ISLAM allowed a subordinate, but well-defined, place in its society to those people possessing written scriptures, the so-called *Ahl al-Kitāb* or “People of the Book” who did not choose conversion to Islam. Idolaters and those not possessing written scriptures had only, in theory, the choice between Islam or death. The “People of the Book” are defined in the Qur’ān as the Jews, the Christians and the Šābians, the latter a mysterious group who have never been satisfactorily identified but who may have been a vestigial gnostic or dualist sect in Syria or Iraq. Accordingly, various peoples were able subsequently to claim that they were in fact the Qur’ānic Šābians and therefore entitled to the status and rights of the *Kitābis*. The best-known of these claimants are the so-called Šābians of Harrān in northern Syria, a group which preserved the beliefs of classical paganism for two or three centuries after the coming of Islam and which produced a remarkable number of famous scholars, above all, historians, mathematicians and physicians. The Zoroastrians of Persia, who came under Muslim rule after the conquest of Persia in the years after 635, successfully claimed in practice the position of “People of the Book”, even though their sacred books, making up the Avesta, were not fully committed to writing till the ninth century.

These non-Muslim “People of the Book” were allowed to dwell in peace among the Muslims, whereas perpetual and...
unrelenting holy warfare, *jihâd*, was prescribed for the Muslims against the polytheists outside the borders of Islam.\(^1\) However, the initial impetus of Arab expansion spent itself after a century or so, and it was obvious that the stark dichotomy of the *Dār al-Islām*, the “Land of Islam”, and the *Dār al-Ḥarb*, the “Land of War”, the latter under perpetual military attack, could not be maintained along hundreds or even thousands of miles of frontier. Classical Islamic law did not allow for definitive peace treaties with the “Land of War”, but the permissible truces could be lengthened into what were in effect lengthy periods of peace. An intermediate category of territories came to be recognized, the *Dār al-Amān* or *Dār al-‘Ahd*, “Land of guaranteed safe-conduct” or “Land of treaty relationship”, by means of which non-Muslim powers could agree to pay tribute to the Muslims whilst peacefully retaining their own faith.\(^2\) A classic example of this was Christian Nubia, the northern part of the modern Sudan Democratic Republic. The Arabs attacked Nubia soon after the overrunning of Byzantine Egypt, perhaps as early as 641 and certainly in 651. Some kind of non-aggression agreement followed, which brought peace and which provided for the Nubians to deliver slaves for the Arabs in exchange for corn, provisions and wine from Egypt. In the form of the treaty given by the Egyptian Mamlūk historian Maqrīzī eight hundred years later, the figure is put at 360 slaves per annum, of good quality and without defect, to be delivered to the Muslim governor of Aswan.\(^3\) This is the agreement generally known in Arabic sources as the *baqt*, a loanword from Latin *pactum* through Byzantine usage, where πάκτος was used for a compact involving mutual obligations and their connected payments; the *baqt* remained in force till the Mamlūk annexation of northern Nubia in the fourteenth century.\(^4\) Similar contractual relation-


\(^2\) See *EP*, art. “*Amān*” (J. Schacht).


ships existed in medieval Georgia between the Georgians and the Arabs and then the Seljuk Turks, and in the last stages of the Byzantine principalities of Constantinople and Trebizond. An offshoot of this intermediate status of amān or ‘ahd was the grant of security and safe-conduct to individuals for a specified period; this enabled diplomatic and commercial relations to be conducted between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds.¹

Our present concern, however, is with the two major components of the “People of the Book” (also called Ahl adh-Dhimma or Dhimmis “Protected Peoples”), the Christians and the Jews, who had entered into a protected relationship (dhimma, ill in Qur’ānic phraseology) with the Muslim state.² The status of the “People of the Book” had to be regulated almost from the birth of Islam. In his lifetime, the Prophet Muhammad came into contact in Arabia with communities of Jews in Medina and Khaibar in the Hijāz and with a large and flourishing Christian community at Najrān in the Yemen. A document, the so-called “Constitution of Medina”, has been preserved in late Arabic sources, and this recognizes the co-existence in Medina of the Muslim community and the Jewish one, possibly within one umma or territorial community, but certainly retaining their own din, i.e. law as well as religion. This constitution must, however, date from a period very soon after the hijra of 622, Muhammad’s migration from Mecca to Medina, perhaps only a few months after then.³ At this time, his relations with the Jews were amicable, since he hoped to secure recognition from the Jews of the essential continuity of the two faiths of Judaism and Islam, that he himself was the prophet for the Arabs foretold in the Jewish scriptures; when the Jews failed to

² The two relevant Qur’ānic references are ix. 8, 10; for the early development, within the Prophet’s lifetime, of the idea of dhimma, see C. E. Bosworth, “The Concept of dhimma in Early Islam”, Proceedings of the Conference on the Ottoman Millet System, Princeton 1978 (forthcoming). The term ill was overshadowed by the near-universal use of dhimma; the lexicographers subsequently defined ill as “an agreement for mutual protection, etc”.
³ For a discussion of the relevance of the “Constitution of Medina” to the question of dhimma, see Bosworth, op. cit. and the references there to the literature (Watt, Serjeant, etc.).
respond to this approach, relations were broken off, and shortly afterwards Muhammad took draconian measures against the three main Jewish tribes in Medina. The status of the Jews of the oasis settlement of Khai bar, to the north of Medina, was, however, of enduring validity for the period after Muhammad conquered the place in 628. When a policy of arabization throughout the Arabian peninsula was adopted by the second caliph, 'Umar, the Jews were expelled from Khai bar, but their descendants, the Khayâriba, still claimed certain rights and exemptions in Fāṭimid and Mamlûk Egypt, and these are mentioned as such by Arabic authors of those periods.

