THE LITANIES FOR THE KING
IN THE COPTIC LITURGY

INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian church had always prayed for the king, even before the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, as is attested in a papyrus dated from the third century from the Oxyrhynchus collection. In Coptic martyrdoms, we find only the mention of Constantine, while in monastic literature, many kings are mentioned, such as Valentinian the father of the two foreign disciples of Saint Macarius: Maximus and Dometius, and Cyrus the brother of Theodosius.

As for the “orthodox king,” only Zeno the father of Hilaria is remembered.
After the Arab conquest, however, many kings converted to Islam and there has been no Christian king in Egypt since the seventh century. And yet, the Coptic church has continued praying for kings.

The Coptic liturgical texts contain several litanies for the king that are used in different services of the church. In addition, there is a rite for enthroning the king of Ethiopia.

This reflects a form of submission to authority, as Saint Peter ordered in his epistle: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;”6 “Honour the king.”7 The same was also directed by the Apostle Paul: “For kings, and [for] all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”8

G. Cuming, while studying the Anaphora of Mark, concludes:

“Prayer for the Emperor is mentioned already by Athenagoras and Tertullian. Outside Egypt it is confined in the liturgies to the Great Synapte and the Anaphora. There is not such prayer in Coptic Mark, Eg. Boh Bas and Greg”9

In this paper, we will examine the litanies10 for the king which are recurrent in the Coptic liturgical books11 in order to follow their evolution, we will also include the prayer for enthroning the kings of Ethiopia.

**THE EUCHOLOGION OF THE WHITE MONASTERY**

I. One of the earliest witnesses in the Coptic Liturgical texts books is the Euchologion of the White Monastery, written in the tenth century,12

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(6) I Peter 2:3.
(7) I Peter 2:7.
(8) I Tim 2:2.
mentioned a litany for the Kings from an unknown anaphora of a Syrian type.\footnote{Lanne, Le Grand Euchologe...., fol. 121, p. 332[68]–333[69]}

\begin{verbatim}
απεμεινεῖε γιόν τὸν πάσο [ε]ρεύμων των βασιλέων
πέραν οἱ πατριάρχες τῶν θερίδων
τὴν ουσίαν τῆς θεομορφίας
διότι εἰσιν ἐν τοῖς ἑαιδεύσιν ἐν παλατίνοις

\end{verbatim}

Remember, also O Lord, the kings of the land and all the army,
give to them a sober spirit and a perfect conscience, mercy upon
the poor of Your people and without trouble
and rebellion against Him.

Commentary

It is hard to date this litany, however, it seems that it was during a
time of famine, poverty and political instability. There is no mention
about the king whether he is “God-Loving”; that is, Christian or “Orthodox,”
which implies that this litany was composed when the king
was not Christian. Hence it could be dated either before Constantine
or after the Arab conquest.

\section*{II.}

And again in a litany from another unknown Anaphora:\footnote{Ibid., fol. 134, p. 338[74]–339[75].}

\begin{verbatim}
απεμεινεῖε γιόν τὸν πάσο [ε]ρεύμων των βασιλέων
πέραν οἱ πατριάρχες τῶν θερίδων
τὴν ουσίαν τῆς θεομορφίας
διότι εἰσιν ἐν τοῖς ἑαιδεύσιν ἐν παλατίνοις

\end{verbatim}

Remember O Lord, the pious king
and those who reign now in the faith of our
Lord Jesus Christ
Remember O Lord the all the faithful\footnote{As there is lacuna, Lanne filled “in faith” ἡμετέρῳ my translation is
based on parallel texts however both texts are possible.}
Orthodox brethren in the palace and
the whole army

Commentary

The king here is qualified as “Pious.” The mention of “Orthodox
brethren in the palace and the Army” is an indication of a peaceful
Christian environment, hence it can be dated between the fifth to the sixth centuries, as the schism in christendom started after the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), and the seventh century was full of wars first between Heraclius and Phocas and then between the Byzantine and Persian empires and finally between the Byzantine and Arabs.

III. Again in the Anaphora attributed to Matthew:16

Remember O Lord, the holy peace which You granted us by saying Peace I leave with you. My peace, which is mine, I give to you. The peace also of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church from one end of the earth to the other.

