Recorded in the Coptic Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo, Egypt
Edited by Aziz S. Atiya, President Institute of Coptic Studies
The Copts are the Christians of Egypt whose evangelization is shrouded in the mist of great antiquity. St. Mark, the Apostle and Evangelist himself, is the founder of their Church and the first in their unbroken line of 116 Popes and Patriarchs. Recent discoveries in Coptic Papyri, both Biblical and Gnostic, have left no room for doubt that Christianity spread very widely in Lower as well as Upper Egypt by the second century. The Coptic Calendar of the Martyrs, of whom the Copts were legion from the earliest times, begins with the year of the accession of Emperor Diocletian -- 284 A.D. The impact of Coptic thought on the formative stages of primitive Christianity in the first three or four centuries of our era are tremendous and little known, since most of the Fathers of the Church who built up the renowned Catechetical School of Alexandria have wrongly been described as Greek rather than Coptic because they wrote mainly in Greek, the language of the Gospel and of Byzantine civilization. This is not the place to enumerate the Coptic contributions to the Church of Christ comprising practically every field and every phase of its ancient development. But it would be of the highest interest for the student of sacred music to discover how much interaction took place between the liturgical Coptic music of ancient Egypt on the one hand and the Byzantine music and Gregorian chants in the West on the other. The subject is still largely obscure on account of our limited knowledge of Coptic musicology, although certain criteria may be regarded as historically acceptable. Coptic music is very ancient, and the conservative nature of the Coptic Church has consequently preserved it without or perhaps with a small measure of change. The Coptic Liturgy is hitherto celebrated throughout the mass of Coptic churches in the ancient Coptic language, although Arabic has for numerous centuries become the spoken language of all Egypt. It is to be assumed that the main characteristics of Coptic music had been adopted from the music of the ancient Egyptians of whom the Copts are the purest direct descendents. Coptic music is above all considerations vocal; and the use of the cymbals and triangles in churches was certainly introduced in the course of the Middle Ages long after the era of primitive Christianity. It may also be assumed that in the urban churches, accretions of Arabic and other oriental influences must have been superimposed on the original structure of that music; and it would be necessary for the searching scholar to seek its purer forms in detached monasteries in the desert or secluded country churches in the heart of Upper Egypt.

In order to appreciate that music, we have to envision ourselves in the Coptic Cathedral of St. Mark or one of the earlier fourth or fifth century churches of Old Cairo. Elaborate ceremonial and ornate pageantry reminiscent of the functions performed in the ancient Egyptian temple mark the occasion. The censors burning in them for centuries have imparted their very essence to the whole of the interior. The Coptic icons with their votive candles and oil lamps shed their spirituality in the dimmed atmosphere where thousands of generations of the faithful have completed their course in profound piety across tempestuous ages of persecution to these days of democratic liberties and security. The whole service, it will be remembered, is vocal and choral; and the actors in this divine drama of the Sacrament are the Priest, the Master-Chanter with his Choir of deacons, and the Congregation which occupies an important position in the Church Responses. The fervour with which the performance is conducted, at times rises to great spiritual heights and its music is occasionally pervaded with remarkable fierceness. The vast range of their hymnal and prayers for all occasions and all seasons is impressive in its richness and its variety. The Copts have special hymns for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension and Whitsuntide. They have seven sets of prayers for the night and day in their Book of Hours, in addition to the Saturday Evening Prayers and the elaborate Sunday Liturgy. They practise numerous offices including those of
Holy Baptism, Matrimony, Office of the Anointing of the Sick, and the Burial of the Dead. The Copts celebrate a number of Holy Liturgies of which the most Coptic in character is the Liturgy of St. Cyril, supposedly a fourth century recording of the great Liturgy of St. Mark from the first century. This is used as a rule only in monasteries or on very special occasions owing to its great length. Its completion lasts at least four hours, and the purity of its Coptic character is uncontested.

