

# From Apostolic Mandate to Print Magazine: *Al-Kiraza* and the Networked History of the Coptic Church

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In early February 2023, two Congolese military officers gathered before a wax figure of the late Coptic Pope Shenouda III (r. 1971–2012), their right hands raised in salute. Flanked by Bishop Ermia, they represented the Congolese Defense Ministry at the Coptic Cultural Center in Cairo. Their tribute symbolised Pope Shenouda's enduring influence in the Coptic Church and his role in expanding its presence globally.<sup>1</sup> By some counts, the Patriarch established 550 churches in 60 countries and undertook 102 pastoral visits to 38.<sup>2</sup> Once largely centred in Egypt, the Church is now represented in locales as diverse as Bogotá, Cleveland, Seoul, and St. Kitts.

This little-noted transnational picture contrasts with prevailing historiographies that frame the Coptic Church as a distinctly Egyptian institution. Western scholarship frequently portrays the Church as operating within a self-contained communal sphere, itself delimited by the political boundaries of the Egyptian

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- 1 Acknowledgements: I thank the participants of the “Rewriting Global Orthodoxy” conference (Radboud University, September 2022) and its convenor Heleen Murre-van den Berg for their feedback on an early version of this paper. During this period, the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (IvOC) at Radboud University hosted me as a Research Fellow. My research was also made possible through the online collections of [coptic-treasures.com](https://www.coptic-treasures.com). Later, I benefited from the comprehensive collections at [copticorthodox.church](https://www.copticorthodox.church). All Arabic words and names are transliterated, except for well-known figures and organisations. To improve readability, full transliterations are provided in the footnotes only. Jirjis Mäykal, “Wafd Wizārat al-Difā’ al-Künghūli yu’addi al-taḥīya al-’askariya li-mujassam Muthallat al-Rahmāt al-Bābā Shanūda,” *Wataninet.com*, February 8, 2023, <https://www.wataninet.com/2023/02/الوفد-وزارة-الدفاع-الكونغولي-يؤدي-التحية>. In this article, I use “Coptic Church” as a shorthand for the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is the primary focus of this study. Unless otherwise noted, the Coptic Catholic and Coptic Evangelical Churches are not considered.
  - 2 This data is taken from an infographic that the St. Athanasius and St. Cyril’s Theological School (ACTS) shared on its Facebook page in March 2023. See <https://www.facebook.com/actslibrary>. For other helpful data, see the articles “ishrūn kanisa fī Amrika ta’assasat mundhu 1958” and “al-bilād allati zārahā Qadāsāt al-Bābā wa-murāfiqūhu” in *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 39–40 (24 November 1989): 4–5. For a modern representation of Pope Shenouda’s legacy, along with a map of Coptic churches worldwide, see “Pope Shenouda III,” St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Cleveland, [stmarkcleveland.org](https://stmarkcleveland.org/pope-shenouda-iii/). <https://stmarkcleveland.org/pope-shenouda-iii/>.

nation-state.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Arabic-language historiography has tended to emphasise the Church's contributions to national life in ways that validate its patriotic commitments or affirm the harmony of Muslim-Christian relations.<sup>4</sup> Even in Late Antique and Medieval studies, terms like "the Egyptian Church" or "the Church of Egypt" – while capturing the Church's geographical and cultural ties to Egypt – risk casting it as a national church in ways that fail to account for its claims to catholicity and transregional authority.<sup>5</sup>

The dominant approach to the Coptic Church reflects a broader tendency to portray the Coptic community as insular and internally undifferentiated. In doing so, scholars often replicate a common shortcoming of state bureaucracies: the use of broad, static categories to describe what are, in reality, slippery social formations. Previously, scholars such as historian Paul Sedra and anthropologist Mina Ibrahim have critiqued this homogenizing impulse, yet much of the scholarship continues to constrain Coptic life within narrow analytical frameworks.<sup>6</sup> This is evident in the reliance on dyadic models, such as those of Coptic–Muslim, Church–state, and Church–missionary relations, that obscure the more contingent, multidirectional forms of exchange that have shaped Coptic life.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, these binary approaches have rendered Coptic history as the downstream effect of larger forces. Missionaries, for example, have been credited with "seed[ing]" a modern "Coptic cultural or ethnoreligious consciousness."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Coptic interfaces with the Egyptian state are frequently framed in mono-

3 See e.g. S. S. Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), as well as other works mentioned in this introduction.

4 See e.g. ʿAṭīq al-Bishrī, *al-Muslimūn wa-l-Aqbāʾ fi ʾitār al-jamāʿa al-waṭaniya* (Beirut: Dār al-Wiḥda, 1982) and Anṭūniyūs al-Anṭūnī, *Waṭaniyat al-Kanisa al-Qibṭiya wa-tārikhihā*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1995).

5 For a more extreme (if now unpopular) position, see W. H. C. Frend, "Nationalism as a Factor in Anti-Chalcedonian Feeling in Egypt," *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982): 21–38.

6 Paul Sedra "Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: Coptic Christian Communities in Modern Egyptian Politics." *Islam & Christian Muslim Relations* 10, no. 2 (1999): 219–35; Mina Ibrahim, *Identity, Marginalisation, Activism, and Victimhood in Egypt: Misfits in the Coptic Christian Community* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

7 For Coptic–Muslim relations, see al-Bishrī, *al-Muslimūn wa-l-Aqbāʾ*; Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*; Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*. For Church–missionary relations, see e.g. Heather J. Sharkey *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Paul Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (London; New York, NY: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011); Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, *Voyage en Haute-Egypte. Prêtres, coptes et catholiques* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2019). For Church–state relations, see Sebastian Elsässer, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mariz Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads: the Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2013).

8 Sharkey, *American Evangelicals*, 46, summarising Sedra's views in *Mission to Modernity*.

lithic terms as an “entente,” a “partnership,” or, conversely, as a “state within a state” in ways that flatten the varied configurations of political alignment and friction that take place on different levels across Church and state institutions.<sup>9</sup>

Today, the increasingly indisputable global character of the Coptic Church not only challenges assumptions about the Church’s insular identity but also raises important methodological questions. What might a history of the Coptic Church look like if written with attention to its cross-border relations? And to what extent is the Church’s reach beyond Egypt a distinctly modern phenomenon? This article draws on recent trends in global history to explore the diffuse and dialectical exchanges through which the Coptic Church has operated as a locally rooted institution with a universal Christian mission.<sup>10</sup> It argues that the Church has long been animated by a deeper mission captured by the concept of *al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya* (literally, “the Preaching of St. Mark”). Derived from the Greek *kerygma* (proclamation, preaching), the term conveys a historical vision rooted in the legacy of St. Mark the Evangelist, whom the Church remembers as its first founder and patriarch. More broadly, it evokes an ecclesial jurisdiction stretching from Alexandria into Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia. The canonical *History of the Patriarchs* – a medieval compilation of the biographies of the Coptic patriarchs, originally known as *Siyar al-Bi’a al-Muqaddasa* (Biographies of the Holy Church) – offers an important frame. Its introduction notes:

These patriarchs were the successors (*khulafa’*) of the father and missionary, Saint Mark the Evangelist, who preached the holy gospels and the good news of the Lord Christ in the great city of Alexandria, and in the clime of Egypt (*iqlim Misr*), and in the regions of Abyssinia and Nubia, and in

9 See e.g. Mariz Tadros, “Vicissitudes in the Entente between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the State In Egypt (1952–2007),” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 2 (2009): 269–287; Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*; Paul Sedra, *Copts and the Millet Partnership: The Intra-Communal Dynamics behind Egyptian Sectarianism*, *The Journal of Law and Religion* 29, no. 3 (2014), 491–509.