Let the kings of the earth make peace with Your Christian people in order that they (the kings) do not decide upon us the schism of the earth and impure Idolatry

Remember also O Lord the Orthodox kings* of the land, those that You have established:

over the land in piety. And moreover the pious (kings)

grant them justice and might in order that all nations surrender to them

(17) Lit. “Make them to sit”.

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Commentary

This litany may be dated to the fourth or sixth century as it is apparent from the mention of Orthodox king. It seems at that time the kings started to interfere in the theological debates hence we find “in order that they (the kings) do not decide upon us the schism of the earth and impure Idolatry”. The text was also written during the time when there were wars “in order that all nations surrender to them.” The mention of “Idolatry” insinuates the presence of idolatry, and hence could indicate that the text was composed before the end of idolatry (sixth century?)

The actual Euchologion

We will start by mentioning the texts where the kings occur in several litanies18 in the Coptic Euchologion as they are repeated in other services Coptic Church.19


(19) See below.
**Euchologion**

We will refer to the best critical edition of this book prepared by Abd al-Masih Salib and printed by Claudius Labib.

1. In the long litany for the Peace of the Church we read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ΦΑΜ ΕΤΘΟΠ ΝΧΗΜ ΛΥΡΗΧ:</td>
<td>This (church) which is from one end of the world to the other,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΝΗΛΟΣ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΖΗΝ ΗΩΣ ΤΗΡΟΥ</td>
<td>All peoples and all flocks bless. The heavenly peace send down into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΣΧΟΥ ΕΡΟΥ ΤΡΙΙΝΗ ΤΕΒΑΘΣΗ</td>
<td>all our hearts, even the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΝΙΥΟΥΝ ΣΗΣ ΕΖΙΡΗΝ ΕΝΘΙΣΙ</td>
<td>peace of this life graciously grant to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΤΗΡΟΥ</td>
<td>us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΑΛΛΑ ΖΗΝ ΤΡΙΙΝΗΝ ΏΤΕ ΠΑΧΟΣ</td>
<td>The king, the armies, the rulers, the councillors, the multitudes, our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΦΑΜ ΕΡΧΙΡΙΖΕΣ; ΣΕ ΝΗΣ ΣΗΝ ΣΗΝ ΣΗΝ</td>
<td>neighbours, our coming in and our going out, comfort them with all peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΠΟΥΡΟ ΝΗΙΝΣΙΝΑΙΟΝ ΝΑΡΧΩΝ ΣΗΣΟΜΗ</td>
<td>O King of peace grant us Your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΝΗΝΝΗ ΝΗΣΟΡΩΣ ΝΗΝΝΗ ΣΗΣΟΜΗ</td>
<td>peace, for You have given us all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΕΡΟΥΝ ΝΗΝΝΗ ΣΗΣΟΜΗ ΕΡΟΥΝ</td>
<td>things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΣΕΑΘΑΜΟΥ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΠΟΥΡΟ ΏΤΕ ΤΡΙΙΝΗΝ ΖΗΝ ΣΗΝ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΏΤΕ ΤΡΙΙΝΗΝ ΖΗΝ ΓΡΑΧ ΣΗΝ ΣΗΝ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΑΚΤΗΝΟΥ ΣΗΝ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commentary**

This text was composed when Christian was present throughout the World. It provides us with an outline of the administration of that time where the army is ranked before the rulers and the counsellors.

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(21) Abd al-Masih Salib, *Πικάν Ώτε Πιευχολογιόν Ευούχα Ετέ Φαλ Πιε Πικάν Ώτε Τρακόν Πιαλοφόρα Ώτε Πιαλος Λακλός Νην Πιαλος Γρηγορός Νην Πιαλος Κύριαλος Νην Τακτιστοχ Ιεγούχα* [The book of the Holy Euchologion which is the book of the three anaphorae of St. Basil, St. Gregory and St. Cyril and other holy prayers] (Cairo, 1902) (Hereafter *Euch* 1902)

(22) For the meaning of this word cf. Y. N. Youssef, “Two notes on the Coptic Theotokias,” *Scr* 5 (2009) 405.

