

St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society

**Twenty-sixth St. Shenouda- UCLA
Conference of Coptic Studies**

UCLA, July 18-19, 2025

Program and Abstracts

Acknowledgment

The Society (SSACS) would like to express its sincere gratitude to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures of UCLA (NELC-UCLA) for its long partnership with us in organizing this conference. as well as the members of the Society. Such a partnership between our two organizations has allowed this historic conference to thrive, steadily grow over the years, and establish a world-wide reputation. In particular, the Society would like to recognize the tireless work of the following individuals:

Ms. Maryna Agaiby (SSACS)
Mr. Aria Anayat (NELC)
Dr. Nabil Elgabalawi (SSACS)
Mr. Joseph Fahim (SSACS)
Mr. & Mrs. Ashraf W. Hanna
Mr. Emad & Salwa S. Hanna (SSACS)
Mr. Raymen Kirolos (SSACS)
Dr. Saad Michael Saad (SSACS)
Mrs. Marcell Takla (SSACS)
Ms. Maggie Tawadros (SSACS)
Mr. & Mrs. Ramses Wassif (SSACS)

Also, we would like to extend our appreciation to all the presenters, the Society's members, and the other attendees that have contributed in various ways to make this Conference a success. For more information about the Society please visit us on the web at www.stshenouda.org.

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**Twenty-Sixth St. Shenouda Conference of Coptic Studies
Program**

Friday, July 18, 2025

- 9:30-10:00 a.m.** **Registration**
10:00-10:05 a.m. *Opening Remarks* by Dr. Solange Ashby (NELC-UCLA)
- 10:05-10:30 a.m. Dr. Youhanna N. Youssef, *Behnam and Sarah in the Coptic Tradition* (online)
- 10:30-11:00 a.m. Dr. Saad Michael Saad, *The State of the Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*
- 11:00-11:15 a.m.** **Break**
- 11:15-11:45 a.m. Mr. Mena Basta, *Councils Reimagined: Variant Readings and Collective Memory in the Copto- Arabic Synaxarium*
- 11:45 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. Dr. Tamara Siuda, *The Portland Agpeya: Three(?) Horsemen and Many Questions*
- 12:15-1:00 p.m.** **Lunch Recess**
- 1:00-1:30 p.m. Prof. Salim Faraji, *Amun Hymns, Plotinian Metaphysics and the Theology of Origen*
- 1:30-2:00 p.m. Prof. Tim Vivian, *Evagrius of Pontus and the Desert Mothers and Fathers on Thoughts: Some Reflections*
- 2:00-2:30 pm Ms. Helana Boutros, *Canadian Coptic Women's Pursuit of Spiritual Health and Encounters with The Imaginaries of Mental Health and Biomedicine: Doctoral Research Proposal* (online)
- 2:30-2:45 p.m.** **Break**
- 2:45-3:15 p.m. Prof. Caroline T. Schroeder, Dr. Nicholas Wagner, *New Digital Resources for Bohairic Coptic: A Project Update from Coptic Scriptorium*
- 3:15-3:45 pm. Prof. Lillian Larsen, Mr. Joseph Fahim, *Sequencing/Scaling the Scala.*
- 3:45-4:15 pm Mr. John Habib, *"Without Dwelling on the Differences: Importing Melkite and Nestorian Texts into the Jacobian Tradition in Egypt"*
- 4:15-4:45 pm. Ms. Maggie Tawadros, *Chosen, Tried and Proven: An Illustration of the Temptation on the Mount through Fr. Matta al-Miskīn's Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*

Saturday, July 19, 2025

- 8:30-9:30 a.m.** **Registration**
- 9:30-10:00 a.m. Hany N. Takla, *Manuscript and artefacts Acquisition of the St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society 2025*
- 10:00-10:30 a.m. Dr. Daniel Girgis, *Christ Our God the High Priest: Hierarchical Vesting of the Lord's Priesthood in Coptic Liturgy*
- 10:30-10:45 a.m.** **Break**
- 10:45-11:15 a.m. Prof. Stephen Davis, *The Council of Nicaea in Coptic Monastic Cultural Memory: Archaeological and Archival Soundings from Thebes to Wādī al-Naṭrūn*
- 11:15-11:45 am Monica Mitri, *Apologetics as public theology in medieval Egypt: al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl's apologetic enterprise*
- 11:45 am-12:15 pm Mr. Michael Habashi, *Reconciliation, Reunion, and Reincorporation: A Historical Study of the Coptic Orthodox Church's Engagement with the Chalcedonian Churches (from the 7th to 19th century)*
- 12:15 - 1:15 p.m.** **Lunch Recess**
- 1:15-1:45 p.m. Dr. Mary Farag, *Antony, the Life of Pachomius, and Apologetics of Asceticism*
- 1:45-2:15 p.m. Dr. Jason Zaborowsky, *Christian Wisdom in the Margins: Reading the Apophthegmata Patrum Between the Languages of Egypt*
- 2:15-2:45 Dr. Heather Badamo *Natural Histories and Spiritual Lessons: Ostrich Eggs in Medieval Egypt*
- 2:45-3:00 p.m.** **Break**
- 3:00-3:30 p.m. Dr. Lisa Agaiby, *St Antony always taught his disciples." The Arabic Sayings of St. Antony the Great.*
- 3:30-4:00 p.m. Prof. Mark Swanson, *The Formation and Culture of a kātīb: The witness of Yūḥannā ibn Sāwīrus, al-kātīb al-miṣrī (fl. ca. 1020 CE)*
- 4:00-4:15 p.m.** **Break/Pictures**
- 4:15-5:00 p.m. *Business Meeting of the Members of St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society.*