10 Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016). See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). In the study of Eastern Christianity, see especially John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “Connected Histories and Eastern Christianities,” *Pathways through Early Modern Christianities*, ed. Andrea Badea (Köln: Böhlau, 2023): 85–210; Bernard Heyberger, *Middle Eastern and European Christianity, 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Century Connected History*, Tr. M. Robitaille-Ibbett, Ed. Aurélien Girard, Cesare Santus, et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023). In Coptic history, see especially Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439–1822: the European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Pentapolis in the West which is also called Ifriqiya [“Africa”], and in the neighboring territories.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of *al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya*, which Hans Wehr Dictionary elegantly translates as “the Missionary Province of St. Mark,” has received little to no attention in scholarship, even as scholars have begun to reconsider the geography of the “Alexandrian Church.”<sup>12</sup> The concept is not only essential for understanding how the Coptic Church has imagined its authority within a wider Christian ecumene, but, I argue, it also offers a productive lens through which to reconsider the spatial and political imaginaries of Coptic Christianity as shaped by long-standing entanglements along the Red Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>13</sup>

I focus on *al-Kiraza* (“The Preaching”), the official periodical of the Coptic Orthodox Church (1965–today), which in the twentieth century energised this ecclesiological idea. Founded in 1965 by Shenouda (then Education Bishop) as the flagship journal of the Coptic Clerical College, it became the Coptic Church’s official mouthpiece in 1972 after Shenouda’s election as patriarch. This study focuses on the period from 1965 to 1989, during which the magazine was suspended three times: first in 1967, after tensions with then-Patriarch Kirolos VI (r. 1959–1971), and again in 1972 and 1981 amidst a rift between Pope Shenouda and President Anwar al-Sadat (r. 1970–1981).<sup>14</sup> The magazine’s turbulent publication history is but one indicator of its significance for modern Coptic history. In the 2000s, the historian s.s. Hasan observed that Pope Shenouda would spend hours reviewing issues line by line with his editorial staff.<sup>15</sup> Hasan, a rare commentator

11 B.T.A. Evetts, ed., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria: 1: Saint Mark to Theonas* (300), *Patrologia Orientalis*, Tome I (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), 7. I have mildly amended Evetts’ translation.

12 The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, ed. JM Cowan, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1994) 960. Joshua T. Georgy, “Fragmented Geographies: The See of Alexandria, Its Following, and the Estrangements of Modernity” (PhD. Diss, Columbia University, 2015).

13 For the nineteenth century context, see Johannes Makar, “That Knowledge May Flow: Coptic Intellectuals and the Making of Public Knowledge in Late Ottoman Egypt, ca. 1850–1900” (PhD Diss, Harvard University, 2025).

14 From the 1990s onward, its prominence gradually declined with the rise of the World Wide Web and satellite television, both of which significantly diversified Coptic media discourses. See in this regard the forthcoming work by Febe Armanios, *Satellite Ministries, The Rise of Christian Television in the Middle East* (Oxford/New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2025).

15 Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*, 128. Hasan points in particular to two columns: *Afkār Ra’awiya* (“Pastoral Reflections”) and *Šaftāt al-Ābā’ al-Kahna* (“The Fathers’ Column”), which, she argues, served as mechanisms of clerical discipline, describing the columns as a guide for future conduct and a warning to priests not to repeat the errors of their predecessors. However, *al-Kiraza* had been under Shenouda’s supervision since its inception, and it would seem incomplete to characterise the magazine based on only two columns. Moreover, as far as I’ve been able to corroborate, both columns addressed a broader range of issues, framed more in the spirit of pastoral counsel

on *al-Kiraza*, links Shenouda's editorial investment to his desire for ecclesial control and centralization.<sup>16</sup> This was partly true. *Al-Kiraza* adopted a pastoral voice directed inwardly toward the faithful, often leaving little room for dissent. Yet this editorial stance did not preclude outward engagement; on the contrary, the magazine simultaneously functioned as a platform through which the Church forged national and transnational relations, whether through its commentary on state policy, its outreach to other Christian communities, or its positioning within ecumenical networks.<sup>17</sup>

### Periodicals and the beginnings of *al-Kiraza*

In 1911, the Coptic historian Ramzi Tadrus likened periodicals to “a mirror of a nation's morals and customs.”<sup>18</sup> Tadrus, witnessing the rapid spread of print media, noted how periodicals shape the moral state of nations and, by extension, their prospects for progress or decline. In recent decades, scholars have probed further into the intersection of print media and nationalism. Famously, Benedict Anderson noted that the shared consumption of newspapers enabled otherwise

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than institutional surveillance. Hasan quotes the 1989 issues of Apr. 21 (17, no. 16), June 16 (17, no. 24), and Nov. 25 (probably, Nov. 24, 17 no. 39–40) of 1989. The author of *Afkār Ra'awiya* in 17, no. 16, p. 16, calls on priests to be strictly neutral and impartial when mediating martial conflicts. Bishop Anbā Binyāmīn advocates in *Afkār Ra'awiya* 17, no. 39–40 (24 Nov. 1989): 18, for the use of computers in facilitating the pastoral tasks of the church. The author of *Ṣafḥāt al-Ābā' al-Kahna* in 17, no. 24 (16 June 1989), 6–7, summarises Pope Shenouda's view on the election of new priests, stating that the process should involve the participation of the local parish devoid of pressure from either priests or lay individuals towards any candidate. However, it also emphasises the clergy's ultimate right to reject a candidate. None of the other articles I reviewed confirm the scandalising tone which Hasan underscores. *Al-Kirāza* 13, no. 7 (9 Aug. 1985) speaks of the importance of the church looking after those with disabilities; 13, no. 12 (13 September 1985) argues that a priest should care for his flock not superficially but with his heart. 13, no. 20 (8 Nov. 1985) reprimands parishioners who speak during church prayers. 13, no. 21 (15 Nov. 1985) speaks of how the priest (*al-rā'i*) should exert efforts toward the people, not the other way around. In later years the column was published less frequently. By contrast, an earlier column, “Odd are They” called out undesirable spiritual practices. For example, *al-Kirāza* 12, no. 30 (24 July 1981) censured priests who curse others. *Al-Kirāza* 11, no. 13 (28 Mar. 1985) questioned those who follow a path even if it leads to an impasse. *Ṣafḥāt al-Ābā' al-Kahna* offered more extensive discussions. 12, no. 36 (4 Sep. 1981) stressed the spiritual nature of the liturgy, calling out priests who perform liturgical prayers routinely without care for its sacred (*rūḥānī*) character.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> It is not clear when (and where exactly) *al-Kirāza* began to be distributed overseas. However, its earliest issues indicate an intention to reach readers abroad, listing two separate prices: one for readers in Egypt (40 milliemmes, later raised to 50), and another for international readers (50, then 100 milliemmes). Compare the price listings in *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 2 (February 1966) and 1, no. 3 (March 1966); the international prices were omitted in subsequent years. Beyond official distribution networks, the magazine also circulated informally by means of Coptic travellers and migrants.

