

**The Church of Alexandria and the City's Economic Life in the Sixth Century**



George R. Monks

*Speculum*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr., 1953), 349-362.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0038-7134%28195304%2928%3A2%3C349%3ATCOAAT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-R>

*Speculum* is currently published by Medieval Academy of America.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/medacad.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE CITY'S ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

By GEORGE R. MONKS

ONE of the most remarkable phenomena of the late Roman empire was the extension of the functions of the bishop beyond the purely religious aspects of his office. Among other features of his extensive extra-religious functions, the Byzantine bishop sometimes played a prominent role in the economic life of the community. The patriarch of Alexandria, in particular, was placed in a peculiar position which especially permitted him to develop such a role. The present article is designed to illustrate that aspect of his activities with material drawn largely from the Greek hagiographical literature of the sixth and early seventh centuries, in particular, Leontius' biography of St John the Compassionate.<sup>1</sup> It is based on material indexed some years ago as a project sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies.

From the reign of Constantine and the Peace of the Church the emperors continued to confer increased powers upon the bishop. In the sixth century, Justinian, having once established throughout the empire the so-called caesaropapism which reduced the bishops to the status of magistrates, was quite willing still further to enhance their functions. Indeed, he invested the episcopacy with more extensive powers than had any sovereign before him.<sup>2</sup> So much did the secular business of a Byzantine bishop's life expand that it came to occupy the greater proportion of his time.<sup>3</sup> 'As the empire decreased,' Otto of Freising had the perspicacity to observe much later, 'the church adapted itself to the intermission and began to appear in great authority.'<sup>4</sup> Nowhere was this more true in the sixth and seventh centuries than in the case of the isolated and, in fact, derelict bishopric of Rome. The Church of Alexandria also offers an interesting example. On the periphery of imperial influence, it was able to assume a measure of autonomy and independence.

Jean Maspero<sup>5</sup> has presented a vivid picture of the semi-independent position of the Egyptian patriarch. The fact that Egyptian national consciousness found in the church a means of venting its resentment against the empire, and some compensation for its alien domination, centered tremendous prestige in the person of the ecclesiastical autocrat enthroned in the ancient chair of the Evangelist

<sup>1</sup> Leontius, *Vita S. Johannis Ellemosynarii*, ed. Heinrich Gelzer (Freiburg and Leipzig, 1893). Hereafter in these notes this work is cited merely as 'Leontius' (without title or '*op. cit.*').

<sup>2</sup> William K. Boyd, *The Ecclesiastical Edicts of the Theodosian Code* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1905), p. 104, with numerous citations from the Code and Novels of Justinian.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, citing *Ottonis Frisingensis Chronicon* (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, xx, 248), vii, prologus: 'Verum quia regno decrescente, ecclesia, ut dixi, braviam aeternae patriae ac post vitae praesentis laborem, requiem adeptura, in praesenti quoque in magnum montem crescens, in magna auctoritate stare coepit. . . .'

<sup>5</sup> Jean Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1923); hereafter cited as 'Maspero.'

Mark in Alexandria. Indeed, contemporaries were wont to refer to him as a new Pharaoh.<sup>6</sup> The Patriarch Dioscorus arrogated to himself the title 'Oecumenical Patriarch' one hundred and fifty years before its assumption by his brother in Constantinople caused St Gregory the Great of Rome such acute distress,<sup>7</sup> and Maspero cites instances of the Egyptian patriarch appearing as 'Judge of the Church' and 'Judge of the Universe.'<sup>8</sup> After Chalcedon (451) and the Monophysite Schism the Melchite archbishop retained his power, but in a different sense — not as the embodiment of Egyptian national pride, but as the principal instrument of imperial policy.

The power of the patriarch quite overshadowed that of the nearest civil official, the *praefectus augustalis*. In the sixth century Justinian pared down the jurisdiction of the *augustalis* until it consisted only of Alexandria and the two adjacent provinces forming the western part of the Delta.<sup>9</sup> The patriarch of Alexandria was thereafter the only personage in Egypt whose authority embraced the whole valley of the Nile. It extended also to the dependent churches of Libya and Ethiopia.

The wealth of the see of Alexandria was proportionate to its political influence and moral prestige. Hardy is of the opinion that the Apion family and the Church of Alexandria were the largest landowners in Egypt,<sup>10</sup> and by the end of the sixth century the Alexandrian archbishop may well have been the wealthiest man in Egypt.<sup>11</sup> In the first place, the direct revenues of the patriarch from his own resources were considerable. The Church of Alexandria possessed lands in the Arsinoïte Nome<sup>12</sup> and doubtless throughout the valley, and also drew extensive revenues from the African provinces subject to its jurisdiction.<sup>13</sup> Another source of income must have been very lucrative, i.e., simony, which was rife in the Eastern Church.<sup>14</sup> When Gregory the Great learned from a young medical student from Alexandria that a mere youth and acquaintance of his of vicious character had received a diaconate by bribery and that the practice was common

<sup>6</sup> Maspero, p. 63; and Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church*, tr. Claude Jenkins (New York and London, 1924), III, 57.

<sup>7</sup> At the Council of Ephesus, Bishop Olympius referred to the patriarch as 'praesul & primus . . . sanctissimus pater noster & universalis archiepiscopus Dioscorus magnae Alexandrinae civitatis' (Mansi, *Sanctorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, VI, 855). Cf. Gregory the Great, *Registrum*, V, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Maspero, p. 37, note 1: *κρῆς τῆς δικουμένης*. Both the Coptic and the Orthodox patriarchs of Alexandria are still officially designated *δικαστῆς τοῦ κόσμου*; cf. Sidney Herbert Scott, *The Eastern Churches and the Papacy* (London, 1928), p. 249.

<sup>9</sup> *Edictum XIII*, i-ii.