**The Twenty-Sixth St. Shenouda-UCLA Conference of Coptic Studies
Conference Abstracts**

Title: *St Antony always taught his disciples: The Arabic Sayings of St. Antony the Great.*

enter: *Dr. Lisa Agaiby* (St Athanasius College, University of Divinity, AU)

Abstract:

The sayings attributed to St. Antony in the Apophthegmata Patrum appear across multiple textual traditions and languages. Together with the Life of Antony, they serve as foundational texts for understanding Antony and his monastic legacy. These sayings have shaped monastic practice for generations, reflecting their enduring influence across cultures and centuries. Within the Copto-Arabic tradition, numerous Arabic manuscripts preserve sayings ascribed to Antony that do not appear in the Greek or Coptic versions. These additional sayings were gradually incorporated into the Arabic Bustān between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a concentration of additions during the eighteenth century. This paper examines the background and development of these otherwise unattested sayings, as found in manuscripts from the Red Sea monasteries.

Title: *Natural Histories and Spiritual Lessons: Ostrich Eggs in Medieval Egypt*

Presenter: *Dr. Heather Badamo* (University of California, Santa Barbara, CA)

Abstract:

This paper places medieval Coptic beliefs within their Mediterranean contexts by exploring the use of ostrich eggs in sanctuaries. The practice of hanging ostrich egg ornaments in sacred spaces was a Mediterranean phenomenon, spanning both the Abrahamic faiths and the religious confessions within them. Coptic authors provide rare discourses on the practice in two fourteenth-century liturgical handbooks (*The Order of the Priesthood* and *The Precious Pearl*), which interpret the suspended eggs as material metaphors of Christian conduct. Here, I trace the roots of this practice to overlapping late antique institutions: the trade in luxury goods and the transmission of zoological knowledge. In the former, ostrich eggs figured as exotica and material supports for the artistic imagination, traded as far north as England, where they took on new identities as griffin eggs. In the latter, authors transformed animal behaviors into allegories for human virtues and vices, reflecting beliefs in the divine nature of the cosmos. Ostrich eggs, in these writings, symbolized the wholehearted concentration with which one should pray. As I show, the circulation of animal lore created a range of common, overlapping, and divergent practices around the use of ostrich eggs by the religious communities of the Mediterranean. By situating Coptic practices within Afro-Eurasian routes of exchange, then, this presentation highlights the material and artistic dimensions of the Copto-Arabic Renaissance, revealing a series of porous boundaries: between science and religion, elite and everyday practice, Christian and Muslim intellectual spheres.

Title: *Councils Reimagined: Variant Readings and Collective Memory in the Copto- Arabic Synaxarium.*

Presenter: *Mena Joseph Basta* (Claremont Graduate University, CA)

Abstract:

This study interrogates how Coptic communities remembered and presented church councils by comparing the council-related lections in twenty synaxaria manuscripts dated from the late 1300s to the 1800s. Drawn from both Upper- and Lower-Egyptian recensions and penned in Copto-Arabic script, these witnesses preserve the commemorations of the three ecumenical councils (Nicaea I, Constantinople I, and Ephesus) alongside an array of local synods. While the Synaxarium is often treated currently as a scripturalized liturgical text, close philological comparison reveals a surprisingly fluid tradition. To make sense of these divergences, the paper applies memory-studies and scripturalization theories, reading each variant as a representation of communal recollection rather than mere scribal accidents. By mapping changes diachronically and regionally, this paper show how the local traditions and narratives influence the larger identity of the church’s remembrances. Such textual maneuvering illustrates how liturgical readings renegotiated historical authority in light of shifting political landscapes, even centuries after the councils themselves. Beyond refining the stemma of the Copto-Arabic synaxarium tradition, the findings illuminate broader questions of how the Coptic church curates collective memory through liturgical practice.

Title: *Canadian Coptic Women’s Pursuit of Spiritual Health and Encounters with The Imaginaries of Mental Health and Biomedicine: Doctoral Research Proposal*

Presenter: *Ms. Helana Boutros*

Abstract:

Growing spiritual health scholarship since the 1980s has expounded an understanding of spiritual health beyond a subfield of mental health and as a separate dimension of health. Research consistently shows that spirituality in all its forms is a key dimension of health. To this end, this study of Canadian Coptic women in the Greater Toronto Area will illuminate the pursuit of spiritual health in the context of a mental health landscape that’s becoming more and more shaped by biomedical ideas. Positioned at the unique nexus of the anthropologies of health and illness, the senses, and Orthodox Christianity, this research examines spiritual health, by retaining a close focus on Coptic women’s lifeworlds and Coptic Orthodox Christianity’s theopolitical contexts. Here, the three engaged anthropologies are dialogued with from the *inside out* rather than the *outside in*. This research treats spiritual health as a configuration of health deserving of critical analysis. This project aims to highlight the ambivalent subjectivities that are created “from below” where Coptic women pursue spiritual health, including their negotiations of their spiritual health experiences, the role of the sensorium in their

pursuit, and the ways in which spiritual health knowledge is transmitted across generations.