In 631 the Christians of the town of Najran made a treaty of protection (dhimma) with the Prophet, and various versions of it are preserved in both Muslim and Eastern Christian, above all Syriac, sources. It provides that the Arabs will protect the Christian religion and allow it to flourish, including the provision, contrary to later practice, that they will be able to repair and rebuild churches; also, that bishops and monks will be exempt from any capitation tax and that the non-religious Christian population will not have to pay more than twelve dirhams' tax per annum. What must have been a document of purely local application enjoyed a great renown in later times, being transformed into “the Prophet's Edict to all Christians” and then into “The Prophet's Edict to All Men”. Various Christian bodies eventually claimed to possess the actual document, allegedly written by Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin 'Ali or by his amanuensis Mu‘awiya, both of them future caliphs. As recently as 1909 the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate in Istanbul claimed to have discovered the original in its archives. The monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai possesses a copy of it dating from 1560, said to be made from the original brought by the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent to Istanbul. For a time, various European authors considered this document to be authentic; thus Sir Paul Rycaut reproduced it in his Present

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2 See Encyclopaedia Judaica, art. “Khaybar” (J. Braslowski).
State of the Ottoman Empire (1690) from an original ostensibly discovered on Mount Carmel. The document is, in fact, clearly the fabrication of some Eastern Christian priest, probably of the ninth century, concerned to give his co-religionists an advantageous position within Islamic society. The Eastern Christian sources specifically link it with the Nestorian Patriarch or Catholicos 'Ishóyab II, who is said to have extracted this agreement from the Prophet Muḥammad.¹

Of a similar apocryphal nature, at least in the form as given in the later sources, is the so-called “Covenant of 'Umar”’, supposedly made between the second caliph and the Dhimmis. Amongst its provisions, as given by various Arabic authors, are that the Dhimmis are guaranteed safety of life and property. They are not to construct any new churches, monasteries or synagogues, nor to repair old ones which have fallen into ruin. They are to offer hospitality to all Muslim travellers and to lodge them for three days. Spies are not to be concealed in religious buildings or in houses. The Qurʾān is not to be taught freely to Dhimmis, a curious provision when one recalls that Islam certainly became, if it was not originally, a proselytising religion; this prohibition must be a reflection of the feeling that the Islamic faith and its sacred book were nationally connected with the Arabs above all, and were not to be shared with other ethnic groups. Christianity and Judaism are not to be preached openly; crosses and copies of the non-Muslim scriptures are not to be carried through streets and markets frequented by Muslims; and Christians are not to hold public processions of Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. The wooden clappers or nāqūs, which in the Eastern Christian churches were used instead of bells to summon the faithful, are not to be beaten loudly. A story relating to the later Umayyad period says that the Arab governor of Iraq, Khālid b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qasrī (723 or 724-38), built a church at Kūfa for his Melkite Christian mother, and the congregation of this church used deliberately to bang the nāqūs violently when the muezzin of the adjoining mosque gave the call to prayer and to begin chanting loudly when the Muslim khatīb or preacher

¹See the extensive discussion of the document by A. Fattal, Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam (Beirut, 1958), 22-33.
began his sermon. Hence the Dhimmis are not to pray loudly in places frequented by Muslims, nor to bury their dead near to graves of the Muslims. They are to ride on asses, not horses. They are not to overlook the houses of the Muslims, and especially to overlook their womenfolk, from the tops of their own houses. The effects of these building prohibitions have been felt in certain isolated parts of the Islamic world up to the present century. In Ṣanʿā in the Yemen, the houses of the Jews were limited in height and were further restricted in the use of external decoration. In the region of Yazd in central Persia, the houses in Zoroastrian villages were, until recent decades, low, single-storey buildings, with covered-over central courtyards for easier defence against bandits and Muslim fanatics.

Above all, the Dhimmis are to distinguish themselves physically from the Muslims by wearing distinctive dress. In Islamic society, it was dress above all which indicated such things as social class, craft or profession, and religious affiliation. Frequently mentioned as part of the distinctive dress (ṣiʿār, ghīyār) prescribed for the Dhimmis is the special girdle, zūnūr (Greek ζώνυρον), but there seem also to have been distinctive patches on the shoulders of garments. Various shades of yellow, red and blue are mentioned for these, and it has been suggested that they were the origin of the badge of the Jews in the ghettos of medieval Christian Europe.

Finally, the Dhimmis are to pay the jizya or poll-tax, in what the Qurʾān apparently calls "humiliating circumstances".

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1 Ibid., pp. 185-6. G. R. Hawting, in his *EI* art. "Khālid b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḵasrī", points out that numerous traditions about Khālid's governorship stress his indifference, or even hostility, towards Islam.


5 ix. 29. The exact significance of this phrase, and the preceding one in the Qurʾān text, has been much discussed, but the general purport is clear: the
similar tax had probably been collected from the Jewish communities of Byzantium and the Sassanid Persian empire.\(^1\) It now became regularized as a tax exacted from all Dhimmis, with the initial exemption of certain classes such as priests and monks. In practice, these latter groups came to be liable for the jizya also, for in Coptic Egypt at least, people fled in large numbers to monasteries in order to claim exempt status. Because of tax-avoidance abuses, it became necessary to mark taxpayers with some kind of indelible stamp, this mark being considered as the “humiliating circumstances” prescribed by the Qur’an. Islamic law regarded the jizya as a “compensation”—the etymological meaning of the word—for the Dhimmis not having to serve in the military forces, which in earliest times were in fact the levée en masse of all free Arabs.\(^2\) Hence in Ottoman Turkey, the jizya lasted up to the Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century, when the state endeavoured to create for the first time a common citizenship for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Since in practice the Ottoman state did not want Dhimmis in its army, and the latter did not wish to serve in it, the jizya continued in another form as the bedel-i ‘askeri “payment in lieu of military service”.\(^3\)

\(\text{Dhimmis}\) will not be inexorably slaughtered, the fate awaiting obdurate pagans, but must in return for their preservation be subjected to a grudging, second-class status of citizenship within Islamic society.

\(^1\) The pre-Islamic antecedents of the jizya are discussed in Bosworth, “The Concept of dhimma in Early Islam”; for the Islamic practice, see Tritton, op. cit. pp. 197-228 (needs updating in the light of subsequent research; see EI\(^4\), arts. “Djizya. i.” and “Kharadži. i.” [Cl. Cahen]), and Fattal, op. cit. pp. 264-343. Goitein well demonstrates at various points in his monumental A Mediterranean Society, the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967-78) how hard the exactions of the poll-tax—apparently only small in absolute terms—bore on the oppressed and poverty-stricken Jewish communities of Egypt, see e.g. II. The Community (1971), pp. 380-94. On the poverty of the Copts, goaded on several occasions by financial exactions into rebellion, see Tritton, op. cit. pp. 144-5.