<sup>10</sup> Edward R. Hardy, *The Large Estates of Byzantine Egypt* (New York, 1931), p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> The Melchite Patriarch Paul, deposed in 539, bought his restoration from Justinian for the princely sum of 700 pounds of gold (Maspero, p. 61), and the Patriarch John the Compassionate, at his accession, found 8,000 pounds of gold in the episcopal palace (Leontius, XLV).

<sup>12</sup> Germaine Rouillard, *L'Administration civile de l'Égypte byzantine* (1923), p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Leontius, xii. Probably Libya and the Cyrenaica are meant. The sums mentioned here are in gold.

<sup>14</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 135; XI, 28, Gregory the Great to the Patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem in identical words.

in the Egyptian Church, he wrote at once to rebuke the Patriarch Eulogius.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the Church of Alexandria collected court fees on transactions involving its notaries. On one occasion, the patriarch took occasion to warn his *νομικός* not to collect a fee of more than three nomismata for delivery of a document to a creditor of the church.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the power of the patriarch over the Egyptian Church was so absolute and unquestioned that he could, if necessary, supplement the revenues of his own see by making requisitions upon the wealth of the monasteries and bishoprics under his jurisdiction.<sup>17</sup> The wealth of the church in Egypt was vast and constantly increasing by gift, legacy,<sup>18</sup> and purchase,<sup>19</sup> and the guarantee of inalienability in imperial law.<sup>20</sup> The papyrological evidence amassed by Hardy, Rouillard, and Barison amply attests the landed wealth of the Egyptian Church and leads Hardy to conclude that its property was 'probably more extensive than the imperial domain.'<sup>21</sup>

But, as Rouillard points out, 'In making of the Melchite patriarch of Alexandria a veritable representative of the central power in Egypt, the government ran the risk of entering upon a dangerous course, of seeing the Egyptian bishops, disposing of the riches of the church along with an immense moral authority, show towards the state an independence equal to that of the civil functionaries.'<sup>22</sup> The most astonishing example of the wealth and economic power and independence of the Alexandrian see is illustrated in the life of the Melchite patriarch, St John the Compassionate, written by Leontius, bishop of Neapolis. John was appointed to the chair of St Mark by Heraclius in 612. He was a man of such universal and indiscriminate charity that even the Copts by accident have him enrolled in their calendar of saints.<sup>23</sup> His rule illustrates the startling contrast that

<sup>15</sup> Homes F. Dudden, *Gregory the Great — His Place in History and Thought* (London, New York, and Bombay, 1905), I, 235, citing *Registrum*, XIII, 44.

<sup>16</sup> John Moschus, *Δειμών Ψυχική* (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 87, part 3), cxciii: Βλέπε, κίριεώ νομικέ, πλείον τριών νομισμάτων παρ' αὐτοῦ μὴ λάβῃς.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, the Patriarch Dioscorus appropriated the grain destined by imperial bounty to the churches of Libya for the support of the poor and pilgrims, and sold it for a high price in time of famine (Mansi, VI, 1025).

<sup>18</sup> As in its economic and political power and in so many other matters of ritual, belief, iconography, etc., the Egyptian church was strongly influenced by the immemorial traditions of the Pharaonic religion, so in Christian Egypt a form of mortuary endowment was in common usage, namely, the willing of property with definite testamentary provision for prayers and requiems in behalf of the dead testator. And just as his ancestors may have longed to be buried in holy ground at Abydos, one such testator implored the abbot of a monastery to which he had left property to inscribe his name in the catalogue of the dead commemorated in the prayers of the brethren; cf. Paola Barison, *Ricerche sui monasteri dell' Egitto bizantino ed arabo secondo i documenti dei papiri greci (Aegyptus, XVII, 1938)* pp. 87-88, citing *P. Cairo Masp.* II, 67151, of 15 Nov. 570 A.D.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rouillard, *op. cit.* (note 12 above), p. 56, for the wealth of the monasteries, and pp. 60-61 for the resources of the patriarch.

<sup>20</sup> *Nov. Just.*, VII: 'De non alienandis aut permutandis ecclesiasticis rebus immobilibus aut in specialem hypothecam dandis creditoribus. . . .'

<sup>21</sup> Hardy, p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> Rouillard, pp. 215-216.

<sup>23</sup> Maspero, p. 328 and note 2.

had developed between the chief ecclesiastical office and the principal secular office in Egypt. Nicetas, the emperor's cousin, patrician and augustal prefect, cuts a rather poor figure beside the ecclesiastical Pharaoh, although his exertions had freed Egypt from the tyranny of Phocas. He and the patriarch were on terms of intimacy and mutual respect, but undertones of the inevitable friction between them are not wanting in the narrative of Leontius. Rancor and jealousy occasionally flare up.

Although the imperial administration had broken down completely and its fiscal machine was unable to squeeze another drop from Egypt, the revenues of the church continued to flow in abundant streams into the patriarchal coffers. Finally, the patrician, 'prompted by some devil,' says Leontius, appeared before the patriarch, frankly informed him that the emperor's treasury was exhausted, and demanded the surrender of the treasure of the church. Already the property of the church was considered the inalienable treasure of the poor, and John replied, 'My Lord Patrician, I think it unjust to give to an earthly king that which has been offered as an oblation to the King of Heaven. However, if you judge otherwise, know that the humble John will not give you a cent from these moneys, but, behold, under my lowly couch is the treasure of Christ. Do as you will.' The patrician ordered some of his retainers to raise the coffers on their shoulders and carry them out. As they descended, they passed servants of the patriarch ascending with little pottery jars labelled variously, 'Best Honey' and 'Unsmoked Honey.' In reality, these contained cash sums in gold sent from Africa, evidence enough of the state of mutual distrust that existed if the patriarchal revenues must be secreted into his palace by such a device. Nicetas, descending, asked that the patriarch present him with some honey for his own use. In alarm, those conveying the jars informed the patriarch of the situation. He, however, sent one of the jars labelled 'Best Honey' to the patrician with instructions that it be opened at once in his presence, and accompanied it with a little memorandum: 'The Lord who said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee (Hebrews, xiii, 5; Josh., i, 5)" is without falsehood and a true God. Therefore, corruptible man is unable to constrain God who offers life and sustenance to all. Farewell.' The patrician was touched to compunction and restored the goods of the church, and the rival potentates had an increased respect for each other thereafter.<sup>24</sup>