Title: *The Council of Nicaea in Coptic Monastic Cultural Memory: Archaeological and Archival Soundings from Thebes to Wādī al-Naṭrūn*

Presenter: Prof. Stephen Davis (Yale University, CT)

Abstract:

With the year 2025 marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, most scholarly commemorations of this event have focused on the doctrinal legacy of the Nicene Creed. But what impact has the Council had on the lives and everyday practices of local Christians across the centuries? In this paper, I explore the Nicaea’s role in Coptic monastic cultural memory, drawing on archaeological and archival evidence from two sites: the Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes; and the Monastery of the Syrians (*Dayr al-Suryān*) in Wādī al-Naṭrūn. As I will show, in monastic spaces, the Council of Nicaea became materialized time and time again through embodied acts of writing and reading.

Title: *Antony, the Life of Pachomius, and Apologetics of Asceticism*

Presenter: Dr. Mary Farag (Princeton Theological Seminary, NJ)

Abstract:

This paper examines the role of Antony and the *Life of Antony* in redactions of the *Life of Pachomius*. It argues that Antony and Athanasius’s *Life of Antony* eventually entered into the *Life of Pachomius* as a result of the crisis of succession that ensued after the deaths of Pachomius and Petronius. Two Coptic witnesses to the *Life of Pachomius* (S5 and S6) epitomize the *Life of Antony*, drawing out four major themes and presenting them as Antony’s own autobiographical account. The epitome leans on Antony and Athanasius’s authority to smooth over the crisis of succession, while also responding to Athanasius’s priority of clergy over monks and praise of anchoritic monasticism. Instead, Antony himself prioritizes the Pachomian monks over clergy and hails Pachomian coenobitic monasticism as the apostolic way of life par excellence.

Title: *Amun Hymns, Plotinian Metaphysics and the Theology of Origen*

Presenter: Prof. Salim Faraji (California State University, Dominguez Hills, CA)

Abstract:

Origen and Plotinus who both studied under the Egyptian philosopher Ammonius Saccas and who were Egyptian themselves have been traditionally categorized as exponents of Platonism and Neo-Platonism. This presentation will situate the henology of Origen and the metaphysics of Plotinus within their ancient Egyptian philosophical context through an analysis of the theology of Amun hymns as promulgated in the Egyptian temples of the Roman era and the literary sources of

both the Corpus Hermetica and the Coptic Hermetica. Such an examination places early Egyptian Christianity within the philosophical and theological world of ancient Egyptian thought.

Title: *Christ Our God the High Priest: Hierarchical Vesting of the Lord's Priesthood in Coptic Liturgy*

Presenter: *Mr. Daniel Girgis* (St. Vladimir Seminary, NY)

Abstract:

Christ's high priesthood—often understated or overlooked by the modern Coptic mind—was once a major principle permeating Coptic thought in liturgical text, art, and ritual. This paper seeks to elucidate the motif of Christ's priesthood in Coptic tradition generally, and in hierarchical services particularly. By examining medieval manuscripts and rites, this work explores the method by which Coptic liturgical prayers vest Christ's priesthood in the patriarch or bishop. Finally, this paper will suggest that the contemporary omission or alteration of hierarchical rites and texts reflects a diminished understanding that impedes the experience of Coptic faithful.

Title: *Reconciliation, Reunion, and Reincorporation: A Historical Study of the Coptic Orthodox Church's Engagement with the Chalcedonian Churches (from the 7th to 19th century)*

Presenter: *Mr. Michael Habashi* (University of Cambridge, UK)

Abstract:

Since the Chalcedonian Schism in 451 AD, the Coptic Orthodox Church has navigated a complex history of reunion and reincorporation attempts with other Christian traditions, particularly the Roman Catholic Church. This paper examines the Coptic Orthodox Church's engagement with the Chalcedonian Churches following the Arab invasion of Egypt in the 7th century through the 19th century. This study explores key historical milestones in ecumenical engagement, including the failed reunion attempts at the Council of Florence, influx of Christian missionaries, establishment of the Coptic Catholic Church, and lesser-known exchanges between the Roman and Alexandrian hierarchs. By framing these interactions through the lenses of reunion (theological alignment) and reincorporation (institutional integration), this paper underscores the Coptic Orthodox Church's dual pursuit of preserving her distinct identity while fostering dialogue amidst sociopolitical issues and cultural shifts. Drawing on historical records and contemporary sources, this work sheds new light on the Coptic Orthodox Church's long history of reconciliation attempts with the Chalcedonian Churches and argues that her engagement with the other reflects both an ecclesiastical commitment to doctrinal unity and a pragmatic response to external challenges, including periods of persecution, poverty, and proselytism.