\(^2\) In reality, Christian Arabs, like those of the Taglib and Tanukh tribes in northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia, did serve in the Arab forces against the Persians and against the Byzantines on the Taurus Mountains frontier, and later Islamic legal authorities did on the whole allow the use of Dhimmis in auxiliary or specialist units of the army, provided that they were never used against rebellious Muslims (Tritton, op. cit. pp. 185-6; Fattal, op. cit. pp. 232-6).

\(^3\) It was not finally abolished till 1907, the eve of the Constitutional period in Turkey, see EI\(^8\), art. “Badal” (H. Bowen).
In fact, this so-called "Covenant of 'Umar" cannot date from only a decade or so after the Prophet’s death, but must be a later rationalization and systematization of piecemeal measures which grew up over the course of centuries and which were applied at various periods with differing degrees of severity and zeal. Thus the distinctive dress regulations seem to date from the time of the Abbasid caliphate. According to the historian Tabarî, in 807 Hārūn ar-Rashîd ordered churches in the Syrian frontier region to be demolished and commanded the governor of Baghdad to compel Dhimmîs to differentiate themselves from the Muslims in their dress and in their mounts. Some forty-three years later, the Caliph al-Mutawakkil prescribed what are called "honey-coloured" (‘asalî: yellowish-brown?) patches and turbans for the Christians to distinguish them from the white-clad Muslims. In Mamlûk Egypt and Syria in 1301, yellow turbans were stipulated for the Jews, blue for the Christian and red for the Samaritans. The earliest full version of the "Covenant of 'Umar" stems from the early ninth-century lawyer Shâfi‘î, a purely juridical consideration; other full statements, in historical contexts, are given in the twelfth-century Spanish Muslim author Ťurğûshî and the historian of Damascus Ibn ‘Asâkir.

Although protected by the covenant of dhimma, the "People of the Book" existed in the Islamic world only on sufferance, tolerated in large measure because they had special skills as physicians, secretaries, financial experts, etc. or because they fulfilled functions which were necessary but obnoxious to the Muslims or were legally discouraged, such as tanning, money changing, wine-making, etc. They were subject to many legal and social forms of discrimination. A Muslim might marry a Dhimmî wife, but not vice-versa, for this would put a believing woman into the hands of an unbeliever; for the same reason, a Muslim could own a Dhimmî slave, but not the opposite. The legal testimony of a Dhimmî was not admissible in a judicial suit.

1 The contribution of the "Protected peoples" to Islamic economy and society is well summarized by Mez, The Renaissance of Islam, pp. 32-58; for that of the Jews specifically, see also W. J. Fischel, Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Mediaeval Islam (London, 1937).

* Fattal, op. cit. pp. 129-34, 144.
where a Muslim was one of the parties, because it was felt that infidelity, the obstinate failure to recognize the true light of Islam, was proof of defective morality and of a consequent incapability of bearing legal witness. In the words of the jurist Sarakhsi, "the word of a dishonest Muslim is more valuable than that of an honest Dhimmi". On the other hand, the deposition of a Muslim against a Dhimmi was perfectly valid in law. It was further held by almost all schools of Islamic law (the Hanafi one being the exception) that the wergild or bloodmoney payable on the killing of a Dhimmi was only one-third or one-half that of a free Muslim.¹

It is surprising that, in the face of legal and social disabilities such as those outlined above, and in the face of a relentless social and cultural Islamic pressure, if not of sustained persecution, the non-Muslim communities survived as well as they did in medieval Islam. Under the stigma of worldly subjugation to another faith, inevitably viewed by many as a manifestation of divine displeasure, and cut off from ready access to sources of spiritual and cultural inspiration like Byzantium and Rome, standards of ecclesiastical discipline and clerical literacy amongst the Eastern Christian churches inevitably declined. Whenever a Dhimmi was in difficulties under the laws of his own community, he could generally escape by embracing Islam, thus putting himself outside the reach of his own legal system. We have several instances amongst even the higher clergy, when bishops or patriarchs of the Nestorian and Jacobite churches escaped the consequences of serious crimes like simony or unnatural vice by timely conversions to Islam.² In several parts of the Islamic world, such as North Africa and Nubia; Circassia, Daghistan and other parts of the northern Caucasus; and Persia and Central Asia, Christianity disappeared completely by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The predominantly urban Jewish

¹ Tritton, op. cit. pp. 178-81; Fattal, op. cit. pp. 113 ff., 344 ff.; EI², art. "Diya" (E. Tyan).

² L. E. Browne, The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia (Cambridge, 1933), passim; Mez, op. cit. pp. 32-33, who notes that similar happenings took place at the other end of the Islamic world, in Muslim Spain, for when the Roman Catholic Bishop of Elvira was in the ninth century deposed for evil living, he became a Muslim.
communities were more tenacious, and even in the Arabian peninsula itself, the medieval Arabic geographers mention Jewish communities in the settlements along the caravan route running southwards through the Hijāz, and in the Yemen, a significant Jewish community survived, in very repressive conditions, up till 1948. Nevertheless, in Egypt and Syria, the Christian communities have passed from being majorities in the early Islamic centuries to being distinct minorities in our own time.

That the Dhimmi communities survived at all was partly because some of them lived in inaccessible regions, like the Zagros Mountains around Lake Urmia, the Central Caucasus, Mount Lebanon or the marshlands of Lower Iraq; but also because, as was mentioned above, their particular skills and aptitudes made them useful to the Islamic state. In the first century or so of the Islamic empire, the conquering Arabs were everywhere a minority and could not do without the services of the Christians and Jews for carrying on the everyday business of central and local government, the latter comprising essentially the collection of taxes. Hence, till the end of the seventh century Greek remained the basic administrative language in the lands bordering on the eastern Mediterranean, just as Persian was in the eastern parts of the empire. Only in the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik, just before the turn of the century, did Arabic become the official language of administration, though Greek or Coptic or Persian officials continued to do the actual administrative work.

In Egypt, where administration was virtually a Coptic preserve, papyri show Arabic beginning to appear side-by-side with Greek in 643, the first purely Arabic papyri in 709 and the last Greek and Arabic bilingual one in 720; but Greek was still used sporadically up to the end of the ninth century. Under the

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1 Goitein, Jews and Arabs, their Contacts through the Ages (New York, 1955), pp. 73-80.

2 On the whole question of the arabisation of the administration, see M. Sprengling, "From Persian to Arabic", American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, lvi (1939), 175-224, 325-36.