<sup>18</sup> Ramzi Tadrus, *al-Aqbāl fī l-qarn al-īshrin*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭba'at Ra'amsīs, 1911), 140.

anonymous readers to “imagine” themselves as members of a shared nation.<sup>19</sup> In Anderson’s view, the modern nation displaced earlier forms of communal belonging rooted in the “divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.”<sup>20</sup> The case of *al-Kiraza* suggests that, in some contexts, older metaphysical and communal imaginaries persisted – and were even revitalised – through the very print technologies that he associates with the rise of nationalism.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the nation-state, with its apparatuses of territorial display (ranging from maps to passports) the Coptic Church’s kerygmatic imagination was rooted in the logic of apostolic succession and martyrology. Periodicals, and the press more broadly, would play a key role in connecting readers horizontally as a *comunitas* of co-religionists whilst embedding them vertically in an ecclesiastical hierarchy that traced its lineage back to the apostles. Early efforts to establish a Coptic religious press included Yusuf Manqariyus’s *al-Haqq* (est. 1894) and Habib Girgis’s *al-Karma* (est. 1904). Manqariyus and Girgis, the first and second deans of the Coptic Clerical Seminary, respectively, found in the press a pedagogical instrument with which to cultivate a modern Orthodox readership. Thus, *al-Haqq* (“The Truth”) declared, its goal was the promotion “the principles of faith” among the “Orthodox Copts in the Nile Valley.”<sup>22</sup> In *al-Karma* (“The Vine”), Girgis expanded the institutional function of the press, making his journal the first official mouth-piece (*lisan hal al-Kanisa*) of the Coptic Church.<sup>23</sup>

This investment in the periodical press as a tool of religious instruction found renewed expression the mid-twentieth century through *al-Kiraza*. Building on the didactic foundations of earlier periodicals, it narrated Coptic ambitions for global belonging and evangelism. Its very title, *al-Kiraza*, invoked the Church’s age-old apostolic mandate, amplified by the words from Mark 16:15 that featured on its cover page alongside global imagery, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach (*ikrizu*) the gospel to every creature” (κϿν). *al-Kiraza* grounded this editorial vision through frequent reports on the Church’s international dealings with refer-

19 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

20 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

21 See also the case of the Assyrian magazine *Light from the East* in Heleen Murre-van den Berg, “Light from the East (1948–1954) and the De-territorialisation of the Assyrian Church in the East” *Religion Beyond Its Private Role in Modern Society*, ed. by Wim Hofstee and Arie Van der Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 115–134. The author argued that the journal allowed its Church leadership to redefine its ecclesiology by taking “[its new] transnational context into account [...] focusing on the malleable links between Christian history, church and language.”

22 *al-Haqq* 1, no. 1 (28 April 1894): 1.

23 For more about *al-Karma*, see Rāmī ‘Āṭā Ṣiddīq, *Ṣafḥāt al-Aqbat wa-Qaḍāyā al-Mujtama‘ al-Miṣrī* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A‘lā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2009), 302.

ences to patristic and hagiographic exemplars, like those of St. Athanasius, who, it reminded readers, helped disseminate Christian monasticism worldwide, or of saints like Verena, whose memory is tied to the Christianization of Europe.<sup>24</sup>

Habib Girgis' example proved especially enduring.<sup>25</sup> As the founder of the Coptic Sunday School Movement, he expanded religious education to broader segments of the laity. Among his students was Shenouda III (then Nazir Gayyid), who rose to prominence as a Sunday School teacher known for delivering rousing and accessible lessons to an increasingly urban audience.<sup>26</sup> The Sunday School also offered him formative editorial experience: in the 1950s, still as Nazir Gayyid, he served as Chief Editor of its flagship publication, *Majallat Madaris al-Ahad* (The Sunday School Magazine), which emphasised spiritual instruction and the preservation of Orthodox identity. In 1965, Shenouda carried forward this vision in *al-Kiraza*. Its inaugural issue noted:

When we work, we do so for the sake of our Lord alone. We will place before us the lives of our Fathers the Saints, their sweet-scented biographies and sayings. We do not subscribe to innovative beliefs; [rather,] we shall proceed on the firm foundations which the Forefathers laid before us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We shall reject every person whose teachings contradict ours, and we will call on the people to reject them [too].<sup>27</sup>

More so than contemporary periodicals like *al-Haqq* or *al-Karma*, *al-Kiraza* exhibited a reformist bent. Its founding followed Shenouda's appointment three years earlier as the first Bishop of Christian Education and as Dean of the Coptic Clerical College. These positions afforded him new institutional authority, which he quickly mobilised toward political change. The magazine's first issue, for instance, featured an editorial calling for the reform of episcopal election laws, one of several interventions in ecclesiastical governance that would soon lead to open disagreement between Shenouda and the reigning patriarch, who ultimately suspended the magazine in 1967 (see Table 1).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> This issue is dealt with eloquently in Ghada Botros, "Religious Identity as an Historical Narrative: Coptic Orthodox Immigrant Churches and the Representation of History," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19, no. 2 (2006): 174–201.

<sup>25</sup> *al-Kirāza* celebrated his legacy in its first issue, featuring his profile on the back cover as the first instalment in a broader series on exemplary preachers (*kārizin*). See *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 1 (January 1965): 54 (backcover).

<sup>26</sup> Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*, 222.

<sup>27</sup> *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 1 (January 1965): 2.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 12–14. See *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 2 (Feb–Mar. 1965): 46–51. See also Rubīr al-Fāris, "Majallat al-Kirāza... Sawt al-Bābā wa-l-Kanīsa ṭiwāl 48 'āman," *al-Masry al-Youm*, Mar. 25, 2013,



During its early years (1965–1967), *al-Kiraza* retained many of the features of a traditional church review like *al-Karma*. Though it had begun to turn attention toward global ecumenical matters and evangelism, its primary function was scholarly, in alignment with its function at the Coptic Clerical College. Its early volumes appeared with plain layouts and little to no visual embellishment. Each monthly issue ran over 40 pages and featured religious essays and serialised commentary in accessible Arabic, primarily directed toward seminarians and fellow clergy.<sup>29</sup> Throughout this period, the magazine was printed at the press of Dar al-‘Ālam al-‘Arabi, which also produced historical and religious works by Coptic and other Egyptian authors.<sup>30</sup>

In 1972, the magazine reemerged in a new form, transformed at the newly elected Pope Shenouda’s direction into the official publication of the Coptic Church. Now printed on-site at the patriarchal headquarters in Cairo, the magazine adopted the style of a tabloid-style bulletin, filled with photographs and short, accessible entries designed to foster lay readership and participation.<sup>31</sup> In form and content, it stitched together the global and the local, the personal and the institutional. Two principal themes characterise this drive for cohesion and communal integration across scales. On the one hand, the magazine frequently reported on *ijtima’at* (gatherings), a term that described social events ranging from ecumenical meetings to local church get-togethers. While the latter positioned the church within the upper echelons of global Christianity, the latter, often written in an affective register, cultivated a sense of collective belonging within the community.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the church periodical channelled pastoral leadership by documenting clerical visits (*ziyara*, *iftiqad*), ranging from mission work and overseas patriarchal trip to Coptic priests’ travels to remote Egyptian parishes.

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<https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/298016> For more about the disagreements which involved the appoint of Anba Gregorius as Bishop of Higher Education, see Bītar Majdi, “Muwājahat al-Akādīmī wa-l-Bābā: Ḥalaqa jadīda min musalsal ṭawīl,” *al-Manassa*, Mar. 6, 2021, <https://manassa.news/stories/4966>. The tensions between Shenouda and other leading clergy are studied in detail by Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 2 (February 1966).

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Sīdārūs ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, *Maryam al-‘Adhrā’ fī-l-Tārīkh al-ṭuqūs wa-l-‘aqīda* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-‘Ālam al-‘Arabi, 1974).

<sup>31</sup> This was the Anba Ruways Press.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, it spoke in the first-person plural, referring warmly to “our Church” (*kanīsatunā*) and “our Egypt” (*miṣruna*). At times, it even addressed its readers personally. To cite one example, in May 1989, it publicly thanked (the Coptic scholar) Maged Ateya of Maryland, one of “our sons” (*ibnunā*), for sending a magazine covering the history of the church in Australia. See *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 21 (26 May 1989): 3. The magazine further fostered a sense of reciprocal communication through a reader letters column and a question-and-answer segment, as well content designed to include children such as riddles and school reports.