The patriarch continued disbursing with lavish hand the 'treasure of Christ' upon the helpless. Before his consecration he had the *οικονόμοι* of the Church of Alexandria compile a registry of the indigent of the city, and 7,500 persons were allotted their daily support at the church's expense.<sup>25</sup> Every comer, native or

<sup>24</sup> Leontius, xii.

<sup>25</sup> Leontius, II. For the similar organization of charity in Rome by Gregory the Great, cf. F. Homes Dudden, *op. cit.* (note 15 above), I, 247 f. The emperors set aside a portion of the *annona publica* for ecclesiastical use, primarily that the church might act as administrators in its distribution to the poor. Justinian especially endowed the patriarchal sees of Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria, as well as numerous provincial churches with such subsidies and forbade their alienation (*Nov. Just.*, VII, *pr.*, *cap.* I; *cap.* VIII). In the Life of St Theodore the Siccote (*Vita S. Theodori Siceotae, Acta Sanctorum*, 3 April), VII, 52, we find the Emperor Maurice giving a monastery an annual subsidy of 600 measures of grain to be used in caring for the poor. In Eustratius' *Vita S. Eutychii*, II, 17, and VII, 61-62 (Migne,

foreign, had but to ask in order to receive, in accordance with our Lord's injunction, 'Give to every man that asketh of thee' (Luke, vi, 30).<sup>26</sup> Human nature being what it is, it soon occurred to some to come repeatedly for alms. The patriarch one day, while visiting the hospitals<sup>27</sup> with his dispensers by his side, gave six nomismata twice to the same person, who appeared again after a change of costume. When the attendant, upon the third appearance of this gentlemen, ventured to point out that his master was being imposed upon, John the Compassionate replied, 'Give him twelve nomismata lest, perchance, it be my Christ who makes trial of me.'<sup>28</sup> One can imagine the annoyance with which the august prefect Nicetas must have observed the patriarch's lavishness to paupers with the needs of Heraclius growing daily before the Persian onslaughts.

But the public calamities and the failure of nature herself at last exhausted the treasury of St Mark. A low Nile occurred at the very moment Egypt was flooded with fugitives from the Persian invasion of Palestine and the sack of Jerusalem by Chosroes II in 614. At the height of his dilemma the patriarch received a very deferential epistle directed with unction 'to the most holy and thrice-blessed father of fathers, John, Vicar of Christ, a request and plea from Cosmas, the unworthy servant of the servants of Your Holiness,' wherein was contained a simoniacal proposal. Cosmas offered as the expiation of his sins, in return for a diaconate, 200,000 measures of grain and 180 pounds of gold. Fortunately, St John the Compassionate was spared the guilt of simony. He trusted to God to multiply the five loaves to feed the five thousand, and was saved by the timely return of two huge ships of the Church sent to Sicily for grain.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, when Modestus, patriarch of Jerusalem, undertook to repair the damage done the Holy Sepulchre by the Persians, his colleague of Alexandria was able to send him as a gift 1,000 nomismata, 1,000 sacks of grain, 1,000 measures of dried peas or beans (χιλία ἀσπρέου), 1,000 pounds of iron, 1,000 ropes of dried fish,<sup>30</sup> 1,000 jugs of wine and a thousand Egyptian workmen,<sup>31</sup> a striking illustration of the

---

*Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 86, part 2, coll. 2293 and 2344-2345), we find the bishop of Amasea and the surrounding monasteries distributing the grain of the church and bread during a famine. The rich monastery of the Metanoia in the suburb of Alexandria at Canopus received substantial quantities of grain annually at the charge of the *annona publica* (δημοσιον σιτου) from Aphrodito, Antaiopolis and the estates of Count Ammonius (Barison, p. 68; Hardy, pp. 46, 58-59). Rufinus informs us (*Historia Monachorum*, xviii (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, xxi, 387-462) that it was almost universally the custom among the Egyptian monks to let themselves out for hire during the harvest and surrender to their abbot the major portion of their wages destined to the relief of the poor. Relief was not only distributed locally, but shiploads of grain were sent as far as Alexandria for the use of those shut up in prison, pilgrims, and indigent. <sup>26</sup> Leontius, vii.

<sup>27</sup> Moschus (*op. cit.* in note 16 above, xlii) tells us that the νοσοκομειον at Jerusalem was under the charge of the patriarch. <sup>28</sup> Leontius, ix.

<sup>29</sup> Leontius, xiii. Perhaps the Patrimony of St Peter supplied this grain. We are not told. But we find Gregory in one of his letters directing the deacon Cyprian, rector of the Patrimony in Sicily, to send at once a thousand (2,000 if he can ship as much) measures of grain to Zeno, 'our brother and fellow bishop,' for the *alimonia* of his city (*Registrum*, vi, 4).

<sup>30</sup> Moschus, *op. cit.*, cxx, refers to the fishermen of the island of Pharos in the harbor of Alexandria who fished the Red Sea in the waters around the port of Raithu.

<sup>31</sup> Leontius, xx.

wealth that flowed into the patriarch's hands from the land of Egypt.

