. Athanasius graciously met with Ms. Blackburn and Dr. Moussa on March 1, and provided a historical overview of the Coptic community in Kitchener. The project will continue meeting with individual members of St. Mary's Coptic Church. We look forward to the opening of the exhibition!

### ***Third Annual Coptic Studies Symposium***

**DON'T MISS!**

The Third Annual Coptic  
Studies Symposium,  
**Saturday May 29**  
**from 9.30am - 5pm.**

Earth Sciences Centre, Reichman  
Family Lecture Hall, Rm 1050,  
5 Bancroft Avenue,  
University of Toronto.

Co-Sponsored by the Canadian  
Society for Coptic Studies,  
The Department of Near and  
Middle Eastern Civilizations,  
and Saint Mark's Coptic Museum.  
Check the Museum's website for  
more details and registration fees.

### ***The Canadian Society for Coptic Studies (CSCS) meets with Southern Ontario Priests – January 13, 2010***

On January 13, CSCS Interim Board members, Dr Ramez Boutros (Interim President), Ihab Khalil (Interim Treasurer) and Dr. Helene Moussa (Interim Secretary) presented an update on Coptic Studies at the University of Toronto to a meeting of the Coptic Priests of Southern Ontario. Dr. Ramez presented a historical overview of Coptic Studies since the second century BC to this day. He concluded by posing three challenges as to why Coptic Churches should continue to support these studies at the University of Toronto:

1. The presence of several Museums with Coptic collections in Toronto which allows students to have concrete experiences with Coptic cultural materials and documents.
2. The University of Toronto is the most prestigious and largest university in Canada. The Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations welcomes the establishment

of this programme. With the financial contribution of Coptic Churches of Southern Ontario (St. Mark's being the largest donor to-date), NMC has been able to offer eight courses. One hundred and ten students—Copts and students from various ethnic/religious backgrounds, as well as from a range of academic disciplines, including physical sciences, classics, theology—have registered for these courses as part of their major or elective credit. Several have taken the full series of courses.

3. Coptic Studies should become a permanent programme of studies in the University so that the future generation of Coptic-Canadians and other Canadians will have the opportunity to learn about our rich Coptic heritage.

The meeting concluded with an appeal for the continued financial support from Coptic Churches of Southern Ontario.