By translating clerical authority into an accessible, popular idiom, the magazine rendered itself legible, and at times, suspect. Typographically, it echoed conventions of *Nahda*-era Arabic print culture, with serialised essays, calligraphic headers, and multi-column layouts.<sup>33</sup> Its visual iconography drew inspiration from mid-century Protestant magazines, overlaid with Arabic calligraphy and Coptic-styled pictograms adapted to fit the aesthetics of Coptic life. Its content, in turn, adopted the journalistic conventions of Coptic newspapers like *Watani* ("My Homeland") and the national daily *al-Ahram* ("The Pyramids"). The very idea that the Church required an official mouthpiece – capable of reporting Holy Synod decisions and shaping its public profile – mirrored the logic of the Egyptian state gazettes.

### Religious outreach in an anti-colonial age

*Al-Kiraza* emerged with the aim of serving as the Church's "voice to the world,"<sup>34</sup> and projected the Coptic Church's growing global presence and ambitions for international leadership. The timing of its establishment was auspicious. It was founded at the time of the 1965 Addis Ababa conference, which brought together the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Indian, and Syriac Orthodox Churches in a landmark show of pan-Oriental unity.<sup>35</sup> Other ecumenical initiatives were also underway, including the World Council of Churches (est. 1948) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (est. 1958). Meanwhile, Pope Shenouda periodically dialogued with Eastern Orthodox leaders and the Vatican.<sup>36</sup>

The push for Christian unity resonated with broader geopolitical currents. *Al-Kiraza* offered a Coptic vision of Third Worldism, framing the Church's international outreach as part of a broader struggle against colonialism and foreign domination. The magazine articulated biblical critiques of Israel and later con-

33 This illustrated format echoed earlier Coptic magazines like *Mār Jirjis* (est. 1949) but also resembled literary magazines as seemingly unrelated as the Lebanese cultural periodical *al-Barā'im* (based on its 1963 issues). For more about the mobility of visual culture in printing, see Hala Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity: Book Culture and the American Press in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

34 Sharif al-Dawākhili, *Majallat al-Kirāza: Sawt li-l-Kirāza, al-Masry al-Youm*. Apr. 16, 2018. <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1282064>

35 See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 2–3 (Jan.–Feb. 1965), 9–21. See also, Stanislaw Paulau's contribution in this volume, titled, "Addressing a Global Audience: The Ethiopian Orthodox Textual Tradition in the Context of the Early Ecumenical Movement."

36 Despite these gestures of inter-Christian solidarity, however, *al-Kiraza* consistently affirmed the distinctiveness of the Coptic Church. For instance, when the question of standardizing major feast days arose in 1967, it insisted that ecclesial unity (*tawhid al-kana'is*) need not entail uniformity. See *al-Kirāza* 3, no. 1–2 (Jan.–Feb. 1967): 4.

tinued to uphold the Palestinian cause.<sup>37</sup> It also aligned itself with the independence movements sweeping the African continent, portraying the Coptic Church as a native institution poised to support Africa's decolonization. It emphasised the Church's African origins and called on Africans to reject the influence of the "white man" by embracing a Christian tradition indigenous to Africa.<sup>38</sup>

The Copts were not alone to seize on the anti-colonial moment. At the Addis Ababa conference, as *al-Kirāza* reported, Oriental Orthodox leaders affirmed a shared commitment to evangelism (*kiraza*).<sup>39</sup> Other Eastern Churches also expanded their reach in Africa. Notably, the Greek Orthodox Church, which, like the Copts, had long claimed jurisdiction over the See of Alexandria and its African domain, established an archbishopric in Tanzania in 1956.<sup>40</sup> During the same period, Cairo's al-Azhar University launched its own Mission City (*Madinat al-Bu'uth al-Islamiya*), aimed at spreading Islamic teachings across Sub-Saharan Africa, while 'Abd al-Nasser proclaimed to liberate "the dark continent."<sup>41</sup> These anti-colonial ambitions, though couched in the language of liberation and unity, were shadowed by deeper ambivalences. Institutions like the Egyptian government or the Coptic Church that had long been the objects of imperial and missionary overtures now recast themselves as caretakers of a continent-wide renewal, at times mirroring the civilisational logics they ostensibly opposed.<sup>42</sup>

37 See e.g., *al-Kirāza* 3, no. 7 (Sep. 1967): 12. In the 1970s, the paper continued to stress that a Palestinian homeland would be a fundamental necessity, followed by a return to the boundaries of 1967. See *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 21 (27 May 1977): 3. The magazine also dedicated great attention to visits by Yasser Arafat to the Pope in 1985 and 1986. *al-Kirāza* 13, no. 21 (15 Nov. 1985) and 14, no. 4 (Apr. 1986). The use of Christian imagery in the struggle against Israel was echoed by Muslim figures. See e.g. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥafīz's Passion-inspired song *al-Masīḥ* (Christ), written by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Abnūdī and performed first in London in 1968. A later rendition is available on Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke-TOL-NefA>

38 *al-Kirāza*, 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1965): 15–21. Later, *al-Kirāza* referred to Pope Shenouda as an "African Pope" (*al-Baba al-Ifriqi*). *al-Kirāza* 10, no. 43 (26 Oct. 1979): 1. The underlying theme of African originality is addressed in John W. de Gruchy, "From Cairo to the Cape: The Significance of Coptic Orthodoxy for African Christianity." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 99 (1997): 24–39.

39 *al-Kirāza* 3, no. 1 (January 1965): 19. It announced the founding of a missionary institute in Addis Ababa, jointly operated by the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

40 John N. Njoroge, "Missiological Context of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa: Missiological Context." *International Review of Mission* 106 (2017): 356–368. For more about Coptic-Greek relations, see Makar, "That Knowledge May Flow."

41 Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, Book 1 (Cairo: Mondiale Press, 1955), 54. Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir, *Falsafat al-Thawra* (Cairo: Madbūli, 2005), 59. President 'Abd al-Nasser's established a Committee of African Affairs (under the Ministry of Finance) and a Department of African Affairs (under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in 1956. Chanfi Ahmed, "Islamic Mission in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Perspectives of Some 'Ulamā' Associated with the Al-Azhar University (1960–1970)," *Welt Des Islams* 41, no. 3 (2001): 348–78.

42 Compare, for example, 'Abd al-Nasser's description of Egypt's responsibility in Africa and its Islamic civilization with *al-Kirāza*'s articulation of a Coptic duty toward the continent. 'Abd al-Nāsir, *Falsafat al-thawra*, 79; *al-Kirāza*, 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1965): 15–21.

The Coptic Church portrayed its outreach in Africa as the reaffirmation of its apostolic mandate. *Al-Kiraza* named St. Mark an African and spoke of the Church's historic responsibility toward the peoples of the continent,<sup>43</sup> a framing that had several precedents across the twentieth century. In 1908, at the request of Emperor Menelik II, the Copts established a school in Ethiopia that strengthened its institutional presence in the country. In 1912, Fr. Murqus Sarjiyus founded an Arabic-language periodical in Sudan titled *al-Manara al-Murqusiya* ("St. Mark's Beacon") with the aim of promoting Coptic teachings.<sup>44</sup> A more programmatic expression followed in 1944, when the earlier-mentioned Habib Girgis published his treatise *Practical Means for Coptic Reform*. There, he called for the restoration of the Church's traditional jurisdiction, offering an evocative image of his soul soaring across *al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya*, the Missionary Province of St. Mark:

One summer night, just before the break of dawn, I [dreamt that] I became a soul freed from matter, able to wander at will [...]. In but a moment, I traversed all corners of Saint Mark's Missionary Province (*al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya*): from Alexandria in the north to Sudan in the south. From Sudan, I passed through Ethiopia, and from there continued to Eritrea [...]. Everywhere I went, I encountered the concerns of my Coptic nation. Since I was already familiar with its condition, this vision did not weary me. The ailments afflicting the Church [...] became starkly clear to me, as did the obstacles that stood in the way of true reform.<sup>45</sup>

Girgis's dream vision sought to revitalise an ancient legacy, but the Church's twentieth-century activities would go well beyond this scope. Under Pope Kirolos VI (r. 1959–1971) and later Shenouda III (r. 1971–2012), the Church expanded its proselytising efforts across Africa and later into Asia, Latin America, and within diasporic contexts. To this end, the newly established Higher Institute of Coptic Studies began offering courses in African studies and evangelism.<sup>46</sup> In South

43 *al-Kirāza*, 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1965): 15–21; 6, no. 1 (3 January 1975): 3.