Since the Copts quarrelled with the Latins and the Greeks from the West in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 over issues of nationalism and Christology, they chose to live their religious life entirely on their own and systematically avoided contacts with the Byzantine and Roman branches of Christendom. With their loss of faith in fellow-Christians, speaking figuratively, they buried themselves in the sands of time and the rest of the world became oblivious to their very existence. Nevertheless, they continued to be a living reality until they were re-discovered in the course of the last century. In spite of the growing interest in the Copts throughout the Christian world, the true nature of their heritage remains to be revealed through long and painful research. This rule evidently applies to their musical heritage which is still largely buried in the bosoms of village chanters, country priests, and monks living in the wilderness. The first serious attempt to disinter and preserve traditional Coptic music occurred when Ragheb Moftah, a devout rich Copt with musical talent, devoted the whole of his life and fortune to that great task during the last thirty years of our time. Handed over from master chanter to another and from priest to priest empirically for centuries, this music had never been set to the recorded note until Moftah perceived the necessity of doing so before the amenities of modern life change the nature of that legacy through the influence of the radio and other devices. In 1927, he invited the noted English musicologist, Professor Ernest Newlandsmith of Oxford and London Universities and the author of "Art, Love and Life", to come to Egypt as his honoured guest and spend the winter of that year in a houseboat (dahabiyah) on the Nile. His only obligation would be to listen to the singers and chantors of the Coptic Church and commit their tunes to the written note for the first time in history. The results of that preliminary experiment proved to be so staggering that the Professor decided to return to Egypt for three more years in order to fulfill a great task which had captivated his imagination. The harvest of those years of a labour of love exceeded all wild expectations. In recording the Liturgies and Hymnal of the Copts, he compiled in the end some thirteen large folio thick volumes of notes, which until this moment have remained unpublished. Speaking of this music, the great British scholar said in the course of a long review of the position: "Orthodox teaching says that great music is a thing of the last three or four centuries, but there is a tremendous emotional appeal in much of this Coptic music, and many of its deep-hidden themes not only demand but demand harmonization." Then he gives the historical clues by an enumeration of the following data: "(1) That many of the tunes bear the names of villages which are known to have been in ruins for very long periods. If these dates can be established by historical research, then Coptic music must be at least as old as the earliest of them. (2) There is reason to believe that the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church stretch in unbroken succession from St. Mark the Evangelist. Much of its usage is undoubtedly of similar antiquity. (3) Ancient Egypt is the only possible source of this music, since the basic themes show no affinities to either Turkish or Arabic music. The early Coptic Church took over many features, including the surplice and tonsure, from pagan ritual, and it is at least probably that the same is true of music." His final verdict is noteworthy. "What we understand today as Oriental music," he proclaims, "appears simply a degradation of what was once a very great art. This music, which has been handed down for untold centuries within the Coptic Church, should be a bridge between East and West, and place a new idiom at the disposal of Western musicians. It is a lofty, noble, and great art, especially rich in that element of the infinite which is lacking today." (The Morning Post, 22 April, 1931.) Professor Newlandsmith is apparently of the opinion that, to use his own words, "Western music has its origin in ancient Egypt."

With the notation of Coptic music from its very sources, Ragheb Moftah thought that the next natural step would be to have that same music recorded on the tape from the mouths of the older master-chanter who were ultimately doomed to disappearance. This became his next dedication, and he thus selected the most eminent of all master-
chanters of the old school for this purpose - Master Mikhail the blind Chanter of the Coptic Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo, who died a centenarian about a year ago. He proved to be a living storehouse of all the traditional Coptic sacred music with its unadulterated tunes, if not in possession of a beautiful voice. That man became Professor Newlandsmith's chief source in the past.

Then, in 1955, the Institute of Coptic Studies was founded in Cairo, and it included amongst its numerous departments a Sector of Coptic Music to which Mr. Ragheb Moftah was appointed as head and was requested to pursue his old project in the new home of Coptic learning. Before Master Mikhail's decease, the Sector of Coptic Music completed his entire recording on tapes. Then a gifted priest was selected in the person of Father Morkos of the small church of Matay in Middle Egypt together with a Choir of fifteen students of the Clerical College endowed with reasonably good voices for the final stage of again recording the Coptic Liturgy and Hymnal in the spirit of Master Mikhail's tapes. It is from these last attempts that the Institute of Coptic Studies is offering the present six selections for distribution in the form of records without awaiting the long process of the publication of either the general Liturgy or the Hymns which should see the light one day. The selection, as will be seen, is varied in character and should provide the listener with a good representation of what to expect in the greater work. More research is imperative in order to cleanse the ancient forms from the accretions which have deposited on the beautiful old recensions of this time-honoured music. For unity of the spirit and the bond of peace amid Churches and Nations, this new music appears to be of incalculable value. In publishing the present record, Folkways is undoubtedly opening up for the first time a vista of possibilities which ought to arouse interest in a field of virgin soil.

Let us, in the end, quote a significant technical remark from one of Professor Newlandsmith's lectures on the subject. "And when we remember that the diatonic genus, although based on the same natural scale, is differently applied in the East to what it is in the West; and when we come to realize that there is an ancient Oriental application of the chromatic genus which contains no less than 253 untransposed octave scales, we may well tread with caution! For it is almost impossible to grasp the endless involutions of which such a vast array of scales is capable. Such a basis of music opens up a vista quite undreamt of by the ordinary musicians of the Western world."