Title: *Without Dwelling on the Differences: Importing Melkite and Nestorian Texts into the Jacobian Tradition in Egypt*

Presenter: *Mr. John B. Habib* (Yale University, CT)

Abstract:

By the 11th century, many of the Christian communities in the Middle East had adopted the Arabic language in their liturgies and literatures. Confessional groups that were divided from each other by doctrine and language found themselves in direct contact. Rather than writing exclusively in Coptic, Greek, or Syriac; the Jacobites, Melkites and Nestorians were all contributing to the flourishing Christian Arabic literature of the medieval world. Therefore, valuable Arabic works could easily traverse denominational boundaries without the need for a translator. Naturally, medieval Coptic authors had ambivalent sentiments towards the texts that they deemed to be simultaneously useful and heretical. This study has two parts that will showcase a range of different approaches that the medieval Coptic authors pursued to resolve their conflicting convictions. The first part is to survey previous academic literature on Coptic adaptations of Melkite and Nestorian Arabic works. The second is to present new evidence regarding a preface by the Melkite author and translator ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭakī that was integrated into the Coptic Book of the Gospels.

Title: *Sequencing/Scaling the “Scala”*

Presenter: *Prof. Lillian Larsen* (Redlands University, CA) / Joseph Fahim

Abstract:

This joint paper continues the work of contextualizing two 19th century Copto-Arabic grammars – among the earliest to appear in print – aimed at re-introducing Coptic Language skills to Arabic speaking monks. The paper more explicitly places the foundational sequences which structure each grammar in conversation with late-ancient and medieval classroom content. This involves first examining each 19th century grammar in light of school artifacts provenanced to late-ancient monastic sites, then more explicitly in comparison/contrast with the compendious collections of *scala*, that is ‘word lists’ which derive from medieval monastic settings.

Title: *Apologetics as public theology in medieval Egypt: al-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl’s apologetic enterprise*

Presenter: *Ms. Monica Mitri* (USC, CA)

Abstract:

Between 1239 and 1242, the prolific theologian al-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl composed four apologetic texts responding to Muslim talking points about Christianity. And although apologetics is a restrictive and reactionary genre, these four texts have come to represent the culmination of al-Ṣafī’s theological production. One would

think he would have found it easier and more prestigious to compose a theological compendium like his brother al-Mu'taman.

I argue here that al-Ṣafī intentionally chose the apologetic genre in order to design a comprehensive theological and linguistic project. By analyzing his most substantial apology, *al-Ṣaḥā'ih fī jawab al-naṣā'ih*, I suggest that al-Ṣafī found apologetics a conversational and appealing genre, and that he used it to participate in a tradition of linguistic expansion inherited from earlier theologians. Using an apparently reactionary genre, al-Ṣafī expertly demonstrated that Arabic is more expansive than Islam and claimed it as a Christian theological language.

Title: *The State of the Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*

Presenter: *Dr. Saad Michael Saad* (CGU, CA)

Abstract:

Since its launch in 2012, the Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia (CCE) has established itself as an indispensable digital resource for scholars, students, and specialists engaged in the study of Coptic heritage. Hosted by the Claremont Colleges Digital Library (CCDL), the CCE has garnered over 1.4 million page views, reflecting its broad and sustained scholarly engagement. Encompassing more than two millennia of Coptic history and culture, the encyclopedia offers comprehensive coverage of topics such as religious institutions, liturgy, theology, monasticism, art, architecture, music, language, literature, and the socio-political life of Copts. This paper provides an overview of the CCE's current scope and infrastructure, recent editorial and technical developments, and ongoing initiatives aimed at expanding its accessibility and scholarly utility. The CCE may be accessed at: <https://ccdlib.claremont.edu/digital/collection/cce>.

Title: *New Digital Resources for Bohairic Coptic: A Project Update from Coptic Scriptorium*

Presenter: *Prof. Caroline T. Schroeder* (University of Oklahoma, OK), *Dr. Nicholas Wagner* (Duke University, NC/University of Oklahoma, OK)

Abstract:

Since 2013, the Coptic Scriptorium project has been producing tools for studying the Coptic language and digitizing Coptic literature. At last year's St. Shenouda-UCLA Conference of Coptic Studies, we announced our preliminary work on the Bohairic dialect. This year, we will present new digitized documents and other features on our platform and the Coptic Dictionary Online made possible by our Bohairic tools. The paper will provide examples of comparative dialectical research (Sahidic and Bohairic) that one can do using the database. We will conclude by discussing our future plans in light of the drastic reductions at the National Endowment for the Humanities (our primary funding source).

Title: *The Portland Agpeya: Three(?) Horsemen and Many Questions*

Presenter: *Dr. Tamara Siuda (CGU, CA)*

Abstract:

Portland State University (PSU) Mss. 40 is a partial Coptic Horologion (Agpeya) manuscript, probably dating to the 19th century, which was presented to the Portland State University Library in along with a smaller set of pages from a completely different manuscript as a donor gift. It features portions of the Bohairic Coptic and Arabic bilingual Agpeya liturgy including headings from four hours and the Veil Prayer, as well as three beautiful full-page color images of the equestrian saints George, Philopater/Abu Seifein, and Theodore. Up to now the manuscript has been known and studied by various university students, but has not received any scholarly review. This paper will discuss what we can know about PSU Mss. 40 thus far, some peculiarities that require further study, and my attempt to locate the rest of the manuscript if it is still in existence and solve the mystery of a second partial document—written only in Arabic and undecorated—that the donor included with his gift.