44 The priest, Hegumen Murqus Sarjiyūs, also played a prominent role in the 1919 Revolution. An earlier magazine, *al-Sudān*, was published by As'ad Yassā al-Massāh, who was likely a Copt as well. These are among the earliest known Arabic journals to have been published in Sudan. See Filūthā'us Faraj, *Aqbāt al-Sūdān* (s.n., 2008).

45 Habib Jirjis, *al-Wasā'il al-'amaliya li-l-uṣlāḥāt al-Qibṭiya: āmāl wa-aḥlām yumkin taḥqīquhā fī 'ashara a'wām* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Tijāriya al-Ḥadītha, 1942), 1.

46 See Batriyarkiyat al-Aqbāt al-Urthūdhuks, *al-Ma'had al-'Āli li-l-Dirāsāt al-Qibṭiya* (Cairo: Dār al-Jil li-l-Ṭibā'a, 1968), 31–2. Habib Girgis, too, had advocated the study of Ethiopic languages in Coptic theological education to reinforce the Church's bonds with Ethiopian Christians. Jirjis, *al-Wasā'il al-'amaliya*, 86. Also see Iris Habib al-Miṣrī, *Qiṣṣat al-Kanisa al-Qibṭiya Tārikh al-Kanisa al-Urthūd-*

Africa, some 400 families joined the Church already during Kirolos's papacy. Writing in the 1960s, historian Edward Wakin observed: "Their services are in Coptic, their sermons in Bantu and Zulu, their chief priest a Coptic monk."<sup>47</sup> Soon thereafter, the Church attracted followers in Kenya and Uganda, and in the 1970s it established the Bishoprpic of African Affairs that institutionalised its presence.

Yet this outward expansion also coincided with a moment of internal reckoning. Even as *al-Kiraza* promoted an image of pan-African belonging, it also – more quietly – faced the uneasy legacy of the Coptic Church's centuries-long ecclesiastical dominance in Ethiopia. In 1959, the long-standing Ethiopian frustrations over Coptic oversight and restricted autonomy finally ushered in the formal granting of autocephaly to the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church. A decade later, *al-Kiraza* downplayed the rupture it had caused, framing Coptic-Ethiopian relations as an ongoing familial bond.<sup>48</sup>

## National unity?

*Al-Kiraza's* reporting on inter-Christian affairs reflected a Coptic search for shared belonging that transcended their fragile existence in Egypt. This impetus became more pertinent following *al-Kiraza* re-instatement in the 1970s amidst a wave of sectarian violence. Following its hiatus from 1967–1972, the journal declared its commitment to continuing "to declare the will of God and defend the faith."<sup>49</sup> The message served as an omen of tension to come with Egypt's new president, Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat (r. 1970–1981).

As Shenouda ascended to the papacy in 1971, Egypt was in the midst of broad changes. Sadat had initiated a "corrective revolution" aimed at reversing the pol-

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*huksiya al-Miṣriya alattī assasahā Mār Murqus al-Bashīr*, Vol. 7 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Maḥabba, 1988), 49. Central to this initiative was Makary El-Souryani, a monk who was consecrated in the early 1960s as Bishop Samuel, the first Coptic Bishop of Ecumenical Affairs. A close advisor to Kirolos VI, he earned a Master's in Christian Education from Princeton Theological Seminary, where he wrote a thesis that addressed Coptic evangelism in places as far and wide as Ireland and India. In the 1940s, he had worked as a teacher in Ethiopia. See Makary El-Souriany, "Ancient and Contemporary Christian Education in the Coptic Church of Egypt" (MRE Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1955), 34–39. A copy of the thesis can be accessed here, <https://accot.stcyriels.edu.au/bsam-thesis/>. See also a photo of El-Souryani pointing to a map of Africa in Wakin, *Lonely Minority*, plate 8 (inserted between pp. 102–3).

47 Wakin, 173–4. According to ʾĪris Ḥabīb al-Miṣrī, the Coptic Patriarchate had already in 1949 received a request from South Africans during Apartheid rule to come under the Church's care. See ʾĪris Ḥabīb al-Miṣrī, *Qiṣṣat al-Kanisa al-Qibtīya Tārīkh al-Kanisa al-Urthūdhukiya al-Miṣriya alattī assasahā Mār Murqus al-Bashīr*, Vol. 7 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Maḥabba, 1988), 49.

48 For example, it portrayed the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in affectionate terms as a faithful "son of the Coptic Orthodox Church." See *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 26 (27 June 1975): 1. See also, *al-Kirāza* 4, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1972): 69.

49 *al-Kirāza* 4, nos. 4–6 (June–Aug. 1972): i (not numbered).

icies of his predecessor. He pursued economic liberalisation and, more importantly for Copts, promoted public religiosity in ways that privileged Islamic identity in national life. In public, Sadat's uncomfortable relationship with Egypt's largest religious minority was carefully managed under the banner of national unity (*wahda wataniya*).<sup>50</sup> On the ground, a different reality rang true. Just a year earlier, Sadat had amended the Egyptian Constitution to enshrine the principles of Islamic law (*al-Shari'a al-Islamiya*) as "a principal source of legislation."<sup>51</sup> The change in legislation precipitated rising sectarian tensions that ushered in a wave of anti-Coptic attacks. Only a few months later, in August 1972, *al-Kiraza* ceased publication for 26 months.<sup>52</sup>

The journal itself appears to offer no context to the suspension, but it is likely that *al-Kiraza* was halted because of political pressures, particularly given the growing friction between the Church and the state. The timing of the journal's return to publication in October 1974 is no less significant, as it resumed almost exactly one year after the outbreak of the October 1973 War with Israel, which provided a convenient pretext for the mending of relations between Shenouda and Sadat. *Al-Kiraza's* inaugural issue that year (5 October 1974) took the opportunity to celebrate Sadat as a military "hero" (*batal*),<sup>53</sup> while *al-Ahram* anticipated the return of *al-Kiraza* with a note asking God to preserve the magazine for the benefit of the Church and the nation.<sup>54</sup> This triadic relationship between Church, state, and media became increasingly visible in the years that followed, particularly as Pope Shenouda III traveled to the United States, garnering international attention and meeting with President Jimmy Carter. During this time, Sadat appeared in *al-Kiraza* with expressions of goodwill toward the Copts.<sup>55</sup> In other issues,

<sup>50</sup> The cover page of *al-Kirāza's* second (and final) issue of 1972 featured a photograph of Pope Shenouda standing alongside Sadat, Vice-President Husayn al-Shafi'i, and the Shaykh of al-Azhar Muhammad al-Fahham, with the caption proclaiming national unity. Ibid, i (not numbered).

<sup>51</sup> Article 2 of the 1971 Constitution reads, "Islam is the state religion, the Arabic language is its official language, and the principles of Islamic law are a principal source of legislation. See "Dustūr Jumhūriyat Miṣr al-'Arabīya," *al-Jarida al-Rasmiya* 14 (12 December 1971): 2.