At the same time, however, and in spite of certain restrictions expressly imposed upon such interference in the Edicts of Justinian,<sup>32</sup> we find the patriarch quarreling with the patrician on the subject of the public revenues: '... the patrician wished to conduct the public market in the interest of the revenues, but the patriarch would not suffer it, in this procuring the salvation of the poor.' It appears that Nicetas attempted to renew the methods of a predecessor, the augustal prefect Hephaestus, who, early in the reign of Justinian, brought all the business of Alexandria under the monopolistic system from which he made enormous profits for the government.<sup>33</sup> Apparently after a public scene, the patriarch and the patrician left each other in high dudgeon. It was the fifth hour, and in the interval until the eleventh hour, the patriarch meditated upon the dictum of the desert hermits:<sup>34</sup> 'It is the character of angels not to quarrel at all, but in all things to abide in perpetual peace; of men to have altercations, but straight-way to be reconciled; of devils, however, to quarrel and pass the whole day unreconciled.' At the eleventh hour, the patriarch sent his arch-presbyter with the words, 'My Lord, the sun is on the point of setting.' Apparently the patrician had been meditating along the same lines; he arose and went to his rival and the two embraced and sat down to reconcile their differences.<sup>35</sup>

In thus interfering the patriarch would seem to have been conceivably within his legal rights. Justinian not only in a general way gave the bishops the power of intervening and supervising municipal magistrates and municipal finances,<sup>36</sup> but in his pragmatic sanction of 554 for the re-organization of the government of Italy he assigned to the pope the supervision of weights and measures.<sup>37</sup> The patriarch of Alexandria would appear at some time to have been granted a similar authority, for we find him exercising it as a matter of course. One of John's first official acts was to send his *oikonomoi* about the city with the other magistrates<sup>38</sup> to post conspicuously in every ward the following proclamation: 'John, the humble and least servant of the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, to all to whose lot it falls to be shepherded by Our Poverty and the Lord our God, thus: In accordance with the law which blessed Paul and Christ speaking through him laid down, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account (Epistle to the Hebrews, xiii, 17)." Our Nothingness trusts that, obedient to the word of God, you will receive our injunctions as coming from God, not from man. Whence, knowing

<sup>32</sup> *Edictum XIII*, x; xxviii.

<sup>33</sup> Procopius, *Anecdota*, xxvi, 35-39.

<sup>34</sup> We are informed elsewhere that the lives and sayings of the monks constituted some of John the Compassionate's favorite reading, Leontius, xxiii, xli.

<sup>35</sup> Leontius, xv.

<sup>36</sup> *Nov. Just.*, cxxviii, 16; cxlix, 1; cf. the Pragmatic of 554 (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Legum v*, p. 174), sec. 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Iustianiani Imp. Pragmatica Sanctio (loc. cit.)*, sect. 19: 'Ut autem nulla fraudis vel lesionis provinciarum nascatur occasio, iubemus in illis mensuris vel ponderibus species vel pecunias dari vel suscipi, quae beatissimo papae vel amplissimo senatui nostra pietas in praesenti contradidit.'

<sup>38</sup> Similarly the pope shared his authority with the senate (cf. *loc. cit.*).

this, I admonish your charity that, since 'God hates a false measure' as saith Holy Writ, such transgression will appear in none of you.' The patriarch did not content himself with quoting Biblical admonitions, but was invested with power to enforce his laws, and the proclamation concludes summarily enough, 'If, therefore, after the posting of this our present edict, anyone shall be apprehended guilty of this charge, all his property will be applied to the needs of the poor without recompense.'<sup>39</sup>

In addition, the patriarch exercised considerable jurisdiction over the various corporations of the city. When John's nephew became involved in a tavern brawl and was injured, he complained to his uncle. The patriarch at once summoned before him the officer in charge of taverns. Everyone expected him to be ordered to flog the offending tavern-keeper and have him led in procession through the market place. The patriarch, on the contrary, ordered him not to punish the tavern-keeper, thus rebuking his nephew publicly for frequenting such establishments.<sup>40</sup>

We can judge of the congestion in the patriarch's court from the following anecdote. Learning that certain persons wished to appear before him but were intimidated by the numerous officials who surrounded his judgment seat, he adopted the custom of placing his chair and a couple of benches before the church every fourth day of the month and taking his seat there with the Holy Gospels in his lap and but a single assessor in attendance, thus granting free and easy access to his tribunal.<sup>41</sup> On one occasion, when he had tarried until the fifth hour without anyone presenting himself before him, the patriarch was much distressed, but Sophronius, later patriarch of Jerusalem, then by his side, consoled him with the words, 'Today, most blessed one, you ought to rejoice and be glad; for you are indeed blessed if you have so pacified the flock entrusted to you by Christ that no one has a suit against his neighbor but, like angels, are without litigation or quarrel.'<sup>42</sup> It is difficult to imagine even a saint reducing the Alexandrians to the condition of angels 'without litigation or quarrel.'

Since his see was also the greatest port on the Mediterranean at the juncture of the sea routes eastward to India and Ceylon and westward to Marseilles<sup>43</sup> and possibly Britain, at a time when the Byzantines still preserved a maritime supremacy over the Mediterranean which no other people disputed,<sup>44</sup> with the commerce of the Mediterranean world largely in the hands of Syrians and Egyptians,<sup>45</sup> it is not surprising to find the patriarch of Alexandria intimately associated with the commercial life of the city.

In the first place, just as the churches and monastic establishments of Egypt possessed and operated various craft on the Nile,<sup>46</sup> so their chief, the patriarch,

<sup>39</sup> Leontius, iii.

<sup>40</sup> Leontius, xvi.

<sup>41</sup> Leontius, v.

<sup>42</sup> Leontius, vi.