Title: *The Formation and Culture of a k̄atib: The witness of Yūḥannā ibn Sāwīrus, al-k̄atib al-miṣrī (fl. ca. 1020 CE)*

Presenter: *Professor Mark Swanson (Lutheran School of Theology, IL)*

Abstract:

A recent Arabic-language publication in Egypt, Sherif Ramzy’s *Yūḥannā ibn Sāwīrus al-k̄atib al-miṣrī: ḥayātuhu wa-kitābātuhu* [Yūḥannā ibn Sāwīrus “the scribe of Miṣr”: his life and works] (n.p.: n.p., 2021; reprint Cairo: Maktabat al-Maḥabbah, 2023) has brought the largely neglected figure of Yūḥannā ibn Sāwīrus and his *Kitāb al-‘Ilm wa-l-‘amal* [*The Book of Knowledge and Work*] to the attention of students of Copto-Arabic literature. Sherif Ramzy provides a very readable edition of Yūḥannā’s book, with an introduction in which he convincingly solves the problem of dating this author: Yūḥannā lived at the time of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 996–1021), and, like other prominent Christians, he left Cairo for Antioch during the period of al-Ḥākim’s persecution. His *Kitāb al-‘Ilm wa-l-‘amal* reflects his sojourn in Antioch and can be dated to the decade between 1015 and 1025.

Yūḥannā’s book is an apology for the Christian faith, but it also offers a kind of apology for the vocation of the Christian scribe (*k̄atib*). Yūḥannā provides a map or curriculum for the formation of such a scribe, which includes acquisition of the technical skills of the scribe but also the study, in step-by-step fashion, of mathematics, medicine, philosophy (including music), and theology – a pathway that is seen as leading to growth in the knowledge of God and holiness of life. For Yūḥannā, the “culture” of the Christian scribe should be one marked by ascetic learning and philosophical piety.

This paper argues that Yūḥannā’s vision and example provide a helpful template for understanding the formation and culture of the Coptic Christian scribe, one that can be used in studying the many scribes (*kuttāb*: secretaries, bureaucrats, financial administrators, and so on) who play a role in medieval Copto-Arabic literature, whether as lay Christians or in “second careers” as monks, priests, or bishops. The monk and priest Buṭrus al-Sadamantī (*fl.* 1260) – who is often assumed to have once been a *kātib* in government service even though we have no direct evidence of that – will be taken as a “test case,” an opportunity for comparison with the template that Yūḥannā provides.

Title: *Manuscript and Artefacts: Acquisition of the St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society 2025*

Presenter: *Mr. Hany N. Takla* (St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society/ACTS, CA/ SAC, AUS)

Abstract:

The Society identified Manuscripts as the basis for recovering our Coptic heritage. We began with the most economical way of obtaining such resources, which was microfilm reels which we converted to microfiche cards and eventually to digital format. In doing so we opened a door to the new generation of Copts in the diaspora and also in Egypt to pursue primary sources research. The verdict on proper methodology is still to be determined. Our next logical step was to acquire original manuscripts that provide a more comprehensive look at these resources. Since we started in 2003, the acquisitions have gone through peaks and valleys with regard to the number of annual acquisitions. In this past year or so, we were able to acquire 25 new manuscripts. This paper will highlight the history as well as share some of the notable acquisitions.

Title: *Chosen, Tried and Proven: An Illustration of the Temptation on the Mount through Fr. Matta al-Miskīn’s Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*

Presenter: *Ms. Maggie Tawadros* (St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society/CGU. CA)

Abstract:

The temptation on the mount was an event divinely decreed in the economy of God as an essential prelude to Christ’s earthly ministry, an encounter that established the framework for the trials and triumphs that would follow, not only for Christ, but for all humanity. Through each of Satan’s disruptions, Christ is tempted to undermine the perfect unity between His Person and the Father, either by disobeying, showing distrust, or lacking faith in God the Father. The following study examines the significance of this trial through two mediums: Fr. Matta al-Miskīn’s commentary on the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and an illustration of the final temptation by Michael, the Metropolitan of Damietta, in Paris Manuscript Copte 13. Specifically, this discussion delves into how Fr. Matta’s emphasis on the salvation of the soul—

expressed through a clear depiction of Christ’s divine authority and suffering in the gospels—lies at the heart of Coptic 13’s iconography. Looking at the arena of warfare depicted in Fr. Matta’s exegesis, this paper investigates how the central themes of suffering and divine Kingship are intricately woven into Metropolitan Michael’s illustration of the confrontation between the Son of God and the prince of this world, wherein the divinity of Christ is manifested through His profound obedience and sacrificial love for His Father, and for the creation. Consequently, this portrayal emphasizes that Christ’s impending passion is rendered possible uniquely by virtue of His status as the Son of God—a detail vividly captured in the powerful representation of Christ’s figure on the mount, alongside the physical and spiritual fall of Satan from his “exalted” position.

Title: *Evagrius of Pontus and the Desert Mothers and Fathers on Thoughts: Some Reflections*

Presenter: Prof. Tim Vivian (California State University Bakersfield, CA)

Abstract:

In his *Praktikos*, Evagrius, at the Wadi Natrun in the late fourth century, names the eight “primary thoughts,” which become the eight “evil thoughts” of Nilos of Ancyra and the eight “vices” of John Cassian: gluttony, sexual immorality, love of money, gloominess/sorrow, anger, acedia, self-importance/vainglory, and excessive pride. The monastic past here is prologue, and more than prologue: this paper offers reflections on the eight principal thoughts and their relevance for us today.