<sup>52</sup> The surviving copies of *al-Kirāza* jump directly from 1972 (vol. 4) to 1974 (vol. 5), with no apparent issues for 1973. For 1972, I have identified only two combined issues: one for January–March (nos. 1–3) and another for June–August (nos. 4–6), with no for April and May 1974. Although the 1972–1973 hiatus is confirmed by the magazine's volume numbers, it not mentioned in *al-Kirāza's* own historical genealogy, "Majallat al-Kirāzah khamsūn 'āman min al-mutābi'ah wa-l-'atā' wa-l-tanwīr (1965–2022)," *alkirazamagazine.com*, January 28, 2022, <https://www.alkirazamagazine.com/ArticleDetails.aspx?ArtID=4098&IssueID=226&LanguageID=1>.

<sup>53</sup> *al-Kirāza* 5, no. 1 (5 October 1974): 1.

<sup>54</sup> *al-Ahrām* (4 October 1974): 7.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 6 (11 Feb. 1977); 1; 8, no. 21 (21 Oct. 1977): 1; 10, no. 4 (26 Jan. 1979): 1; 10, no. 19; 10, no. 15 (13 April 1979): 1; 10, no. 20 (18 May 1979): 1. The latter dovetailed with growing attention to the Camp David Accords. See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 10, no. 11 (16 March 1979): 1.

*al-Kiraza* reported gratefully on the President's donation toward the construction of a churches, even as securing building permits for churches in Egypt remained fraught with difficulty.<sup>56</sup>

A deeper rift between Shenouda and Sadat became increasingly apparent by the late 1970s. Sadat's introduction of new constitutional amendments, this time elevating Islamic law to "the principal source of legislation," dealt a serious blow to Christian-Muslim relations. Shenouda denounced the changes as the ultimate sign of the Copts' second-class citizenship and began using *al-Kiraza* as a platform for dissent. In 1979–1980, the magazine published a series of political demands and announced the Holy Synod's decision to cancel the annual celebrations of the Feast of the Resurrection.<sup>57</sup> As tensions escalated, Sadat exiled Shenouda to the Monastery of St. Bishoy in 1981. *Al-Kiraza* was suspended for a third time and remained defunct until its reinstatement in 1985 under Sadat's successor President Hosni Mubarak (r. 1981–2012), four years after his assassination at the hands of Islamist militants.

The protracted ban on *al-Kiraza* under Mubarak provides an indication of the paper's efficacy. When the journal finally reappeared in June 1985, its relaunch signaled the restoration of Shenouda's public standing. However, Egypt had once again changed, and so had the Coptic community. Perhaps most significantly, activists in diasporic communities had begun to assert themselves as political force in their own right: the "Coptic of the diaspora," or *Aqbat al-Mahjar*, as the Egyptian national press often referred to this increasingly disruptive force. Many

<sup>56</sup> *al-Kirāza* 11, no. 15 (11 Apr. 1985): 5. For comparable events, see the founding of a church in Tanta, described as a "national gathering" (*ijtimā' waṭani*) in *al-Kirāza* 5, no. 6 (6 Nov. 1974): 1–3. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 21 (21 Oct. 1977): 1 reports on the laying of a foundation stone for the St. Mark Hospital by President al-Sadat. The construction of churches has frequently served as a flashpoint in Coptic-Muslim relations, with Copts historically subject to severe restrictions. For an overview up to 2013, see Jason Brownlee, "Violence against Copts in Egypt," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Nov. 14, 2013, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2013/11/violence-against-copts-in-egypt?lang=en>.

<sup>57</sup> See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 10, no. 32 (1 Aug. 1979): 1 for a critique of the constitutional amendments expanding the role of Islam and Islamic law in Egyptian state affairs. Earlier, *al-Kirāza* had frequently spoken of "the Church's support (*ta'yīd*) for al-Sadat." See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 46 (14 Nov. 1975) and 8, no. 50 (16 Dec. 1977). For the announcement of the cancellation of the Resurrection service, see *al-Kirāza* 11, no. 15 (4 April 1980): 1. The same year, al-Sadat exiled Pope Shenouda, after which *al-Kirāza* came to be halted for a second time before reappearing in 1984. Later, the magazine also voiced critiques against the controversial Coptic theologian George Bebawy and the self-declared Patriarch Max Michel. See for instance *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 25 (23 Nov. 1989): 14. for a report on George Bebawy's admission to the Anglican Church. In *al-Kirāza* 13, no. 14 (27 Sep. 1985): 2, it warned against one Maksimūs (i.e. Max Michel, known as Bishop Maksimūs) who had adopted the title of bishop on false grounds (see "*inthīḥāl ṣiffat muṭrān*"). See also Rubir al-Fāris, *Majallat al-Kirāza... Ṣawt al-Bābā wa-l-Kanīsa ṭiwāl 48 'āman*, *al-Masry al-Youm*, Mar. 25, 2013. <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/298016>.

early emigrants, often well-to-do professionals, established active associations and a vibrant press that, grafted onto the associative life of earlier Christian Arab communities, drew international attention to religious discrimination in Egypt.<sup>58</sup>

The Coptic diasporic press built on the example of *al-Kiraza*, which it quoted on occasion; yet its editorial throughline conveyed a politically charged message that resonated less with the idiom of ancient martyrdom and more with the language of civil rights. In doing so, it rearticulated Coptic communal identity in ways that were often at odds with the domesticated posture of the Church under Mubarak. Unencumbered by Egyptian censorship, periodicals like *The Copts/al-Aqbāt* (New Jersey, est. 1974) and *Majallat al-Salam/Peace News* (Michigan, est. 1978) adopted a confrontational stance toward the Egyptian state. The bilingual *The Copts* mobilised political imaginaries that needed to strike a chord with Congressional representatives and other policymakers.<sup>59</sup> For instance, Coptic activists in 1979 capitalised on the aftershocks of the Iranian Revolution to frame the plight of Egypt's Christians within broader Western anxieties about Islamic fundamentalism and regional instability. This strategy resembled the tactics used by Sadat, who referred to "Iranian spies" to explain away the local roots of anti-Coptic attacks in Egypt.<sup>60</sup> On other occasions, he evoked the Lebanese civil war to liken the Copts to a potential "fifth column" akin to the (Christian) Phalangist factions in Lebanon.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> This can be gleaned from the commercials of Levantine and Chaldean-owned businesses and institutions that appeared in *Majallat al-Salam/Peace News*, alongside the contributions by Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean authors. See, for instance, an article on the "Assyrian National Question" in *Majallat al-Salām/Peace News* 7, [no. 5] (6 May, 1984): 3, and an interview with Patriarch Zakkā I of the Syriac Orthodox Church in *Majallat al-Salam* 8, [no. 1] (January 1985): 2. See also an article by the Chaldean Exarch Mar Ibrāhīm Ibrāhīm on the second-class citizenship of Middle Eastern Christians and a theological essay by the Chaldean priest, Fr. 'Imānū'il of the Sacred Heart Church in Detroit. *Majallat al-Salām wa-l-Nūr/Peace News* 8 (December 1985): 16–17. For more about the relationship between Arab communities in the Americas, see Michael Akladios, "Critical Events and the Formation of a Coptic Diaspora in North America Between al-Khanka and al-Zāwiya al-Hamra," in *Routledge Handbook on Middle Eastern Diasporas* (Abingdon/New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 57–59.

<sup>59</sup> *Majallat al-Salam/Peace News* as largely cut-and-paste production, reproducing content from other Arabic newspapers. A third paper, *al-Risāla al-Qibṭiyya/The Coptic Church Review* (published out of Lebanon, PA), is mentioned in *Majallat al-Salam* in its December 1985 issue. In Colorado, Evangelical Copts published a magazine title *Ṣawt al-Kirāza bi-l-Injil* ("the Voice of Evangelism"). For more about periodicals in North America, see also Akladios, "Critical Events," 59–62.