There is a litany in the Anaphora of Saint Gregory\(^{(24)}\) for the king:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Remember O Lord, those who have} & \quad \text{Deacon: Pray for our Christ-loving} \\
\text{reigned in piety} & \quad \text{kings} \\
\text{and those who are kings}\(^{(25)}\) & \quad \text{Remember O Lord, our brethren} \\
\text{the orthodox believers who are in} & \quad \text{the palace and all who are in the} \\
\text{the palace} & \quad \text{military} \\
\text{and all who are in the military} & \quad \text{people: Lord have mercy} \\
\text{and for all the troops} & \\
\text{People: Lord have mercy}
\end{align*}
\]

**Commentary**

This prayer is identical to the one mentioned in the Euchologion of the White Monastery, text II.

2. Long litany of peace in the Anaphora of Saint Cyril:\(^{(26)}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Deacon: Pray that Christ our God} & \quad \text{The king of our land, Your servant} \\
\text{may grant us mercy and} & \quad \text{Deacon: Pray that Christ our God} \\
\text{compassion before the ruling} & \quad \text{may grant us mercy and} \\
\text{authorities and} & \quad \text{compassion before the ruling} \\
\text{so} & \quad \text{authorities and} \\
\text{en} & \quad \text{so} \\
\text{their hearts} & \quad \text{their hearts} \\
\text{towards us for that which is} & \quad \text{towards us for that which is} \\
\text{good} & \quad \text{good} \\
\text{at all times and forgive us} & \quad \text{at all times and forgive us} \\
\text{our sins.} & \quad \text{our sins.} \\
\text{People: Lord have mercy} & \quad \text{People: Lord have mercy}
\end{align*}
\]


Keep him in peace, righteousness and strength.

May all the barbarians, the nations that desire wars against all our abundance be subdued unto him.

Speak to his heart concerning the peace of Your one only catholic and apostolic church.

Grant him to think peaceably toward us and towards Your holy name.

In order that we too live a quiet and peaceful life, and may be found dwelling in all piety and holiness in You.

People: Lord have mercy.

Commentary
This text resembles the rite of royal crowning in the Ancient Constantinopolitan Euchologion.28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constantinopolitan Euchologion</th>
<th>Coptic Euchologion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ὑπότοξον αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ βάρβαρα ἔθνη, ἐνσπειρον ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ τὸν φόβον σου, καὶ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς ὑπηκόους συμπάθειαν διατήρησον αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ἀμωμήτῳ πίστει, ἀκριβῆ φύλακα τῶν τῆς ἁγίας σου καθολικῆς εκκλησίας δογμάτων</td>
<td>ἱπούσαςεκδοχῆς ὑπὸ τρόυ ἱπέξα ἱεράρχης ἱεροσόλυμος ἱεροσοφῆς ἱεροσύνης ἱναβατεις ὑπὸ τοῦτο τῆς ἁγίασμας ἱσχύς ἰδιώτης ἐν τῇ ἀμωμήτῳ πίστει, ἀκριβῆ φύλακα τῶν τῆς ἁγίας σου καθολικῆς εκκλησίας δογμάτων</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This prayer is different from the intercession of the Byzantine Anaphora of Mark\(^{29}\) where there is no mention of the Barbarians and the nations.

It is hard to say which litany took from the other. However, it is important to mention that the earliest manuscripts of the liturgy of Saint Cyril and Saint Mark are Greek fragments on papyrus. These fragments are preserved in the University of Strasbourg (not including this litany). These fragments probably date from the fourth century. The British Museum possesses small Greek fragments written in the sixth or seventh century containing part of the liturgy of Saint Mark, while the Constantinopolitan Euchologion is later.

For obvious reasons the Coptic rite of enthroning the kings is absent from Coptic manuscripts\(^{30}\) however, the similarities with the Byzantine rite of Enthroning the king, show that this rite was not only compiled for use at the enthroning of Haile Selassie, but may have historical roots. The fact that the Litany for the king comes to the conclusion of the rite — as the crowning of the service — has similarities in the Coptic Church; for example, the Funerary service for the congregation at the conclusion of the Palm Sunday service is the Litany for the Reposed. The same could be said for the Unction of the Sick where the Litany for the sick comes as a conclusion.

### The Rituals

These services include:

There is no special litany for the kings, however, the different rites use the litanies — mentioned above in the Euchologion. We will give an overview of the use of these litanies in the different services:

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\(^{29}\) **Cuming, The liturgy of St Mark...**, 7, 13, 113–114, 116–117.