<sup>43</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, v, 5; vi, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Wilhelm Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen âge* (Leipzig, 1885), I, 24.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> All the Egyptian monasteries possessed a couple of river craft which they employed in going to and from Alexandria on the business of their house (cf. Barison, p. 52, citing *Dict. Arch. Chret. et Lit.*,



engaged in a regular commerce and disposed of a very sizeable fleet of vessels belonging to the Alexandrian Church. On one occasion, a single squadron of the see of St Mark navigating the Adriatic consisted of more than thirteen vessels, each capable of carrying 10,000 measures and carrying an extremely rich cargo of fabrics<sup>47</sup> and silver and other cargo whose loss in a storm amounted to thirty-four centenaria.<sup>48</sup> There are other references to the 'great ships of the church' of Alexandria.<sup>49</sup>

The vessels of the see of St Mark found their way to remote shores. Besides the adjacent coasts of Palestine<sup>50</sup> and the Pentapolis,<sup>51</sup> they visited Sicily<sup>52</sup> and the Adriatic.<sup>53</sup> If we are to believe one almost romantic episode in Leontius' biography, they even reached the remote coast of Britain,<sup>54</sup> whither the mission of St Augustine had but recently preceded them,<sup>55</sup> and of which Procopius had such eerie tales to tell.<sup>56</sup> Besides supporting at his own expense 7,500 poor in the city and every refugee whom the vicissitudes of war and invasion washed up on the shores of Egypt, the patriarch also trafficked in Egyptian grain, exporting it in his own vessels.<sup>57</sup> The Alexandrian patriarch undertook to enlarge his fleet by building new vessels. This presented him with the problem of finding suitable timbers outside of Egypt, and his quest carried him as far afield as Rome. On this subject St Eulogius of Alexandria and St Gregory the Great of Rome carried on a correspondence lasting from 596 to 603 A.D. In spite of the scandalous excrudes-

---

II, col. 2, 3122), and St Pachomius in his Rule took care to formulate the principles of conduct his monks were to observe aboard ship (*Reg.*, cxviii, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, xxiii, col. 76); the monkish *vabrys* of the monastery of Abba Sourous is probably not exceptional (cf. Barison, *op. cit.*, p. 52). The vessels of the Metanoia came all the way from Canopus up to Aphrodito and the estates of Count Ammonius in the Thebaid to receive the grain allotted them from the *annona publica* which was handed over directly to the *διακομηράι* of the monastery (c. Hardy, p. 47, citing *P. Lond.* 995, 996, 1152; *P. Cairo* 67347 for the boat of the Metanoia and *P. Cairo* 67286 for the annual payment of Aphrodito and the *διακομηράι*). The monks of Abba Jeremias in Antinoe inherited a ship from the estate of one Phoibamon (Barison, p. 88, citing *P. Cairo Masp.* II, 67151 of 15 Nov. 570 A.D.), and in the expense accounts of the church of Arsinoe in the Fayum we find items for the building of a bark and the caulking and other repairs of other boats belonging to the church (cf. Hardy, p. 128, citing *P. Klein Form.* 900, 901, 902, 904, 908, 920, 924).

<sup>47</sup> Doubtless the magnificent Coptic textiles which were one of the media by which motives and designs from oriental art reached the remotest west to inspire the decoration of Irish illuminated manuscripts. Cf., Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period* (London, 1940), pp. 45, 51, 65, 66, and 133; and the interesting references in Lester D. Longman's article, 'Two Fragments of an Early Textile in the Museo Cristiano' (*The Art Bulletin*, XII, 2 [June 1930]), to the frequent mention in the *Liber Pontificalis* of 'vela Alexandrina' and 'rotas siricas, habentes storias Annuntiationis seu Natale Domini Nostri Jesu Christi' presented as gifts of popes to various basilicas (p. 123); also the citation of the statement in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, xxiv, that Egyptian textiles were shipped east and west to all parts of the known world (p. 128, note 55).

<sup>48</sup> Leontius, xxviii.

<sup>49</sup> Leontius, x and xiii.

<sup>50</sup> Leontius, xx.

<sup>51</sup> Leontius, x.

<sup>52</sup> Leontius, xiii.

<sup>53</sup> Leontius, xxviii.

<sup>54</sup> Leontius, x.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Registrum*, VIII, 29 (598 A.D.) in which Gregory announces the conversion of England to Eulogius of Alexandria.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the Dantesque tale related by Procopius in *The History of the Wars* (Loeb Classics edition), VIII, xx, 47-58.

<sup>57</sup> Leontius, x, xiii.

cence of simony in the Alexandrian see<sup>58</sup> and the Alexandrian patriarch's somewhat unsatisfactory and non-committal attitude with regard to the assumption of the title 'Oecumenical' by their brother prelate in Constantinople,<sup>59</sup> the two were on the most amiable terms. Portions of the Patrimony of St Peter lay in wooded sections of Italy whence good ship-building timbers would be drawn. It is clear that Egypt was supplied from the Patrimony because Gregory refused to accept payment from the patriarch on the ground that the wood had cost him nothing.<sup>60</sup> The patriarch's ship-building campaign was prolonged through seven years. In July 596 the pope sent a first shipment of timber suitable for ship construction in charge of the Alexandrian deacon Isidore. He would have sent larger timbers but the patriarch had sent a ship too small to receive them.<sup>61</sup> A year later, Gregory is prepared to send larger timbers if the patriarch will send a ship big enough to transport them. He awaits instructions from Alexandria.<sup>62</sup> In 598 the patriarch apparently complained of the small size of the wood he was getting and offered to pay for larger timbers. Gregory declined to accept payment, reminding his colleague of the evangelical injunction against taking a price, i.e. 'You have received freely, give freely,' and informed the patriarch he would send larger timbers if a larger ship came to carry them away. For the present, he was sending another installment of small ones and next year, if it pleased almighty God, would prepare larger ones.<sup>63</sup> It was the same rather tiresome story next year. The pope had caused to be got ready fine timbers too large to be loaded in the small vessel from Alexandria. He was reluctant to cut them and would await instructions. If they were not required in Alexandria, he had use for them at home. Would His Sanctity pray for relief from his incessant afflictions from gout and the incursions of the Lombards.<sup>64</sup> Still a year later (A.D. 600), the pope informs Eulogius he has ready more timber, but until a ship arrives from Alexandria for it, he doesn't intend to bring the logs to Rome, but will let them lie where they were cut.<sup>65</sup> Three years later, we hear the last of this matter. The patriarch has apparently no further need of timber and has failed to send instructions as to what should be done with that prepared which the ship he has sent is too small, as usual, to carry. Gregory requests him to tell his deacon, Boniface, now on the way to Constantinople on papal business, what his wishes in the matter are.<sup>66</sup>