3 Cf. A. Grohmann, From the World of Arabic Papyri (Cairo, 1952), pp. 35-38; and on the general topic of the Coptic community in Egypt during the period up to the tenth century, see I. M. Lapidus, "The Conversion of Egypt to Islam", Israel Oriental Studies, ii (In Memoriam S. M. Stern) (Tel Aviv, 1972), pp. 248-62.
early Abbasids, the majority of physicians, astronomers, mathematicians and philosophers at the court in Baghdad were Christians, and these played an outstanding role in transmitting the Greek philosophical and scientific classics to the Arabs, often by the intermediacy of Syriac, still the spoken language of the bulk of Syrian and Iraqi Christians and the liturgical language of their churches. The famous Miqyās or Nilometer in Cairo, at the southern tip of the island of Raūḍa, by means of which the rise and fall of the Nile waters was plotted, remained in the hands of Coptic Christians for two-and-a-half centuries, till in 861 a Muslim from Iraq, Abu 'r-Raddād, took over. The architect of the great Cairo mosque of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, the oldest mosque of Cairo surviving in its entirety, was a Christian, probably from Iraq, according to Maqrīzī.

The Dhimmis of Egypt and Syria enjoyed a particular period of toleration and florescence under the Fāṭimid dynasty of caliphs there (969-1171). The caliphs themselves were Ismāʿīlī Shiʿīs, rivals of the orthodox Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, and in the same stream of sectarian belief as the somewhat later Assassins of Syria and Persia; but since in Egypt they ruled over a Muslim population which was wholly orthodox Sunnī, the Fāṭimids’ outlook was in general relaxed and tolerant. This tenderness towards the Dhimmis probably contributed to the slander circulated among the orthodox Muslims that the


3 Ibid. pp. 332-3. This Christian architect had already constructed for Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn an aqueduct, but Creswell doubts this story that he built the mosque also.

4 No specific history of the dynasty exists (meanwhile, see EI¹, art. s.v. [M. Canard]), but for the Coptic Christians in this period, see EI¹, art. “Ḳibṭ” (G. Wiet) and A. S. Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity (London, 1968), pp. 86-94, and for the Jews, J. Mann, The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fāṭimid Caliphs, a Contribution to their Political and Communal History (Oxford, 1920-2), and Fischel, op. cit. pp. 45-89.
Fiṭīmids were not of genuine Alid origin, descendants of the Prophet’s daughter Fiṭīma (whence their name) and her husband ‘Alī, but of obscure Jewish origin, the ultimate insult in medieval Islam. An important figure in establishing the new state in Egypt on a firm financial basis was the Baghdad Jew Ya‘qūb b. Killis (930-91), who had become a convert to Islam under the Fiṭīmids’ predecessors. He now became in effect head of the financial administration, reforming *inter alia* the chaotic and depressed coinage, and becoming actual vizier in 977 under the second Fiṭīmid caliph in Egypt, al-‘Azīz (975-96); and although he himself had renounced his ancestral faith, he remained in contact with the Jewish community of Egypt and employed them as his subordinates in government service. Also, several of the caliphs had Christian viziers. Al-‘Azīz’s wife was a Melkite Christian, hence the caliph’s two brothers-in-law were the Melkite Patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem respectively. Al-Ḥākim (996-1021) had three Christian viziers, and when in 1009 the caliph ordered the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, it was his Chief Secretary, the Christian Abū Manṣūr Bishr b. Severus, who drew up the document and his Christian vizier Manṣūr b. ‘Abdūn who signed it. The thirteenth-century Jacobite bishop and historian Barhebraeus writes that “At that time [sc. during the Fiṭīmid period] Christians could be made viziers in the Egyptian lands without having to renounce their faith, but this is unfortunately not the case in our time”. The ubiquity of Jewish and Christian functionaries in the Fiṭīmid administration led a contemporary Muslim poet to lament that

In our time, the Jews have reached the summit of their desires. They have acquired honour and fortune, and have become advisers and rulers!

O Egyptians, if you take my advice, turn Jew, because Heaven itself has become Jewish!

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1 Ibid.; EI², art. “Ibn Killis” (M. Canard).
2 Mez, op. cit. p. 58; Fischel, op. cit. pp. 88-89; Atiya, op. cit. pp. 87-89; B. May, *Die Religionspolitik der ägyptischen Fiṭīmiden 969-1171*, diss. (Hamburg, 1975), pp. 51-120. Fischel notes that the verses quoted above, by a poet called Riḍā b. Thaub (?), were apparently stimulated by the activities in the eleventh century of the caliphs’ Jewish bankers, the Banū Sahl of Tustar.
In the caliphate of al-Āmir (1101-30), a monk, Abū Najā, became Chief Secretary, and it was by this time that an Armenian element had secured an ascendancy in the state. During the eleventh century, the reviver of the Fāṭimid caliphate when it had reached a low ebb under the long-reigned but not very capable al-Mustanṣir (1036-94) had been the Armenian slave Badr al-Jamālī, vizier and Amīr al-Juyūsh or commander-in-chief. He had come from Acre to Cairo in 1074 to re-establish the caliphate after a "time of troubles" in the previous decade, bringing with him a bodyguard of Armenian mercenary troops known collectively as the Juyūshiyya. Badr himself was a Muslim, as is shown by the fact of his founding the well-known Juyūshī mosque on the Muqāṭtam Hills overlooking Cairo, but many of his Armenian troops were Christian. The influence of these Armenians was perpetuated into the twelfth century under Badr’s son, the vizier al-Afdal, and it was only after the fall of the vizier Bahrām in 1137 that Armenians declined in power and were replaced by black Sudanese and Turks. Though Bahrām had the honorific title of Saif al-Islām, "Sword of Islam", he was actually an Armenian Christian from Tell Bāshir to the north-east of Aleppo, the Turbessel of the Crusaders, and conceivably from a noble Armenian family tracing its descent back to the Pahlaviuni (though if he was, in fact, a eunuch, a lowly slave origin seems more probable); his brother was the Armenian Patriarch of Egypt, Gregory.