Note

The only substantial work ever published on ancient Egyptian music and instruments collated from the monuments is Hans Hickmann's "45 Siecles de Musique dans l'Egypte Ancienne a Travers la Sculpture, La Peinture, l'Instrument." (Paris, 1956) It is interesting to note that the author has published a photograph of Master-Chanter Mikhail (see plate no. CVII) in performance to illustrate an ancient Egyptian singing posture.

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U. A. R.
The Congregation says:

The Priest says:

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The Priest says:

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The Priest says:

Ephesi Epcos o asebani pe ente pek monogenees ouni, ethren-erevneve epi-erefmevi ente ni-sthobay estak.

Arikatasion Epcos entek-erefmevi enoi-sthobay te eroi elamrak igen ep-enek.

Neniot ethobay, nipatriarchees, ni-eprfdees, ni-apostolees, ni-rexhiniach, ni-evangeliee, ni-martyree, ni-emoligitees, nem epenevma nien-ethni elagok evol khen efnaht.

Enho-o the sthobay, ethneh eno-o, etoy emparthenos enosi nien, thiteokos ethobay, ti-agia Mariya, thiesatge epho dit piligos khen emethmi;

Nem piagios youannis, pieprothromos, embaptistis, owch emmar-tyros; nem piagios Estifanos piarchihiaekos owch emeprmortyros; nem pitheorimos en-evangelistees Markos, piaposteros ethobay owch emmar-tyros;

Nem nipatriarchees ethobay Se-viros, nem penseah Dioskoros; nem piagios Athanasios piapostoleikos; nem piagios Petros yermartysos piarchhlarov; nem piagios Youannis plekhrissostomos; Nem piagios Theodosios; nem piagios Theofoilos; nem piagios Dimetrios; nem piagios Kirillos; nem piagios Basilios; nem piagios Egrigorios piropelistos; nem piagios Egrigorios pithavmor-gos; nem piagios Egrigorios pi-armenios;

Verily, O! Lord! This is the will of Thy Only Begotten Son, that we should participate in the commemoration of Thy Saints.

Condescend, O! Lord! to remember all the Saints who have pleased you from the beginning.

Our holy fathers, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, missionaries, evangelists, martyrs, and confessors and all the souls of the faithful who became accomplished in the profession.

Mostly the Holy Virgin, full of glory for ever, Mother of God, holy Mary, who begat God, the word in verity.

And Saint John, the Forerunner, the Baptist, and Martyr; and Saint Stephen, the arch-deacon and first martyr; and the witnesses of God, the Evangelist Mark, the Apostle, the pare and the Martyr.

Side 2; Band 1a

And the Patriarch, Saint Severus; and our master Dioscorus, and Saint Athanasius, the Apostolic; and Saint Peter the martyred priest, chief of the priesthood; And Saint John Chrysostom; and Saint Theodosios, and Saint Theophilos; and Saint Demetrios; and Saint Cyril; and Saint Basil; and Saint Gregory the Theologian; and Saint Gregory the Miracle Maker; and Saint Gregory the Armenian.
Nem pishomt sheholem shemin stavr予以, ol khen Nikiya; nem pishet-evi ente Kostantinopolis; nem pishomt sheholem ente Ephesos; nem p ponyot entheekos pisiniti AvA Antonios; nem pishomt Ave Pavie; nem pishomt entheekos Ava Makari; nem noshiri tiro enastavroforos;

Nem poneyot Ave Youanas pihegenomenos; nem poneyot Ave Pishoy piento piromi entheekos pisiniti ente pensive os ente agathos; nem ephoros tief ente nieth-owb eintak.

And the 318 who met at the Council of the Cross.

And the three abba Antony; and the venerable and perfect Abba John the Hegomenos; and our father Abba Macariuses the Priest, spiritual sons, the bearers of our father Abba John the Righteous and Perfect, the faithful and holy patriarchs.

Selection V Side 2: Band 2

The Congregation says:

Khen efran emevoys em ep- shiry nem pi-epnevma eth- owb, ti-etiiria ethowb en-omo-aniyos, axiya anixya axiya tiaquiya Marinya ti-parthenenos.

Axiys axiys axiys nek- eviaky enekhrystianos

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, the Holy equal Trinity.

Worthy, worthy, worthy, the Holy Virgin Mary.

Worthy, worthy, worthy, Thy servants the Christians.