Title: *Behnam and Sarah in the Coptic Tradition*

Presenter: Dr. Youhanna N. Youssef (St Athanasius College, University of Divinity, AU)

Abstract:

The veneration of Behnam and Sara was introduced to the Coptic liturgy by the Syriac community. In this paper, we will discuss the manuscripts containing their life, the place of their veneration. We will edit and comment on the liturgical texts containing their praise.

Title: *Christian Wisdom in the Margins: Reading the Apophthegmata Patrum Between the Languages of Egypt*

Presenter: Dr. Jason Zaborowski (Bradley University, IL)

Abstract:

Reading *Apophthegmata Patrum* between the languages of Egypt reveals subtle variations in the translations of many sayings. What can we learn from variant phrasings? This presentation compares the earliest Arabic recensions of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* to Greek, Coptic, and Syriac recensions, identifying

patterns in the ways the target language of translation construes traditional Christian ascetic concepts. While Coptic and (less so) Syriac inherit much Greek vocabulary, the Arabic recensions sometimes search for apt Arabic terms. Through analyzing sayings between the languages of Egypt, the presentation identifies meaningful adaptations of culture, anthropology, and theology by variations of diction, omissions and interpretive glosses.

The Twenty-Sixth St. Shenouda-UCLA Conference of Coptic Studies Participants

Dr. Lisa Agaiby: is a lecturer in Coptic Studies and Academic Dean at St Athanasius College, University of Divinity in Melbourne Australia. Her latest publication is, with Tim Vivian, *Door of the Wilderness: The Greek, Coptic, and Copto-Arabic Sayings of St Antony of Egypt* (Brill, 2021). Her latest publication is an edited volume on *Fist in the Desert: St. Paul the Hermit in Text and Tradition* (Brill, 2025). Lisa is currently heading a project to digitize and catalogue the manuscript collection at the Monastery of St Paul at the Red Sea, Egypt. She is honored to be a fellow member of the St Shenouda Society.

Dr. Solange Ashby: received her Ph.D. in Egyptology with a specialization in ancient Egyptian language and Nubian religion from the University of Chicago. Dr. Ashby's expertise in sacred ancient languages including Egyptian hieroglyphs, Demotic, and Coptic, Ethiopic, Biblical Greek and Biblical Hebrew underpins her research into the history of religious transformation in Northeast Africa and the Middle East. Her first book, *Calling Out to Isis: The Enduring Nubian Presence at Philae*, explores the temple of Philae's history as a Nubian sacred site. Her current research describes the roles of women – queens, priestesses, mothers – in traditional Nubian religious practices. She is a founding member of the William Leo Hansberry Society which seeks to create pathways for people of African descent – on the continent and in the diaspora – to engage in the study of African antiquity

Dr. Heather Badamo: is an associate professor in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her work investigates the visual manifestations of exchange in the eastern Mediterranean, with a particular focus on Christian-Muslim contact. Her first book, *Saint George Between Empires: Image and Encounter in the Medieval East* (Penn State UP, 2023), explores the political repurposing of Saint George by competing states and communities during the era of the Crusades. She has received support from the American Philosophical Society, the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, Dumbarton Oaks, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Research Center in Egypt, and the IIE Fulbright Foundation. She is currently in residence at the Getty, where she is at work on a book about the “Copto-Arabic Renaissance,” which considers how medieval Coptic elites employed the sacred arts to ensure communal survival in the midst of seismic linguistic and cultural transformations.

Mr. Mena Basta: is an incoming Ph.D. student in Religious Studies at Claremont Graduate University and a student at St. Athanasius and St. Cyril Theological School (ACTS). He holds a B.S. in Leadership Studies from California State University, Stanislaus. His current research engages the historical development of Coptic Orthodox ecclesiology in dialogue with broader patristic and

manuscript traditions. His work also explores models of ecclesial leadership in the Coptic diaspora alongside his studies on the Copto-Arabic Synaxarium.

Ms. Helana Boutros: is a 2nd year PhD student at McMaster University in the Health, Society, and Aging Department. Her thesis explores the lesser-known stories of Coptic Orthodox diasporic women's lived experiences as they pursue spiritual health, and how those collective experiences shape and frame their broader encounters with the imaginaries of mental health and biomedicine in the West. In this work, she draws heavily from the anthropologies of health/medicine, the senses and Orthodox Christianity to encourage people to think differently about health, illness, and distress. Her work has gained funding traction on local, provincial, and federal levels, where Helana has successfully secured multiple awards of recognition toward her Doctoral work. Outside of her thesis, Helana is also currently leading two small sensory-ethnographic-focused projects in the Coptic community, namely with respect to (1) liturgical hymnology, and (2) sacred and environmental materiality in the Coptic diaspora. Ultimately, she sees the work she does, within and outside of thesis, as a gift back to the Coptic community.