This generally favourable atmosphere in Fāṭimid Egypt and Syria for the Dhimmis was marred by only one or two outbreaks of persecution, the worst of which was associated with the caliphate of al-Ḥākim, who was clearly at times unbalanced and who eventually disappeared in mysterious circumstances, to be regarded as a semi-divine being by the Druze sectaries. His change of policy meant a reversal of earlier tolerance; a threat to the stability of the state, which depended so much for its smooth running on the expertise of Dhimmi officials; and a challenge to

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1 El, art. "Badr al-Djamālī" (C. H. Becker).
Byzantium, with which he had made a ten years' truce in 998, actually in force for the whole of his caliphate, in place of the bellicose policy of the previous ruler.

Al-Ḥākim's anti-Dhimmi measures became expressly official ones in 1004, although there had been signs of the new attitude in incidents of the previous year or two. Several Jewish and Christian secretaries were arrested and two churches destroyed, apparently the result of an attempt by the Copts to rebuild a ruined church in Cairo, on the site where the caliph wished to build a mosque; in compensation, he allowed three new churches to be built in another quarter. Soon afterwards the caliph ordered that all Christians and Jews (with the exception of the Khayābira, descendants of the Jews of Khaibar, who still claimed special privileges) should wear in public a black distinguishing patch and belt, and that it should be forbidden to sell slaves to them; the Jews were to wear a bell and the Christians a cross in public baths; Christian ceremonies at Epiphany and Easter were forbidden; all Dhimmiṣ were forbidden to ride horses, but only mules and donkeys, with plain, undecorated saddles; and they were barred from boats manned by Muslim crews (then, as now, much communication in Egypt was along the Nile and its channels). Church revenues were confiscated and placed under the control of the state treasury, the Diwān; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was destroyed in 1009, and many churches in Egypt pulled down in a wave of Muslim religious zeal which ensued.¹

It is not easy to discern, from amongst several different reasons adduced in the sources, what was the mainspring of al-Ḥākim's actions here. It was not necessary for political reasons to reduce the prosperous state and the influence of the "Protected peoples" in the state, as potentially-dangerous, overmighty subjects. No individual Dhimmiṣ seem to have suffered confiscation or to have had their professional or commercial activities disrupted. It was not a policy of forcible, mandatory conversion to Islam, because, according to certain

Christian sources, al-Ḥākīm allowed any Dhimmī to leave the country and take with him all the belongings which he could carry, and he actually began a decree of 1008 with the Qur'ānic text "There is no compulsion in religion". Some of the reasons must doubtless be sought in the caliph's volatile nature and unpredictable moods, but the basic cause must surely have been that al-Ḥākīm was keeping himself attuned to the feelings and thought of the Muslim masses of population, who became periodically incensed by the apparent dominance in the state of Dhimmīs, and he was further demonstrating that he could bring them low any time he liked. It may well have been that Christians and Jews had become too bold and provocative in rebuilding their places of worship and in publicly manifesting their beliefs. The periodic reissue all through medieval Islamic times of the discriminatory decrees shows that for long periods they must have been dead letters. Of the Dhimmī officials who at this time remained in Egypt and were converted to Islam under duress, many later apostatised when al-Ḥākīm's measures were relaxed, and they were not harmed, although the theoretical penalty in Islamic law for apostasy is death. There exists, indeed, a panegyric poem addressed to the caliph by a Jewish author praising him as the benefactor of his country and as a just ruler. The anti-Dhimmī policies did not, at all events, excite retaliation from Byzantium, as not infrequently happened; the truce continued, and only when Byzantine interests in northern Syria were threatened by the rebellion of the Fātimid governor of Aleppo, Fāṭik, just before al-Ḥākīm's disappearance, did Byzantine troops move southwards.

There were, inevitably, other outbreaks of anti-Dhimmī feeling during the Fātimid period. Thus under al-Mustanṣir the Muslims vizier Abū Muḥammad al-Yāẓūrī (1050-8) oppressed the Copts and jailed the Patriarch Christodoulos on a false suspicion of having influenced the Christian king of Nubia to withhold tribute due under the baqt (see above, p. 12), arresting other bishops and levying a heavy fine on the Coptic community. Normally, however, the Fātimids maintained good relations with the Christians of Nubia. In 1079 King Solomon

\[\text{ii.257/256}\].
of Nubia abdicated in favour of his nephew George and retired to a life of contemplation at a monastery south of Aswan on the Egyptian-Nubian frontier; but local Muslims carried Solomon off in great state to Cairo, where he was received with great honour, settled there for the rest of his life, and finally buried in the monastery of St. George in Cairo.¹

The succeeding Ayyūbid dynasty (1169-1252 in Egypt) was deeply involved with the Crusaders in Syria, Palestine and Egypt, although the position of the Dhimmis did not deteriorate as sharply as it was to do under the subsequent Mamlûks. The Ayyūbids swept away all vestiges of Fāṭimid and Shi‘i domination in Egypt and Syria, and viewed themselves as the protagonists of Sunni orthodoxy. The discriminatory laws were periodically revived, including by Saladin (1169-93), who for instance re-imposed the double-rate customs duties on the wares of non-Muslim merchants compared with the rate on those of Muslim ones, until pressure from Frankish merchants in the Levant brought about a relaxation here.² The Armenians, prominent in Fāṭimid times, lost their privileged position, but the Copts do not seem to have been singled out for particular discrimination, and the Coptic Church was in general flourishing at this time. Together with the Armenians, it was, of course, the Melkites, with their allegiance to a Patriarch in Constantinople who were most likely to suffer when there were fears in Egypt of Crusader descents on the coasts, although the Ayyūbids did not in normal circumstances worry unduly about connections between the Latin Christians and the indigenous Eastern Christian churches, as is shown by the Ayyūbids’ granting permission to Dominican and Franciscan missionaries to work within their dominions and to proselytise among the oriental Christians, provided of course that they did not attempt to convert any Muslims. The Jews, also, were invited to return to Jerusalem after its reconquest from the Christians under Saladin, and it was in Ayyūbid Cairo that the western Jew Maimonides found a final haven. Moreover, Saladin’s personal physician was a Jew, Ibn Jāmi‘, and that of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Saif ad-Din

¹ Hasan, The Arabs in the Sudan, p. 93.
² Goitein, Jews and Arabs, p. 72.
(1196-1218) a Christian, Abū Sulaimān; the three sons of this last likewise served the later Ayyūbids, and other rulers of that dynasty had Jewish physicians.¹

