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### A Report on the Calendar of the Coptic Orthodox Church

- What is the beginning date of the calendar? What event is used as a starting point?

According to Fr. Tadros Malaty, the rise of Diocletian to Emperorship in the November of 284 AD is the starting point of the Coptic calendar, as the Egyptian Christians were apparently the most heavily persecuted during Diocletian's reign. Hence, they mark subsequent years with AM, Anno Martyrdum. Their new year begins with Thout 1, which can be either September 11 or 12, depending on the leap year.

- Evolution of the calendar: What were its origins? If the origins are obscure, are there key points where the calendar was codified or changed?

Who did this?

It was based off of the older Egyptian calendar, which was reformed to have a leap year by Pharoh Ptolemy in 238 BC, although the reform was not widely accepted until Julius Caesar imposed it on them in 46 BC.

- Is it a solar calendar or lunar calendar—or both? (This will help you answer the next question.)

Coptic Month	Start Date
Thout	September 11/12
Paopi	October 11/12
Hathor	November 10/11
Koiak	December 10/11
Tobi	January 9/10
Meshir	February 8/9
Baremhat	March 10
Baremoude	April 9
Pashons	May 9
Paoni	June 8
Epip	July 8
Mesori	August 7
Little Month	September 6

Figure 1. Coptic Calendar, taken from <https://ukmidcopts.org/coptic/calendar/>

It is a solar calendar.

- Just how long is a month?

12 of its 13 months are 30 days each. The 13<sup>th</sup> month has 5 or 6 days, called epagomenai, depending on if it is a leap year or not.

- Can you date your project using the notation of this calendar?

Sunday, Misra 21, 1739 AM.

- How many days are in a year? (Not as obvious as you may think.)

365, except for leap years where it is 366.

- Are there units in the calendar besides the day and month and year? (e. g. weeks, etc.) What is the basis for these units?

There are seven-day weeks, like in other Christian calendars. The basis for it, like in the other Christian calendars, is the six-day work week with Sunday as a Sabbath rest.

- Important days/festivals on the calendar

Most of the major holidays are the same as other Christian calendars, although the dates are calculated differently: Easter/Pascha, Christmas, the Annunciation, and Epiphany. Of course, they also have feast days for saints that the Coptic Orthodox Church does not share with any of the Chalcedonian churches, such as Pope Dioscorus I, who is celebrated on 7 Thout (17 September on the Gregorian calendar). Interestingly, the feast day of the 21 Coptic Christians martyred at the hands of ISIS members, which was formerly only a Coptic holiday, was recently adopted into the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar as a gesture of unity between the two churches, as Nicole Winfield reported for AP News on May 11, 2023.

- Any other features of interest



Figure 2. Icon of Pope St. Dioscorus, taken from <https://www.facebook.com/suscopts/photos/a.644442172239197/3911956978821017/?type=3>

There are several traditions of “lucky” and “unlucky” days that have existed throughout the history of the Coptic calendar. According to Christoffer Theis, writing for Mythos in October 2016, one manuscript says that if a male child is born on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month, he will be poor, while if a girl is born on that day, she will be a harlot. It also says that the 21<sup>st</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup> days of the month are good days to start undertakings. However, another manuscript assigns various ill omens to the 23<sup>rd</sup> day, and yet another assigns them to the 25<sup>th</sup>. Most of the Coptic manuscripts on this subject are from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

- Reflection: Why did these societies make these particular choices? What does the calendar you chose say about that particular culture/civilization? What does it tell us about the nature of timekeeping?

It can be seen that the Egyptian Christians put emphasis on their history as a people who continually suffer martyrdom, from the Roman persecution to oppression under the Ottoman empire to their continued abuse by the majority Muslim population around them. Their conservatism can be seen in their retaining the names of the months from their pre-Christian days. And their history of Roman influence can be seen in their calendar remaining essentially in step with the Julian calendar. All this shows that people will mark with great significance events of great proportions with something in their calendar. Most will not gain much more than a holiday, but sometimes something can have such a deep impact that the years are counted from that moment onwards. And it also shows that cultures will influence one another in all aspects of life.

- Is there a reason you chose this particular calendar?

I have a fascination with the Eastern Christian traditions, namely the Eastern Orthodox (which includes the Greek, Russian, Antiochian, and Serbian Orthodox churches, among others),

the Oriental Orthodox (which includes the Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Indian Orthodox churches), and the Assyrian Church of the East.

## References

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