Prof. Stephen Davis: is Woolsey Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of History at Yale University. He specializes in the history of ancient and medieval Christianity, with a focus on the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. His book publications include *The Cult of St Thecla* (Oxford UP 1998), *The Early Coptic Papacy* (AUC Press 2001), *Coptic Christology in Practice* (Oxford UP 2008), *Christ Child* (Yale UP 2014), *Monasticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford UP 2018), and most recently *The Gnostic Chapters* (Brill 2023), a critical edition and translation of Evagrius Ponticus' *Kephalaia Gnostika* in Arabic. Since 2006, he has served as executive director of the Yale Monastic Archaeology Project (YMAP), conducting field work and training graduate students principally at three sites in Egypt: the Monastery of John the Little in Wādī al-Naṭrūn, the White Monastery near Sohag, and its federated Women's Monastery at Atripe. Finally, he is also founding editor of the series *Christian Arabic Texts in Translation* (CATT; Fordham UP 2019–), and for the past decade he has overseen a project to catalogue the collection of Coptic and Arabic manuscripts at the Monastery of the Syrians in Egypt, with four volumes already published in CSCO Subsidia series (Peeters 2020–), and two more currently in press.

Joseph Fahim is a board member of the Saint Shenouda Coptic Society, and a regular contributor to a range of SSCS initiatives. His most recent academic work has focused on translating two nineteenth-century grammars prepared for Arabic speakers, seeking to learn Coptic. Working in close collaboration with Saint Shenouda Coptic Society faculty associates, Joseph started this work as an effort to find a way to teach his three children the Coptic language.

Joseph additionally serves as a subdeacon in the Coptic Orthodox Church, and has a background in Electrical, Biomedical and Aerospace Engineering.

Dr. Mary Farag: is Associate Professor of Early Christian Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. Her book, *What Makes a Church Sacred? Legal and Ritual Perspectives from Late Antiquity* published by the University of California Press in 2021, studies the Roman juridical concept of *res sacra* (“sacred thing”) and its implications for bishops’ administration of ecclesial property in late antiquity. She is currently editing and translating an Arabic witness to the Life of Pachomius.

Prof. Salim Faraji: Dr. Salim Faraji is Professor and Chair of Africana Studies at California State University, Dominguez Hills. He is also the founding Executive Director of the Master of Arts in International Studies (MAIS) Africa Program at Concordia University Irvine in Ghana, West Africa. He completed his Master of Divinity at the Claremont School of Theology and M.A. and Ph.D. at Claremont Graduate University. He is a member of the *International Society for Nubian Studies* and specializes in early Christian history, Africana and Africanist historiography, Coptic Studies and the Kerma, Napatan, Meroitic and Medieval periods of Nubian history. Dr. Faraji is a founding member of the William Leo Hansberry Society. He is also a member of the American Sudanese Archaeological Research Center (AmSARC). He is one of a handful of Nubiologists in the United States and the only Africana Studies scholar in the country who is also a Coptic Studies specialist. Professor Faraji is a contributor to *New Perspectives on Ancient Nubia*, *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* and the author of *The Roots of Nubian Christianity Uncovered: The Triumph of the Last Pharaoh*

Dr. Daniel Girgis: is a subdeacon in the Coptic Orthodox Church. He has received his MA in Theology from St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in 2021, and his PharmD from the SUNY University at Buffalo in 2019. His research focuses on the restoration and preservation of Coptic liturgical tradition through the study of Orthodox theology, the analysis of Coptic liturgical manuscripts, and the oral transmission of Coptic chant.

Mr. Michael Habashi: is currently pursuing his PhD in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Cambridge. His research focuses on Coptic Church history and the ecclesiology and ecclesiastical reforms of Pope Shenouda III. Alongside his doctoral studies, Michael is the Senior Business Manager at Capital Group, a global investment firm in Los Angeles. Michael graduated with a Bachelor of Arts *magna cum laude* in sociology, certificate in markets and management studies, and minor in religion from Duke University. Michael also earned his Master of Theological Studies from St. Athanasius and St. Cyril Theological School.

John Habib is a PhD student in the Medieval Studies program at Yale University. He is particularly interested in the transmission history of Biblical texts in medieval Egypt, the movement of their manuscripts between individuals and institutions, as well as the nature of their use in communal and individual settings. Before enrolling at Yale University, John completed the Master of Art Conservation program at Queen's University specializing in the treatment of paper objects. He was awarded the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Scholarship in support of his research project at Queen's University. He was also the recipient of the 2023-2024 Fr. Marcos Marcos Scholarship for the Study of Coptic Cultural Heritage at a Canadian University. John has held various positions at the Coptic Museum of Canada, St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, Bradley Museum, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Ultimately, John strives to integrate his experience as a conservator into his current research to further investigate the material characteristics of Coptic books and their relation to their textual contents.

Prof. Lillian I. Larsen: She serves as Crawford Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Redlands, in Southern California. Complementing teaching responsibilities in Christian Scriptures, Global Christianity and World Religions, Larsen's co-edited volume traces the contours of *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2108). In turn, her broader trajectory of research and publication has incrementally re-assembled the 'missing chapter' that is the history of monastic education in Egypt. A current book project ('On Learning a New Alphabet'), collects and codifies this ongoing work.