A regular commerce existed between the two sees. Both the correspondence and articles of commerce were apparently carried in the patriarch's ships under the supervision of an Alexandrian deacon. Besides an almost annual shipment of timber from the Patrimony, the pope also tried to fill requests for books, notably the *Gesta Martyrum* of Eusebius of Caesarea, but neither the papal archives nor the Roman libraries contained more than a few works of this author collected in a single scroll.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in the exchange of controversial material on past and cur-

<sup>58</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 44.

<sup>59</sup> *Registrum*, VI, 58; VIII, 29.

<sup>60</sup> *Registrum*, VIII, 28.

<sup>61</sup> *Registrum*, VI, 58: 'Nos vero quia videlicet peccatores sumus, ab occidente vobis ligna transmisi-mus, quae construendis apta navibus, . . .'

<sup>62</sup> *Registrum*, VII, 37.

<sup>63</sup> *Registrum*, VIII, 28.

<sup>64</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 175.

<sup>65</sup> *Registrum*, X, 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 45.

<sup>67</sup> *Registrum*, VIII, 28.

rent heresies the see of Peter was still much indebted to Alexandria, and we find Gregory requesting and receiving from the scholarly industry of the polished, courtly, and eloquent Eulogius<sup>68</sup> citations culled from Basil, Gregory Nazianzen and Epiphanius condemning the Arian Eudoxius (of whom the pope had never even heard!)<sup>69</sup> as well as his own masterly treatise refuting the Agnoetae whose heresy consisted in denying an omniscience in Christ equal to that of the Father.<sup>70</sup> The pope, in sending his first shipment of timber thanks the patriarch for presenting him with precious scented wood from Arabia.<sup>71</sup> To the patriarch also, Gregory was grateful for a shipment of the resinated wine (cognidium—*κωνίζιον, κωνίας οίνος*) which he preferred to all else; the genuine article he found it difficult to get from the ordinary merchant.<sup>72</sup> We also find the deacon of a monastery on the Jordan in charge of building a coenobion, sending a monk to Alexandria to buy an altar cloth (*ἄπλωμα*)<sup>73</sup> 'on the account of the archbishop.'<sup>74</sup>

It appears quite clear that the ship-masters who operated the fleets of the Alexandrian church served under the same general terms and responsibilities as those in the service of the state. Here again, as in so many other aspects of its government and administration, the church copied the institutions of the empire. The picture is very incomplete—in fact, only fragmentary. The references are purely incidental and it is necessary to proceed by analogy. For instance, there is no indication at all that there were hereditary corporations of *navicularii* in the service of the church. However, it is clear that they carried the cargoes of the church under the same liabilities as the *navicularii* in charge of the state transport. The law of *naufragium* applied to them and apparently they were held liable until they received a formal written quittance from the proper ecclesiastical authority. Thus, a fleet of more than thirteen ships of the church of Alexandria, navigating the dangerous Adriatic out of season, encountered a winter storm and it became necessary to lighten the vessels by casting over-board a portion of the cargo worth thirty-four centenaria. It was perfectly lawful to cast over-board whatever was necessary to save a ship in imminent peril of foundering,<sup>75</sup> but the

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Dudden, Gregory the Great, II, 229.      <sup>69</sup> *Registrum*, VIII, 29.

<sup>70</sup> *Registrum*, X, 14, 21.      <sup>71</sup> *Registrum*, VI, 58.

<sup>72</sup> *Registrum*, VII, 37. These articles of commerce, to be sure, are but matters of minor interest in a correspondence laden with the weightier matters of the sixth century, as for instance, the 'barking of heretics' (*hereticorum latratus*). Gregory rejoices at the triumphs of Eulogius over heresy and the many conversions he has effected in Egypt; he has 'not dissimilar news' to report from the western extremity of the world where his missionary Augustine has just baptized 10,000 Englishmen on the preceding Christmas day (*Registrum*, VIII, 29).

<sup>73</sup> Ἄπλωμα is primarily a cloth spread on the Holy Table, but may also mean simply cloth, according to E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Cambridge, 1914).