Nevertheless, the Crusades inevitably in the long run affected adversely the Eastern Christian churches,² and with the establishment in 1250 of the strongly Sunnī Turkish Mamlūks in Egypt and Syria, we enter a perceptibly different phase in the history of Muslim-Dhimmi relations. The Mamlūk period saw a general hardening of Muslim attitudes here. The state was in effect a military despotism, although the ruling institution was constantly changing its leadership and composition. The spirit of militant jihād was revived, and Muslim xenophobia and fear became more apparent. The first Mamlūk sultans of the Bahri line took the lead in reducing the last Frankish strongholds on the Syro-Palestinian litoral, such as Antioch, Tripoli, Tyre, Haifa, Beirut, Sidon, 'Athlīth and Acre.³ It is almost certain that events in the westernmost part of the Islamic world, sc. in Spain, where the Reconquista had largely come to a halt by the mid-thirteenth century but where Catholic fanaticism was already bearing heavily on the resident Muslims, the Mudéjares, provided fuel for Mamlūk severity towards their Christians in turn, for many Muslim refugees from Spain made their way eastwards as far as Cairo.⁴

A much more imminent danger to the Mamlūks was the threat from the east posed by the Mongols. Although the


² As is emphasized by Atiya, op. cit. pp. 92-93.

³ See in particular, EI³, art. “Baybars I” (G. Wiet).

⁴ We know from e.g. an exchange of correspondence between the Marinid sultan of Morocco and the Mamlūk one an-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn in the second quarter of the fourteenth century that the Mamlūks were kept informed about the progress of the Reconquista along the shrunken frontiers of the surviving Muslim foothold in Spain, the principality of the Nasrids in Granada; see Canard, “Les relations entre les Mérinides et les Mamelouks”, AIEO Alger, v (1939-41), 50, and also Bosworth, “Christian and Jewish Religious Dignitaries in Mamlūk Egypt and Syria: Qalqashandi’s Information on their Hierarchy Titulature and Appointment”, International Journal of Middle East Studies, iii (1972), 61 n. 3.
Mamluks checked the invaders at ‘Ain Jâlût near Nablus in 1260, and although the Franks in the coastal cities allowed the Muslim forces unimpeded passage northwards through Palestine, Muslims could not fail to note that the commander of the Mongol army, the Turk Kitbugha Noyan, was a Nestorian Christian and that the Mongol forces contained Christian Georgian and Armenian contingents, however unwillingly impressed.\(^1\) The Mongol threat continued for another half-century, especially under the vigorous Il-Khanids Ghazan and Uljeitû. In 1300 Ghazan occupied Aleppo and Damascus, and Mongol raiders penetrated as far as Jerusalem and Ghaza. In 1303 the Mongol army returned for what proved to be its last great assault on Mamlûk Syria, but was decisively defeated in the same year at Marj ̀aş-Sûfâr near Damascus. The Mamlûks tried to outflank the Il-Khanid Mongol sovereigns of Iraq and Persia by entering into diplomatic relations with the rival Mongol house of the Golden Horde in South Russia, descendants of Chingiz Khan’s son Jochi and grandson Batu; and it was not till the second or third decade of the fourteenth century that the Mamlûks achieved a peaceful *modus vivendi* with the Il-Khanids, who were by now in any case tending to fall into internal dissension.\(^2\)

The need to present a strong front to external foes like the Franks and the Mongols intensified the religious fervour and the expansionist feelings of the Mamlûks. The old Muslim dream of taking Constantinople remained, and in the light of Mamlûk diplomatic activity among the Turkmen principalities of Asia Minor and the reduction in 1375 of the Armenian Rupenid kingdom in Cilicia (the principality of the ruler of Sîs, as it is generally called in Islamic sources), which had been sporadically tributary to the Mamlûks for several decades, this was no idle dream. The capture of Baghdad, the old religious and cultural capital of Sunnî Islam, was also a desideratum, but Iraq at this time was too firmly within the grasp of Mongol and then Turkmen dynasties ever to fall to the Mamlûks. They did, however, attempt to draw the Yemeni dynasty of the Rasûîlîds, itself Turkish in origin, into their orbit, and to control the Sharîfs or

\(^2\) Ibid. pp. 456-60, 475 ff.
local rulers of Mecca, custodians of the Holy Places. The Mamluks also took a more aggressive attitude towards Christian Nubia, intervening there more and more, and finally coming to dominate it. Sultan Baibars' expedition of 1276, retaliating for a Nubian raid on the important commercial port of 'Aidhāb on the Red Sea coast, defeated the Nubian forces and brought back their king David in chains to Cairo. Further expeditions followed in the fourteenth century; the cathedral of Dongola was converted into a mosque in 1317, and Nubian Christianity was dealt a mortal blow, although Nubian pilgrims continued to visit Palestine as late as the end of the fifteenth century.\(^1\) Within the Mamluk dominions internal lines had to be secured and Sunni orthodoxy made to prevail. Hence jihād was whipped up against Muslim schismatics like the Syrian Ismā‘īlīs, against whom Baibars led a campaign in 1270, and against the Nusairīs of the Jabal Ansāriyya in western Syria.\(^2\)

The activities of inquisitorial tribunals, presided over by the qādīs or judges in Islamic law, are one aspect of this intensified drive against internal dissent. Inquisitions (mihān, sing. mihna) for ferreting out heretics were an old institution in Islamic society, for they had been used in early Abbasid times against various heterodox elements in Iraq, the so-called zindiqs, who were probably in the main Manichaeans and other dualists, and against substantially orthodox Muslims whose views nevertheless happened to conflict with the theological attitudes of certain caliphs.\(^3\) The Mamluk tribunals probably dealt with only a small number of professed atheists and sceptics, but many Shi‘is were hauled before them, especially in Syria, where Shi‘ism was strong. There were cases of men from Sunni families who were attracted to Shi‘ism after studying its doctrines; thus in 1343 one Ḥasan as-Sakākīnī was executed in Damascus for insulting the first two caliphs Abū Bakr and ‘Umar and their daughters, the Prophet's wives ‘A‘īsha and

\(^1\) Ḥasan, op. cit. pp. 106-28; Atiya, op. cit. pp. 440-1.


