



# THE ISLAMIC ERA

# THE ARAB CONQUEST

- The conquest of Egypt by Amr ibn el As took place between 639-41
- Amr Ibn el As
- Amr was a wealthy member of the Banū Sahl clan of the important tribe of Quraysh.
- accepted Islām in 629–630.
- He was sent to Oman by Mohammed where he successfully accomplished his mission in converting the ruler to Islam
- He was involved in the Islamic conquest on Palestine but his fame was gained when he conquered Egypt on his own initiative



- On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 639 AD, Amr arrived in Egypt with an army of about 4000 horsemen.
- Their goal was to capture the Babylon-in-Egypt which was just north of present day Cairo
- The reason for that was their ultimate goal of reaching Alexandria.
- In June the Arab army was reinforced and their numbers increased up to 12000 and they engaged in a battle with the Byzantine armies on the Heliopolis plains.
- The Arabs defeated the Byzantine army and forced them to retreat back into the Babylon fortress.
- The Byzantine army retreated back to the Babylon fortress which later fell to the Arabs on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 641.



- After that final win the Arabs proceeded on their way to Alexandria which surrendered and a peace treaty was signed in November 641.
- This victory gave the Arabs control over most of Egypt.
- Babylon's name was changed to Al Fustat which is modern day Old Cairo,
- In Al Fustat, Amr built a mosque which was named after him and was completed after his death.



- Amr chose Al Fustat to be his capital and made a pact with the Copts.
- He promised to leave them unharmed and grant them the freedom to worship in return they had to pay a monetary amount of 2 dinars per capita for men between the ages of 15-50.
- One dinar was also collected from women in the same age group.
- He gave the administration of the provinces to the leaders who were already in charge and also gave them the right to carry out their own legal and judicial systems.



- When Amr Ibn El As heard that Pope Benjamin (Benymean) and most of the bishops had retreated into the monasteries, he asked the most prominent Coptic leader at the time, Sinutius, to request them to return to their sees.
- Amr also requested a meeting with Pope Benjamin after which he told his men that he had not met a man of God who was so upright and majestic.
- At that time the Arab conquerors did not force people to convert to Islam and recognized the Christians and Jews to have a special place because they were “people of the book”



- The Copts and the Byzantine Christians decided to pay the poll tax, known as al gezya, and to continue to worship freely.

## The burning of the Library of Alexandria.

- Omar Ibn el Khatab (2<sup>nd</sup> rightful Khalifa) was not happy with Amr Ibn Al As because he expected him to provide him with more money.
- In one of his fits against Amr, omar Ibn El Khatab appointed Abdallah Ibn Said governor of upper Egypt.
- This resulted in Amr having limited authority in lower Egypt.



- Amr did not accept this decision and resigned from his position as governor of Egypt.
- Before he left Egypt, Byzantium sent its navy to take Egypt back but a huge battle erupted and cost both sides immense loss of life
- Amr ordered the burning of the city of Alexandria





- According to the writings of a few transcripts it was revealed that Amr acted based on orders from Ibn El Khatab and used the contents of the library as fuel to burn the city because they believed that if the contents agreed with Quran they are not needed because the Quran is sufficient and if they disagreed then they must be burnt.
- This account is provoked among the Islamic circles who deny the events.



# THE CENTURIES BETWEEN THE SEVENTH AND THE TENTH

- By the time of the Arab conquest the Coptic church was free from the yolk of Byzantium.
- They obtained the freedom to choose their own church leaders who were allowed to practice their pastoral duties freely.
- The Church restored many church buildings from the state and repaired what was destroyed.
- There was a great friendship that prevailed between Pope Benjamin and Amr Ibn el As



- Because of this friendship, the spirit of acceptance was carried forward for a few rulers.
- An example of that great spirit is shown through the account of the Sakha incidents where some people set government employees on fire and Maslama, the Moslem ruler at the time, asked Pope Aghathon to help him choose 7 bishops who helped him resolve this problem.
- Dr. A. S. Atiya mentioned an important point and that is the fear of the khalifas that the rulers of Egypt would separate Egypt and rule it on their own so they did not allow the rulers of Egypt to rule for a long time.



- This point can be seen through a table that was compiled by Stanley Lane-poole that shows that Egypt was ruled by 108 rulers in 226 years
- They did not rule for more than two years and their goal was to collect money for the Khalifas so that they would please the khalifa and this money was on top of what the khalifa collected himself.
- Egypt's potential for growth was weekend and the Egyptians could not afford paying anymore.
- The rulers then asked the clergy to pay tribute which they collected according to the hijrah year



- Five rebellions took place at that time all due to the oppression caused by the high amounts collected for taxes.
- One of the very harsh financial oppressions was imposed by Ahmed Ibn Almudabir, who counted the clergy and imposed a certain amount of money upon the Pope.
- After this Egypt became a province until the 8<sup>th</sup> century



- In the 9<sup>th</sup> century many of Egypt's population had converted to Islam to avoid paying the tax and slowly in the 10<sup>th</sup> century more Arabs moved into the country and the Coptic language slowly began to take a turn in its uses.
- first fully Arabic text that appeared in the Coptic church was in the 13<sup>th</sup> century at which time the Coptic language had completely transformed to be a liturgical language and was no longer used as the language of Egypt.



# THE TULUNID DYNASTY



**Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo**

**In 868 Ahmad Ibn Tulun became the governor of Egypt and although he was known to indulge the Copts in all that they wanted he imprisoned the pope. His goal was to win the Coptic people to his side but he imposed taxes on the pope. Ibn Tulun wanted the greater welfare of the country and that gives us the reason behind this good treatment of the common Copts vs. his treatment of the pope.**



# INTRODUCTION TO THE FATIMID ERA

- This era was one of the best eras for the Copts
- Al Muizz conquered Egypt in 972 AD and founded Cairo as his capital because of his fear from a Syrian attack.
- During his reign Egypt flourished economically and artistically.
- He allowed the Copts to rebuild and renovate their churches and he chose a Copt, Abou Elyoumn Youssef to collect taxes from Egypt and Palistine.





- His son and successor, Al Aziz, continued with his father's tolerance and hence allowed the Copts to live and worship in peace.
- Their incomes increased, they prospered and they were able to pay taxes with ease.
- At that time they built many churches and renovated monasteries
- Because of this great relationship between Al Aziz and the Copts, who were also able at that time hold high positions, a Jewish minister at the time said that if anyone wanted to succeed they need to be a Christian, the religion of truth and gain.



# QUIZ

- **List 10 facts that you have learned from today's talk.**