<sup>74</sup> Πάρα τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου λόγος, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita S. Cyriaci Confessoris* (*Acta Sanctorum*, September, VIII, pp. 147–159), i, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Edouard Cug, *Naufragium*, in Daremberg-Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*. In Roman law the captain of a vessel was authorized to cast into the sea all or a portion of his cargo if necessary (*Hermog. 2 jur. epit.*, Eod. 5 *pr.*). But in the case of the state cargoes, the *navicularius* was obliged to make good such losses if he could not produce witnesses to prove the ship was in imminent peril (*C. Theod.*, xiii, 9, 4, 1). A *navicularius* was also held responsible for all losses in case he put to sea in unseasonable weather (*Gaius, 7 ad Ed. prov.*, Dig., vi, 1, 36, 1). By the sixth century

fault in this case clearly lay with the captains for sailing in the stormy season in the first place. Immediately upon arrival in Alexandria, the surviving ship-captains and officers (*οἱ πιστικοὶ καὶ οἱ προναύκληροι*) fled precipitously to sanctuary in the nearest church. We well know their probable fate had they been dealing with the state, but St John the Compassionate was constrained by a higher law. Mindful of the infinite patience of Job, in his own hand-writing he sent them their quittance: ‘“The Lord gave, brothers; the Lord, as he willed, hath taken away; as it is pleasing to the Lord, so be it: blessed be the name of the Lord (Job, i, 21).” Come forth, my sons, and fear nothing from this mishap. For the Lord will provide for the morrow.’<sup>76</sup>

In view of its tremendous wealth and prestige and the relative security that attended its possessions in an age when the civil authority was disintegrating in Egypt, it is not surprising to find that the Egyptian church, and in particular the patriarchal see, engaged in a considerable banking business. This was a natural and, indeed, inevitable development once the church was recognized as a legal person or corporation capable of holding and administering property. And in the midst of the commercial and industrial activity of the eastern provinces of the Roman empire in the sixth century the church was already playing the role of banker which she was later to assume with the revival of trade in the Middle Ages in the West.

In the archives of the see of St Mark kept in the episcopal palace<sup>77</sup> were housed many documents and memoranda (*πιττάκια*) relative to business deals in which the church was involved either as borrower or lender of money. Since Alexandria was the greatest port on the Mediterranean, the wealth of many of its citizens lay in the maritime business and we would expect to find merchants playing a prominent role among the clientele of the church. Again, we are confronted with the incidental nature of the evidence. The anecdotes related in the hagiographical literature are presented for purposes of edification, to illustrate the Christian virtues of the subject of the biography, his charity and forbearance, etc., but they reveal a regular participation by the church in the business life of the East. And, in fact, the merchants of Alexandria frequently found the church prepared to come to their relief on far less exacting terms than any other agency.

Sea-captains suffering shipwreck or such irreparable business losses as to make their continuance in shipping impossible frequently had recourse to the church of Alexandria. Clearing the Pharos and navigating the barren coast of Africa adjacent to Alexandria seems to have been especially dangerous.<sup>78</sup> The fourth epistle of Synesius is a very entertaining account of the vicissitudes of such a

---

the principle was adopted in the legislation preserved by Justinian in the Code that state cargoes sailed at all times at the risk of the *navicularius* (cf. Godefroy's commentary to *C. Theod.*, xiii, 5, 32=C. Just., xi, 6, 6), who must apply for a quittance upon bringing his cargo to port and until such time as he received it remained liable to prosecution (*C. Theod.*, xxv, 3, 1, *pr.*; 6).

<sup>76</sup> Leontius, xxviii.

<sup>77</sup> Τὸ ὑπ' ἀντὴς ἐπιδοθὲν πιττάκιον ἐν τῷ ἐπισκοπείῳ, Leontius, xlvj.

<sup>78</sup> For the dangerous navigation in the neighborhood of the famous Syrtis, cf. Procopius, *Buildings* (Loeb ed.), vi, iii (the Greater Syrtis) and iv (the Lesser Syrtis).

voyage.<sup>79</sup> Many a vessel was wrecked just outside the Pharos or cast ashore by the winds in the treacherous sands along the coast. On one occasion a foreign merchant, sustaining great losses, appealed to the universally known charity of the patriarch. John the Compassionate gave him five pounds of gold with which he bought a cargo and put to sea. He was wrecked just outside the Pharos, preserving, however, his ship. The patriarch gave him a further ten pounds of gold which set him up in business again, but a day from port the wind cast him ashore with the loss of both ship and cargo. The patriarch, hearing of his misfortune, summoned him once more. He appeared at the episcopal palace in sheer despair, rending his tunic and sprinkling his head with penitential ashes, and was this time invested with the command of a 'great ship of the most holy Church' of Alexandria in which the patriarch was exporting 20,000 measures of grain.<sup>80</sup> We can perhaps discredit the grateful captain's eye-witness assertion that during the twenty days that a gale blew the ship, the patriarch himself could be seen standing in the stern holding the steering paddle. But the ship eventually reached port in Britain during a famine, disposed of its cargo at a great profit and returned with a cargo of tin, putting in at the Pentapolis on the return voyage to dispose of a portion of this cargo. And even if we do not feel obliged to believe that the tin was miraculously turned into silver, the venture must have been a highly successful one for both the patriarch and his sea-captain.<sup>81</sup>

So simple a matter was it to negotiate a loan from the treasury of St Mark in the days of John the Compassionate, that here, as elsewhere, he was imposed upon. The saintly patriarch, who could always justify his unsound financial administration and unbusiness-like methods by quoting Holy Writ to his more practical deacons and *oikonomoi*, was wont to remind them when they were dubious of the wisdom of his course, of that passage in Deuteronomy and Luke: 'Do not at any time turn away anyone desirous of borrowing from thee.' Well aware of whom he asked, a certain Gallic slave-dealer<sup>82</sup> borrowed twenty pounds of gold from the Patriarch, and when the administrators of the church in company with his other creditors demanded payment, he denied the debt. The ecclesiastical officials then sought to cast him into prison and confiscate his property. But the patriarch would not suffer it, falling back upon what appears to have been his favorite chapter of St Luke's Gospel, the sixth: 'Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful,' quoted the patriarch, 'who makes the sun to rise upon good and evil alike and the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust.'<sup>83</sup>

On the other hand, whenever the church of Alexandria had occasion to borrow

<sup>79</sup> Chateaubriand found the perils of sailing from Alexandria to Tunis in 1806 no less appalling than Synesius, and his narrative is almost as entertaining; cf. *Itinéraire de Paris à Jerusalem*, ed. Emile Malakis (Baltimore, 1946), II, 237-245.