\(^3\) W. M. Patten, Ahmed ibn Ḥanbal and the Mihna (Leiden, 1897); M. Guidi, La lotta tra l'Islam e il manicheismo (Rome, 1927); EP, art. “Mihna” (M. Plessner).
Hafsa, and for saying that the Archangel Gabriel had communicated his revelations to Muhammad by mistake, when they were really meant for ‘Ali. The famous Hanbali theologian Ibn Taimiya and his followers in Damascus were persecuted over a long period for their denunciation of what they considered to be abuses and degenerate practices in contemporary, popular religion. Since the Mamluk state was anxious to stifle any potential political dissent, which in the Islamic world traditionally expressed itself in religious terms, great savagery was at times used against various wretched and often mentally-unbalanced persons claiming to be prophets.

Although the separate constituting and the internal self-government of the different religious communities within the Islamic state (what in later Ottoman times became known as the millet system) meant that an offender was normally arraigned before and judged by his co-religionists, the Mamluk tribunals of qadis not infrequently dealt with Christians when questions of apostasy were involved. In this period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the Islamisation of the Copts in Egypt was proceeding rapidly, some Copts obviously adopted Islam under pressure or for reasons of political and social advancement. At times some of these repented and denied their profession of Islam, and sought expiation in death rather than re-embrace Islam and save themselves. But sometimes Christians were tried even when no question of apostasy was involved, e.g. for insulting the name of the Prophet or for converting someone from Islam to Christianity. In 1393 four Franciscans were executed in Jerusalem for insulting Muhammad and the Islamic faith in a theological disputation, though there may have been here an element of the voluntary seeking of martyrdom.

These inquisitorial activities in turn fanned the fanaticism of the Muslim masses, but the tribunals were doubtless further used at times for non-religious purposes. Sometimes the Mamluk governmental machinery itself brought an accusation.

2 Ibid. pp. 21-2.
in order to get rid of dismissed officials, and it was an easy matter to bring a malicious suit against an enemy or rival. Thus one fifteenth-century Mamlûk sultan had a Persian alchemist arraigned for materialism and atheism because he had failed to manufacture gold, as he had promised.

Muslim feeling against the Dhimmâs during the Mamlûk period was aggravated by the fact that the machinery of state, the administrative and financial diwâns, still depended to a considerable extent on Dhimmî officials. Manifestations of this hostility included denunciations by popular preachers of contacts with the "Protected peoples", and scholars like Ibn Taimiyya wrote books and pamphlets against them; and the legal authorities, the muftîs, issued fatwâs or decisions against the lawfulness of employing non-Muslims in public office.

A typical specimen of anti-Dhimmî polemics is the brief tract by the head of the Shâfi'i law school in Egypt, Shaikh Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Asnâwî. It probably dates from the thirteen-fifties, when there was a particularly strong wave of feeling against non-Muslim officials, during the sultanes of Şâlah ad-Dîn Şâlih and Nāṣir ad-Dîn al-Ḥasan (covering the period 1347-61), and is called al-Kalima al-muhimma fi mubâsharat ahl adh-dhimma "An earnest appeal concerning the employment of the Dhimmîs". It contains such stock accusations as the one that the Christians regarded Egypt as their own land, taken over by the Muslims by virtue of a treaty and not by conquest, and it denounces the Copts' claim to special treatment from the Muslims because the two groups were kinsmen through Hagar, the Egyptian slave wife of Abraham and mother of Ishmael, regarded as progenitor of the North Arabs. It is, of course, true that all through Islamic history the non-Muslims and other subordinate groups within the state were active in fabricating traditions (hadîths) from the Prophet enjoining kind treatment or privileges for

1 Ibid. p. 20.
2 The text of this epistle is given by M. Perlmann, "Asnawi's Tract against Christian Officials", Ignaz Goldziher Memorial Volume (Budapest, 1948-58), ii. 172-208, and utilized by him in his study "Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamlûk Empire", Bull. of the School of Oriental Studies, x (1940-2), 843-61.
themselves, as were equally sects and parties within the Islamic community itself.\(^1\)

The pride and arrogance of *Dhimmi* officials, together with the fact that Muslims had to come cap-in-hand to them for favours, is also denounced by Asnāwī. The late fifteenth-century historian Ibn Taghrībirdī, commenting favourably on the events of 1419, when Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaikh (1412-21) made the Coptic Patriarch of Egypt kneel before him and have abuse heaped upon his head in retaliation for the oppression of Muslims in Ethiopia by the Christian Emperor Isaac there, remarks,

> For this action is one of the greatest things to the glory of God, just as the employment of these Christians in the *diwāns* of the Egyptian kingdom is one of the greatest calamities. It causes the Christian religion to be exalted. Most Muslims have to apply to and stand before the gates of the dignitaries of state for decisions of their affairs. When a man has some business which is in the hands of the *diwān* of a certain great man, he is compelled to abase himself and ingratiate himself with the official in charge of that particular office, whether he be a Christian or a Jew or a Samaritan. As the proverb goes, "A man in need is blind; he seeks only satisfaction". Thus a man has to stand before a Christian, whilst the latter may remain seated for many hours, until he has come to a decision regarding the matter in hand, with the Muslim blessing him and being more polite towards him than he would be towards a learned shaikh. Or it may be that a Muslim will kiss the hem of the official's garment and follow him on foot, whilst the other rides on horseback, until he is through with his business. As for the peasants in the villages, a Christian tax inspector will beat them, humiliate them and put them in chains on the pretext that he is out to save their master's money. But this is not the real reason; what he is out for is to dominate the Muslims. This is exactly what happens to a Muslim prisoner in a Frankish land, except that there he is owned by his master.\(^2\)

One of Asnāwī's accusations, frequent in Muslim propaganda, is that the Christians deliberately set fire to mosques and other Muslim buildings in retaliation for the pulling down of churches. The historical sources frequently mention such Christian plots, usually on evidence from priests and monks extracted under torture. Thus in 1340 a conspiracy was uncovered to set the

\(^1\) This was demonstrated in a masterly fashion by I. Goldziher in his classic *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle, 1889), ii. 88 ff., Eng. tr. (London, 1967-71), ii. 89 ff.