<sup>60</sup> Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*, 115–116.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



## Diasporic currents

The growing interest in missionary work preceded larger waves migration of Copts themselves out of Egypt.<sup>62</sup> When *al-Kiraza* first proclaimed its call “to go into the world,” it likely did not foresee the extent to which the Coptic diaspora would define that objective. In 1961, the Church established a parish in Kuwait, making it one of the first diasporic churches.<sup>63</sup> Church Historian Iris al-Masry described the event as “extending” the reach of the Church’s evangelical call (*imtidad al-Kiraza*).<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, Coptic priests began preparing for service overseas. One priest, Fr. Morqos Morqos would be dispatched to Toronto in 1965, where he founded St. Mark’s Church, as the first church in North America.<sup>65</sup> Later, he would become known as *Kariz al-Gharb* (The Evangelist of the West), modelled after St. Mark, *al-Karuz al-Maskuni* (the Universal Evangelist). Other priests served Coptic communities in Germany, the United States, and Australia. In many cases, they ministered to dispersed congregations, relying on makeshift spaces for liturgical services and requiring long travel between cities, emulating materially the peripatetic example of the Apostles.

Yet despite this early history of Coptic migration, it was only in the mid-1970s that *al-Kiraza* began to systematically cover events in overseas parishes. Initially sporadic, this coverage reflected a growing institutional awareness of the Church’s expanding global footprint. The growing attention to diasporic affairs, while shaped by changing demographics, may also have been informed by Pope Shenouda’s own 1977 visit to the United States. The magazine framed the papal visit in resonant terms as “breaking the walls of seclusion,”<sup>66</sup> with an opinion piece that likened St. Athanasius’ participation in the ecumenical councils and the role of Egyptian monasteries in the global spread of monasticism.<sup>67</sup> The trip also affirmed the Coptic pontiff’s rising stature abroad, with *al-Kiraza* eager to highlight American press coverage as well as acknowledgements from local church

62 In 1963, Edward Wakin still noted that “[u]nlike Armenians and Jews, the Copts have had little migration and no diaspora.” Wakin, *Lonely Minority*, 5.

63 Benjamin Daniel Crace, *Keeping the Faith in Exile: Kuwait-Coptic Orthodox Diasporic Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

64 al-Miṣrī, *Qiṣṣat al-Kanīsa al-Qibṭiyya*, vol. 7, 51.

65 Michael Akladios, “Competing Notions of Integration in Canada’s First Coptic Orthodox Parishes, 1971–1985,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 13 (Winter 2021): 79–91.

66 The piece was co-authored by Fr. Anṭūniyūs Rāghib and the Deacon Jūrj Ḥabīb. See *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 21 (27 May 1977): 3.

67 *al-Kirāza* 13, no. 21 (15 Nov. 1985). See also a comparable report on the opening of the first Church in the United Kingdom, during which visit Shenouda was reported to have met with local churches leader and Queen Elizabeth II. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 10, 6 (9 February 1979): 1.

leaders and political leaders.<sup>68</sup> To this effect, it dedicated no fewer than six issues to his travels, some supplied with appendices replete with photographs.<sup>69</sup>

By the late 1980s, reporting from the *mahjar*, or “lands of migration,” had become a prominent feature in the pages of *al-Kiraza*. The magazine now regularly included news from places as varied as Austria, Sudan, Cleveland, and Australia, alongside local reporting.<sup>70</sup> Columns like *Khawatir min al-Mahjar* (“Thoughts from the Diaspora”) further amplified the visibility of these far-flung communities. Combined with its regular reporting on papal audiences, the magazine presented an image of a Church that was global, interconnected, and in motion. In the words of the Coptic historian Ramzi Tadrus, *al-Kiraza* offered a “mirror” of a globalising church which, though progressively scattered, was strung together in the columns of *al-Kiraza*.<sup>71</sup>

The growing diaspora was both an asset and a liability that Shenouda had to manage.<sup>72</sup> At times, tensions between lay activists and clerical authorities in the diaspora spilled into the public sphere. In 1981, amidst Sadat’s visit to the United States, Coptic clergy and laymen sponsored competing full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, reflecting divergent visions of who spoke for the Copts in the diaspora.<sup>73</sup> In later years, *al-Kiraza* articulated

68 See *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 18 (6 May 1977): 2. This can be also gleaned from the newspaper clippings of American magazines that appeared in a book published on the occasion of Pope Shenouda visit. See al-Qummuṣ Ḡhabriyāl Amīn, *Ziyārat al-Bābā Shanūda al-Thālith li-iftiqād kanā’is Amrikā* (s.n., 1985), 27–72. A development of comparable gravity took place in 1989 when Pope Shenouda embarked on a 16-week-long trip, during which he visited 70 churches on three continents. In *al-Kirāza*, Bishop Serapion described Shenouda’s travels as marking a new era for the Coptic Church across “seven dimensions.” Shenouda’s travels, Serapion noted, signalled the ongoing renewal and growth of the church. Among other things, he complimented Shenouda’s attention to the pastoral needs of Coptic communities abroad whilst investing in the training of Coptic clergy-men through the establishment of new monasteries and clerical colleges. See *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 42 (22 Dec. 1989): 10–11.

69 *al-Kirāza* 8, nos. 16–21 (22 April–27 May 1977).

70 *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 21 (26 May 1989): 1.

71 The importance of such representational tools is easy to overlook, yet it played a vital role in sustaining a sense of belonging across distances. In a recent address, Metropolitan Serapion reflected on the early challenges of establishing a Coptic presence in the United States. He recalled that when Fr. Bishoy Kamel traveled to the U.S. in 1969 (as one the first Coptic clergy to do so) he brought with him a photograph of Pope Kirolos VI, since many in the diaspora could not form an image of their patriarch. See Metropolitan Serapion’s address “PATR 5035: History of The Coptic Patriarchs Part I with HE Metropolitan Serapion and Deacon Severus Mikhail,” Apr. 30, 2023, at <https://www.facebook.com/actslibrary>.

72 See Rajab al-Bannā, *al-Aqbāʾ fi Miṣr wa-l-Mahjar: Hiwārāt maʿ al-Bābā Shinūda* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿārif, 1998).

73 Akladios, “Critical Events,” 61. He notes, “In August 1981, priests across Canada and the United States bought a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*, stating that the Coptic community was praying ‘for the success of his [Sadat’s] peace mission for the Middle East’ (*The New York Times*, 1981a, p. B3). Diasporic organisations, for their part, purchased a full-page advertisement in

a vision of reciprocal responsibility between Copts in Egypt and those abroad. The magazine emphasised that diaspora communities continued to rely on the Church and faithful in Egypt for guidance and continuity. At the same time, it noted the vital role of churches in the *Mahjar* in preserving a distinctively Coptic environment, through the translation of religious texts, the establishment of clerical seminaries, and efforts to maintain strong ties with the Egyptian homeland, including through pilgrimage and educational travel.

In other issues, *al-Kiraza* leaned more heavily on the language of national unity, framing the Church as an extension of the Egyptian state. In 1989, the periodical described Pope Shenouda's visit to the United States, quoting Bishop Bula, as a "patriotic Egyptian mission" (*rihla Misriya wataniya*).<sup>74</sup> The issue emphasised the importance of Shenouda presenting Egypt to the world as "a nation of civilization and important history." He was said to have encouraged Egyptian-American children to take pride in their Egyptian heritage, even as they benefited from living in a "country of technology and science." He urged them to stay connected to Egypt by learning both Coptic and Arabic – "the language of Egypt" – and by visiting the country. The magazine described him as "a distinguished ambassador for Egypt" and stressed the importance of preserving Egyptian nationality alongside American citizenship.<sup>75</sup> *al-Kiraza* further claimed that the Pope never spoke of Egypt without invoking the broader Arab nation (*al-watan al-'Arabi*).<sup>76</sup> This multivocality was less a contradiction than a reflection of *al-Kiraza*'s role as both a pastoral organ of the Church and a platform through which the Church engaged non-Coptic publics while maintaining an appearance of cohesion.