\(^{30}\) **Zanetti, Bohairic Liturgical Manuscripts...**, 83, note 67.
a- **Baptism**\(^{31}\) and Christian Initiation: The litany for the king is prayed during the liturgy of the baptism.\(^{32}\)

b- **Marriage:** the litany for the **king is not recited**, however, the great litany for the peace of the Church which mentions the king occurs.\(^{33}\)

c- **Unction of the sick:**\(^{34}\) Apart from its use at home for a sick person, this service is performed publicly once a year on the last Friday of Lent; two days before Palm Sunday, using the tunes of Sundays during Lent. The order for the Unction of the Sick consists of an introduction and seven prayers or sections consisting of a litany, readings from the epistle, the gospel, and prayer, and a conclusion. There are some similarities between the Coptic and Greek rite of the Unction of the Sick, however, the Coptic rite is shorter than the Greek one. In the fourth prayer, the priest shall say the **litany for the king**.\(^{35}\)

d- **Burial services:** Only the long litany of peace is said.

e- **The office of the Genuflection:** the litany for the king is said during the second prayer.\(^{36}\)

f- **The procession of the Cross:** there are two feasts for the Cross: The first commemorates the discovery of the Cross by Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, in the fourth century. The second date commemorates the recovery of the Holy Cross from the Persians by the Roman emperor Heraclius in the seventh century. Although these two feasts are Byzantine par excellence, the Coptic Church has a special rite for these days. The tune of Palm Sunday is used for these feasts as well as the procession. There is a hymn praising King Constantine who or-

\(^{31}\) For the rite of Baptism cf. O. H. E. Burmester, Baptismal Rite of the Coptic Church, *BSAC* 11 (1945) 27–86.


\(^{33}\) Cf. Text 1.


\(^{35}\) Cf. Text 3.

dered the closing down of the idol temples and the reopening of the churches of the Christians. It seems that the cult of Constantine was imported from the Byzantine church. When the peaceful edits of Constantine reached Alexandria (saying) close the gate of the temples and open the gates of the Church...

Pray for the Christ loving leaders, who ordered us to remember them by their names so that the Lord bless them and give them grace in front of the mighty authorities etc.

**Commentary**

The political context of this litany shows that this prayer is for the “Christ loving leaders” who are serving “mighty authorities” that means non-Christian. The authority is rendered in Arabic “Sultan.” This implies a late Medieval context, perhaps during the Mamluke era (1257–1516).

**h–** In addition to the special services such as the blessing of the waters for the Epiphany, Maundy Thursday and feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

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(38) Atallah Arsenius Al-MUHARRAQI, [The book of the guide to the Passion Week including the ordo of the passion Week from the Saturday of Lazarus to the day of Sam al-Nasîm] (Cairo, 1970) 123.

(39) A. Sidarus, La Pâque sainte ou la Semaine Sainte selon la liturgie copte, Proche Orient Chrétien 17 (1967) 3–43.
The litany for the king is said before the consecration of the water in the Epiphany, Maundy Thursday, as well as footwashing service on the feast of Peter and Paul.

The Pontificals

These books are mainly to be said by the Bishops of the patriarchs, they include

a– ordination of Bishops, priests, deacons, sub-deacons, readers. Nothing is mentioned relating to the king.

b– The consecration of the liturgical instruments- nothing is mentioned relating to the king.

c– consecration of the Church, and a new altar during this rite the Bishop shall say the Litany of Peace and also we find this Lexis.

This is the house which the Holy Spirit built, and we pray in truth that he may grant victory to our kings and fathers and all pasturage of peace, and his great mercy.
d– consecration of the Myron we find that the archdeacon exhorts the congregation saying: ....44

For our most pious and God fearing Orthodox our kings, and all who are in the palace and the soldiers\(^{45}\) and the heavenly victory\(^{46}\) and their helpers\(^{47}\) let us beseech the Lord, to have mercy\(^{48}\)

Consecration of the Holy Kallielion: Let the Archbishop say the petitions which are for the sick, those who are travelling, for the fruits of the earth, for those who have fallen asleep, the sacrifices, the kings...\(^{49}\)

Horlogion

In the troparia of the Midnight Prayer we read:

For our most pious and God fearing Orthodox our kings, and all who are in the palace and the soldiers\(^{45}\) and the heavenly victory\(^{46}\) and their helpers\(^{47}\) let us beseech the Lord, to have mercy\(^{48}\)

\[\text{O Virgin God-Bearer, the unbroken wall, bring thou to naught the counsels of those who oppose us, and turn the affliction of your servant to joy, be a wall to our city and fight for our kings and intercede for the peace of the world, for you are our hope, O God-Bearer.}\(^{50}\)\]

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(44) Burmester, The Egyptian or Coptic Church..., 228.
(45) Arabic: “his soldiers.”
(46) Not in the Arabic.
(47) Arabic adds “all his helper.”
(48) Not in the Arabic version.
(49) Burmester, The Egyptian or Coptic Church..., 231.
(50) O. H. E. Burmester, The Horologion of the Egyptian Church (Cairo, 1973) (Studia Orientalia Christiana Aegyptiaca) 124 (text), 226 (translation).
Commentary

As Father Ugo Zanetti observed, the prayers of the hours are the direct descendants of those original Canonical hours which came into being with the foundation of the coenobitic or communal form of Egyptian Monasticism. There are some relations with the old Jerusalem rite. This troparion has a counterpart in the Greek office of the Midnight.

The historical context for the Greek office may be during the war between the emperor Heraclius and the Persians. When the Emperor with the Patriarch Sergios prayed to the Virgin Mary, the patriarch made a procession of the icon of the Virgin around the walls of the City while the king was fighting against the Persian occupation of the Jerusalem, Syria, Egypt; “Be a wall to our city and fight for our kings and intercede for the peace of the world.”

The Psalmodia

There is no prayer for the king; only Constantine and Helena are commemorated in the memento sanctorum.

In addition to the liturgical texts there is also a fast called:

The Fast of Heraclius

This seven-day fast is attributed to Emperor Heraclius (575–642), who rescued the holy cross from the Persians in 629 and restored it to Golgotha. It is incorrectly linked with the Coptic Church, and taken to account for the first seven of the fifty-five days forming the Coptic Great Lent. The misconception arises from the following historical event.

When the triumphant emperor reached Tiberias on his way back from Persia, he was lobbied by the Jewish population who succeeded through lavish gifts in acquiring his written pledge of security. This did to forestall any possible acts of retribution on the part of the Christian population of the Holy Land. However, on his arrival at

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(52)  Burmester, *The Horologion...*, 226, note 5.
(53)  Ibid.
(54)  For this text cf. Youhanna Nessim Youssef, “Notes on the Magma” (memento sanctorum) and the Athanasius prayer in the Coptic Psalmodia, *JCS* 7 (2005) 111–124
Jerusalem, the Christians pointed out to the emperor concrete evidence of the devastation caused by the Jews during the years of the Persian occupation and urged him to punish them. Heraclius was at first reluctant to depart from the promise of security he had just granted, but the Byzantine patriarch of Jerusalem and his bishops argued that a promise made under fraud would not be binding. Furthermore, to allay his misgivings, they offered to institute a week's fast in recompense for his breach of promise and to write to other Churches to this effect. Eventually, Heraclius gave orders for the massacre of the Jewish population in Jerusalem. The story occurs in both versions of the chronicles of Sa’id ibn Batriq (887–940), the Melchite patriarch in Egypt, the Egyptian and the Antiochene. The Antiochene version states that edicts were published and the Copts till now observe this fast while the Syrians and the Byzantines have not observed it since the death of Heraclius.

**Conclusion**

This article shows once more the importance of the study of the Coptic liturgical texts as reflecting an early stage of history. It demonstrates the conservative attitude of the Coptic Church of keeping the tradition as for the fast of Heraclius which was left even by the Melchites before the ninth century, while the Copts continue this fast up to the present day. The historical-religious political context in the time of composition are reflected in these texts.

The liturgical prayers for the Kings in the Coptic tradition may be dated from the time of idolatry to the time of the Sultans (Authorities) and hence we have about one thousand years of composition.

**SUMMARY**

This article overviews the Coptic liturgical texts relating to the kings. While after the Arab invasion there is no Christian King in Egypt, the Coptic Church still prays for the King. We follow the evolution of these prayers. In one instance we find a parallel text in the Byzantine tradition.

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