<sup>80</sup> 'Ευθὺς οὖν ἐκέλευσεν παραδοθῆναι αὐτῷ ἓνα δόρκωνα δύο μυριάδων γομάτων σίτου ἐκ τῶν πλοίων τῶν διαφέρωντων τῇ κατ' αὐτὸν ἀγιωτάτῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ.

<sup>81</sup> Leontius, x.

<sup>82</sup> 'Ὦν γὰρ τῶν λεγομένων γαλλοδρόμων. Cf. editor's note 74, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 93, col. 1666.

<sup>83</sup> Leontius, xxxv. Doubtless the Church's debtors more frequently suffered the fate of the Jew Nostannus whose ship and goods were seized and sold to pay his debts by a *defensor* of one of the papal patrimonies in Sicily in conjunction with the other creditors (*Registrum*, ix, 40).

money, the wealth of the mercantile class was available. At least, such is the inference to be drawn from an anecdote in Moschus' *Pratum Spirituale*. There was at Alexandria, in the pontificate of the Melchite Patriarch Apollinarius (551-570), a young man among the first citizens of the city who inherited from his father measureless wealth in the shipping business, all of which was lost through various accidents and a succession of shipwrecks. The patriarch was distressed to see one of the foremost citizens thus brought undeservedly to penury, but was at a loss how to assist him without occasioning embarrassment. At length, a device occurred to him. Summoning one of the *nomikoi* or administrators of the goods of the Alexandrian see, he instructed him to prepare a document attesting an indebtedness of fifty pounds of gold on the part of the church to Macarius, the young man's father. Since Macarius had been dead ten years, the forged document was buried in a granary for some days to give it an aged appearance, after which it was conveyed to the youth by an ecclesiastical official who claimed he had come upon it five or six days back while going through the papers of the church,<sup>84</sup> and that he remembered his father and the transaction well. The patriarch even affected to take a whole week to look into the case, then summoned the youth and returned the fifty pounds, but hoped that he would not exact interest from the church.<sup>85</sup> The grateful youth, on the contrary, even offered to remit some of the principal.<sup>86</sup> All of which presents an edifying picture of cordial and considerate dealings between the church and the merchants of Alexandria.<sup>87</sup>

A notable case of the Church of Alexandria borrowing very extensively from the secular wealth of the city occurred in the pontificate of John the Compassionate. The charitable resources of his see broke down completely under severe famine conditions created by the flood of Palestinian refugees which happened to coincide with the low Nile already mentioned. To continue his relief work the patriarch, after exhausting the coffers of the church, borrowed at interest (unfortunately, the hagiographer did not consider it worth while to tell us the rate) to the extent of ten centenaria (1,000 pounds of gold). And, in spite of the philosophical and biblical traditions against usury, those who let money at interest to the patriarch in behalf of charity were regarded as 'Christ-loving people.'<sup>88</sup> It certainly was a curiously Byzantine form of piety to expiate one's sins while keeping a good business eye on the profits. But when others clung to their wealth as the sole means of buying their daily necessities, perhaps those who

<sup>84</sup> Ζητῶν χάριτας ἐν τῷ δικῷ μου. . . .

<sup>85</sup> 'Εἰς πλῆρεις σοι παρέχω, τοῦτο δὲ παρακαλῶ, κύριε μου ἀδελφέ, μὴ ἀπαιτῆσαι τὴν ἀγίαν ἐκκλησίαν τόκους.

<sup>86</sup> Moschus, *Λεμῶν Ψυχική*, xciii. In a sixth-century papyrus (15 Nov. 570 A.D.) we find the church acting as legal guardian of minors. Phoibamon, the chief physician of Antinoe, entrusted to Besas, abbot of the monastery of Abba Jeremias, and his successors his beloved children during their minority; he was to be not only their legal guardian but also responsible for their education and they were to be obedient to him in all things as to their own father; cf. Barison, p. 87, citing *P. Cairo Masp.* II, 67151.

<sup>87</sup> There is a story of a similar device employed by St John the Compassionate at a later date in coming gracefully to the relief of a pious youth left in penury by the decease of both parents, Leontius, xxxiv.

<sup>88</sup> Leontius, xiii.

parted with it won for themselves both interest on earth and merit in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Perhaps, too, they were never able to recover their loan. Indeed, one is inclined to wonder how the next incumbent of a see so burdened with debt would have managed to extricate himself from such a financial morass and reach solvency once more. However, no immediate successor to St John the Compassionate was to find himself under the necessity of coping with the problem. In 619 the Persians advanced on Alexandria. The public defense collapsed. Patrician and patriarch fled the city, embarking together and setting their sails for Constantinople. However, when they had put in at Rhodes buffeted by contrary winds, the patriarch sensed the approach of death, and, courteously taking leave of the patrician who had so long been his friend and rival, retired to his native city of Amathunta in Cyprus to end his days. Calling for writing materials, the prelate began joyously to compose his last testament: 'I am grateful to Thee, O Lord, that, hearing my wretchedness calling upon Thy goodness, Thou hast found me at the last dying with nothing to my name but a penny. For when, by the favor of God, I was consecrated bishop of the most holy church of the great city of the Alexandrians, I found in the episcopal palace 8,000 pounds of gold. However, a countless host of those dear to Christ found their way to me, and recognizing that everything belongs to the Lord of all, I hastened to give to God His own. Whence it happens that this single penny alone now remains to me. And deeming it likewise to be God's, I command that it be given to God's poor.'<sup>89</sup>

MISSISSIPPI STATE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

<sup>89</sup> Leontius, xlv.