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the Washington Post that accused the Egyptian President of lacking 'courage in handling the systematic assaults launched by Muslim fanatics against the Christians of Egypt', and called on him to put an end to 'state-sponsored fundamentalism' (The Washington Post, 1981, p. A20)...."

<sup>74</sup> *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 39–40 (24 Nov. 1989): 9.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

## Conclusion

Migration throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has profoundly reshaped what scholars once described as a singular Coptic community. A myriad of transnational networks now links Coptic communities from Iraq to Canada to Barbados. Today, remittances from Australia, Europe, the Gulf, and North America account for a considerable portion of Egyptian Copts' financial support.<sup>77</sup> In the realm of education, theological institutes and youth conferences now connect Copts to their heritage and to each other.<sup>78</sup> New technologies, too, have quietly connected believers across continents, helping preserve unity in liturgical practice.<sup>79</sup>

Divergence, however, still looms as a major risk. In both the United States and France, the Church has started to bifurcate along ethnolinguistic lines, with newly emerging "American" and "French" Coptic Orthodox Churches catering to a growing number of non-Egyptian and non-Arabophone parishioners.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, the rise of mission churches has meant that a variety of new musical influences have begun to transform traditional hymnody, thereby reshaping a core feature of Coptic liturgical life.<sup>81</sup> The Church's global growth catechises the

77 Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff and Liesl Riddle, *General Findings: Coptic Diaspora Survey* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2012). Available here, <https://copticorphans.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CopticSurveyWhitePaperReport2-2012.pdf>.

78 Such conferences are held across continents. See e.g., the Logos Coptic Youth Forum and Mahragan al-Kiraza (The Kiraza Festival). Prominent Coptic colleges and theological institutes in the diaspora include the St. Athanasius and St. Cyril Theological School (ACTS) in Newport Beach, CA, as well as St. Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College in Carlton, Australia. Elsewhere, initiatives such as the St. Clement School of Theology in Indonesia and the European Academy for Coptic Heritage (TEACH) offer theological education.

79 See, for example, the Coptic Reader, an app launched over a decade ago in the Diocese of the Southern United States. See "Coptic Reader," <https://suscopts.org/coptic-reader/>.

80 Samuel Tadros suggests that the church in North America may seek autocephaly. See Samuel Tadros, "Fight over Christmas Hints of Looming Coptic Schism," *Providence Magazine*, February 5, 2020, <https://providencemag.com/2020/02/fight-christmas-looming-coptic-church-schism-pope-tawadros/>. According to testimony by Fr. Anthony Messeh of St. Timothy & St. Athanasius Church in Arlington, VA, the establishment of the American Coptic Churches received the approval of Pope Shenouda, who initially "didn't fully understand the concept of what we were trying to do." See "A Lesson from our Departed Pope," *franthony.com*, March 18, 2016. <http://www.franthony.com/blog/a-lesson-from-our-departed-pope>. For more about the Coptic Church in the US, see Telushkin, Shira. *The Americanization of an Ancient Faith, The Atlantic*, March 31, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/coptic-church/555515/>. For more about the Coptic Church in France, see the article by Gaëtan du Roy in this volume, "Online Coptic Theology: A Comparison between French and British Websites."

81 See e.g. Coptic mission in Congo, *Facebook.com*, <https://www.facebook.com/Congo.coptic.mission/>. In other contexts, scholars have noted the growing popularity of Protestant-inspired autotune music, see Carolyn Ramzy, "Autotuned Belonging: Coptic Popular Song and the Politics of Neo-Pentecostal Pedagogies." *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 3 (2016): 434–58.

faithful to reflect on what it means to be Coptic in a transnational age.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, it poses an ecclesiological puzzle that raises questions about how the Church's ecclesial jurisdictions cohere in an organic conception of its community and church organisation. Indeed, as the Coptic Church becomes an increasingly "catholic" – that is, universal – institution, its global expressions will continue to change, most notably, perhaps, by the attendant challenge of maintaining unity in diversity.

Through a preliminary study of *al-Kiraza* in the period 1965-1989, I have argued that the magazine played a critical role in shaping the ecclesial identity of the Coptic Church in both local and transnational networks. While continuing the legacy of earlier Coptic periodicals, *al-Kiraza* distinguished itself by portraying the Church as an institution with a universal mission. To this end, it gave renewed force to the Coptic Church's "kerygmatic" ecclesiology. Though shaped by the context of post-1960s Egypt, the themes and strategies articulated in *al-Kiraza* echo longer trajectories in Coptic religious thought and political engagement. Taken together, these developments suggest that the history of the Coptic Church cannot be adequately understood within the confines of nation-state. Rather, it calls for a networked approach that attends to cross-border flows and the circulation of people, texts, and religious practices. Such an approach shifts the analytical focus away from conventional dyads – Coptic-Muslim, Coptic-state, Coptic-missionary, or more recently, Egypt-diaspora – and instead foregrounds the relational webs that have connected Coptic communities to one another and to wider Christian, Middle Eastern, and diasporic networks.

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82 For a critique, see Maged Atiya. "King of the Copts," *salamamoussa.com*, August 21, 2018. <https://salamamoussa.wordpress.com/2018/08/21/king-of-the-copts/>

## Tables

| Period                   | Frequency             | Coptic Patriarch                                  | Egyptian President                                                          | Notes                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jan. 1965–<br>July 1967  | Monthly               | Pope Kirillos<br>VI (1959–1971)                   | Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser                                                        | Occasionally two issues<br>combined                                                                                                  |
| July 1967–<br>Jan. 1972  | <i>Suspended</i>      | Kirillos VI (until<br>March 1971),<br>then vacant | 'Abd al-Nasser<br>(until Sept. 1970),<br>Anwar al-Sadat<br>(from Oct. 1970) | Suspension due to disagree-<br>ments between Bishop<br>Shenouda and Kyrillos VI                                                      |
| Jan. 1972–<br>Aug. 1972  | Once per<br>trimester | Pope Shenouda<br>III (enthroned<br>Nov. 1971)     | al-Sadat                                                                    | Only two issues released in<br>1972 (Jan.–Mar.; June–Aug.).<br>No issues were published<br>between April and May, or<br>after August |
| Aug. 1972–<br>Oct. 1974  | <i>Suspended</i>      | Shenouda III                                      | al-Sadat                                                                    | al-Sadat                                                                                                                             |
| Oct. 1974–<br>Dec. 1974  | Monthly               | Shenouda III                                      | al-Sadat                                                                    |                                                                                                                                      |
| Jan. 1975–<br>Sept. 1981 | Weekly                | Shenouda III                                      | al-Sadat                                                                    |                                                                                                                                      |
| Sept. 1982–<br>June 1985 | <i>Suspended</i>      | Shenouda III<br>(in exile 1981–85)                | Hosni Mubarak<br>(from Oct. 1981)                                           | al-Sadat deposes Shenouda<br>in 1981; in Jan. 1985,<br>Mubarak lifts restrictions                                                    |
| June 1985–<br>Jan.? 1986 | Weekly                | Shenouda III<br>(restored)                        | Mubarak                                                                     |                                                                                                                                      |
| Jan. 1986–<br>1988       | Monthly               | Shenouda III                                      | Mubarak                                                                     |                                                                                                                                      |
| 1988–1989                | Weekly                | Shenouda III                                      | Mubarak                                                                     |                                                                                                                                      |

Table 1: *Al-Kiraza*: Publication Frequency and Suspensions (1965–1989)

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