Umayyad Mosque in Damascus on fire; two monks, who were expert incendiarios, had allegedly come from Byzantium and had manufactured seven fire bombs out of gunpowder, naphtha and coaldust, which they had then planted. Asnāwī further refers to a Christian plot of 1162, in the time of the ruler Nūr ad-Dīn Zangī, aimed at blowing up the Prophet’s tomb in Medina. Two Christians disguised as Muslim pilgrims from the Magrib were to do the work, but Nūr ad-Dīn was fortunately forewarned of it by a dream. It has been suggested that this story might have originated in the plan of the Frankish adventurer Renaud de Châtillon to strike at Medina in 1183, a move frustrated by Saladin’s brother al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Saif ad-Dīn.¹

Other charges brought by Asnāwī include the one that Christians had managed to appropriate Muslim waqfs, lands and properties given in mortmain for pious and charitable uses, and had then applied them to Christian purposes.² The wrath of the Muslim masses and their religious leaders was also influenced by feelings which were forerunners of the later resentment of the indigenous peoples of North Africa and Asia against foreign capitulations, legal and commercial privileges. The Frankish merchants who visited Egypt to trade, although restricted in their commercial outlets and their physical movements,³ could not be treated on the same footing as the Coptic population and did not, for instance, pay the jizya or poll-tax.

The Mamlūk ruling institution, comprising the sultan and his amirs, were placed in a dilemma by the violent outbursts of popular feeling against the Dhimmi. The sultan knew that the administration could not function without Dhimmi officials, and yet he could not remain indifferent to the intensity of Muslim feeling. The sultans were far from being immovable autocrats, but were liable to frequent upheavals in the state and depositions, in which religious elements might band together with discontented Mamlūk commanders. Thus Sultan an-Nāṣir Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Qalāwún had no fewer than three separate reigns, in 1294-5, in 1299-1309 and 1309-42, and several sultans

had two separate periods of rule interrupted by coups d’état. Hence although the authorities often tried to shield the “Protected peoples” against mob excesses, at other times it was expedient to bow to pressure from below.

Maqrizi, in his account of the Christian churches and monasteries of Egypt appended to his historical survey of Egypt, the *Khiṭat Miṣr*, tells in detail the story of the destruction of the Zuhri Church in Cairo in 1321. In the previous year, Sultan Nasir ad-Din Muhammad had built a camel-racing course, and now wished to erect an embankment along a branch of the Nile. A pool formed in the place where earth for the embankment was being excavated, and workmen began to extend the excavation, digging round the Zuhri Church until it was left high and dry on a bank of earth. The aim was to let the church fall down by itself, so that it could be claimed that the Muslims had not touched it; the Mamluk amirs would not allow the workmen actually to demolish the church. However, one day during the Friday prayers a fanatical mob ran amok, attacked the church with spades and pickaxes, tore it down and looted the contents. The outbreak of violence spread to other parts of Cairo and Old Cairo, and several churches were besieged, burnt down or demolished. The sultan hurriedly despatched the *Ākhur-Salār* or Master of the Horse Aidogh mish to restore order, but the latter was only able to control affairs when the fury of the mob had to some extent abated. Similar risings against the Christians took place simultaneously in Alexandria, where four churches were destroyed, at Damanhūr, where two were torn down, and at Qūṣ in Upper Egypt, where four suffered in this way; in fact, outbreaks occurred all over Upper and Lower Egypt alike. A month or so afterwards, several quarters in Cairo were swept by fire, and this was attributed to Christian retaliation, causing fresh persecutions. It was proclaimed in Cairo and Old Cairo that any Christian found in the streets wearing a white turban, i.e. dressed like a Muslim and without the identificatory *ṣhiʿār*, or riding on a horse like a Muslim,

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1 See the dynastic table of the Mamlūk sultans in C. E. Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties, a Chronological and Genealogical Handbook* (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 63-64.
could be killed and his property confiscated. Some Christians therefore began to wear the yellow turban of the Jews as a protection against molestation when they went out.¹

Outbursts of violence like this eventually subsided, and something like that status quo ante was restored after the safety-valve for Muslim resentments had been let off. The Dhimmi officials usually came back into employment, and in 1464, when the decrees against Christians and Jews filling state positions were renewed, Ibn Taghribirdi commented,

How fine it would be if this state of affairs were to continue, if these recurrent proclamations of prohibitions ceased, and the Copts did not get into government offices again... So it went on for about a year, then everything was just as it had been before.⁸

Nevertheless, each wave of persecution brought more converts to Islam, however unwillingly (and the Islamic sources frequently denounce the converts as hypocritical Muslims, full of rancour towards the genuine Muslims). Churches and other properties were destroyed, and could only be rebuilt or repaired with difficulty. The Coptic community could not sustain this haemorrhage of membership and resources indefinitely, and it is from the Mamlük period that one must date the real decay of the Coptic Church into the very subordinate and self-effacing place which it holds in Egyptian life today.⁹ Even in Upper


⁸ Perlmann, op. cit. p. 861.

⁹ This was the thesis advanced by Wiet in his EI¹ article “Kiibt” and elsewhere, subsequently emphasized by H. Laoust, Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques d’Ibn Taimiya (Cairo, 1939), pp. 60-62, and recently examined in detail for the period of the first half of the fourteenth century by D. P. Little, “Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Bahri Mamluks, 692-755/1293-1354”, Bull. of the School of Oriental and African Studies, xxxix (1976), pp. 552-69. Dr. Little’s conclusion essentially corroborates the earlier views, and he remarks concerning the spate of conversion around the time of the persecution of 1354 that “In this sense the year 755/1354, some seven centuries after the Muslim conquest of Egypt, may be regarded as a turning-point in Egyptian religious history, as the point in time when the second great transformation of Egyptian religion became virtually complete, as complete, at any rate, as it was to be for the next six-and-a-half centuries” (p. 569).
Egypt, adjacent to Christian Nubia, where the Copts had always been numerous and strong, their communities began to shrink. The Coptic language had probably become virtually extinct as a spoken tongue by the thirteenth century and the whole of Egypt made Arabophone.¹ As early as the tenth century, indeed, leading Coptic authors like Severus of Ushmūnain and Eutychius had written in Arabic; from the Mamlūk period onwards, Coptic was to survive essentially as a hieratic and liturgical language for the Coptic Church.

¹Atiya, in his *EI* art. "Ḳībṭ", notes the reports of western travellers and visitors to Egypt who mention the existence of Coptic-speaking remnants, especially in Upper Egypt. But even if one accepts these reports—and how many of these westerners were likely to recognise Coptic if they heard it spoken?—the picture of a general adoption of Arabic by the Copts during the Mamlūk period is not substantially affected.