Ms. Monica Mitri: is a doctoral candidate in religious studies at the University of Southern California. She studies Arabic-speaking Christians of the medieval Middle East, focusing on their intellectual contributions, reception of earlier Christian literatures, and active negotiation of their place in the wider Islamicate society. She is currently writing her dissertation, titled "A Tale of Four Brothers: Awlād al-'Assāl and the Copto-Arabic Golden Age." In it, Monica analyzes the thirteenth-century Copto-Arabic intellectual and artistic renaissance through the eyes of one family of four brothers. Known as Awlād al-'Assāl, they were central figures of the renaissance – as prolific authors, patrons, societal elites, and powerful members of the community. Monica's research, both published and ongoing, paints a lively community of medieval Egyptian Christians engaged in religion and politics, traveling, devising laws for their community, and coming into their own in the Arabic language. Monica's articles and reviews have been published in *the Journal of Methods and Theory in the Study of Religion*, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, and *Reading Religion*.

Dr. S. Michael Saad: is the Managing Editor of the *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia* and Chair of the Coptic Studies Council at Claremont Graduate University. He also hosts *Coptic Civilization*, a LogosTV program broadcast in both English and Arabic via satellite, YouTube, Facebook, and LogosChannel.com. Saad has authored three book chapters and approximately 200 publications spanning modern Coptic history, culture, diaspora studies, and microwave engineering. He served as an adjunct professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Illinois at Chicago (1985-1996), was named a Fellow of the IEEE in 1997, and holds eight U.S. patents. He earned an M.A. from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1987. His publications are available at: <https://chicago.academia.edu/MichaelSaad>. Fellow Member of the St. Shenouda Society.

Prof. Carolyn Schroeder: is Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Oklahoma, where she is also a member of the College of Arts and Sciences' interdisciplinary Data Scholarship Program, Affiliate faculty in History and Religious Studies, and a Fellow at the Data Institute for Societal Challenges. Previously she was Professor of Religious Studies at the University of the Pacific (2007-2019) and served as Director of the Humanities Center there from 2012-2014. She received her Ph.D. from Duke University in 2002 under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth A. Clark. She is an author and/or coeditor of multiple monographs and publications in Coptology and digital humanities. She is also co-founded and is a Principal Investigator of the interdisciplinary online research platform Coptic Scriptorium (copticcriptorium.org), which produces digital editions, natural language processing tools, and other digital resources for the study of Coptic literature and the Coptic language. A Fellow Member of the Society.

Dr. Tamara L. Siuda: is an Associate Managing Editor of the *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*. She is an Egyptologist and Coptologist and received an MA in Egyptology from the University of Chicago, a second MA in Coptic Studies from Macquarie University, and a PhD in Coptic Studies from Claremont Graduate University. Tamara's current research projects focus on contemporary Coptic martyrs and martyrologies.

Prof. Mark Swanson: teaches and is director of Advanced Studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. His book *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt (641-1517)* (Cairo/New York: AUC Press, 2010) has recently been re-released in paperback. He is a proud Fellow Member of the St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society.

Hany N. Takla: President of St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society and Director of the Coptic Center in Los Angeles. Obtained his MA in Coptic Studies from Macquarie University, Sydney Australia. Part-time Lecturer at the

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Ms. Maggie A. Tawadros: received her BA in Art History and Psychology from UCLA in 2017, and her MA in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Chicago in 2019. Currently, she is a PhD Student of Religion at Claremont Graduate University. She volunteers as a Research Assistant at the St. Shenouda Center for Coptic Studies as well as being an Assistant Curator at the St. Shenouda Cultural Museum.

Prof. Tim Vivian: is professor emeritus of Religious Studies at California State University Bakersfield and a retired priest of The Episcopal Church (Anglican Communion). He's published numerous book reviews, journal articles, and essays on early Christian monasticism. The most recent volumes are *The Sayings and Stories of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (2021, 2023), *Exhortation to the Monks by Hyperechios* (2024), *Becoming Fire: Through the Year with the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, revised and expanded edition (2024), and *The Teachings and Sayings of Neilos of Ancyra: Three Essential Works from Early Christianity* (forthcoming, 2026).

Dr. Nicholas Wagner: received his PhD in Religion from Duke in 2021. Nick is currently a Postdoctoral Associate at Duke in the Department of Classical Studies and Department of Religious Studies. His research interests broadly span the cultural history of Judaism and Christianity in the ancient Mediterranean, with a particular focus on ancient books, readers, and reading. Is currently a member of the development team at Coptic Scriptorium

Dr. Youhanna N. Youssef: attained a Ph.D. from the University of Montpellier, France, in 1993, and frequently lectures at the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo. He has taught at Stockholm University College Sweden and at Newman Institute in Uppsala Sweden). He was a senior research associate at the Centre for Early Christian Studies at the Australian Catholic University, and a senior research fellow of the Centre for Classics and Archaeology at the University of Melbourne. A prolific writer who has authored a number of publications, his areas of interest include Patristics, Hagiography, Dogmatic Theology, and Christian-Arabic Studies

Dr. Jason Zaborowski: is an associate professor of Religion at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. His research and writing centers on texts written in Arabic, Coptic, and Syriac, giving special attention to the writings of Egyptian Christians throughout history on topics such as martyrdom, apocalypse, and wisdom. Professionally, Dr. Zaborowski served several years as a co-chair of the Middle Eastern Christianity unit of the American Academy of Religion, and in 2022 at Bradley University he led (with co-director Nelly van Doorn-Harder) an NEH Summer Institute titled: Middle Eastern Christianity: A Historic and Living Tradition



ML.Ms. 297

Euchologion of the Liturgies of SS Basil and Gregory

Dated AM 1629

