

LAUDATIO

Martin Krause

Gawdat Gabra came into the world in Luxor on September 24, 1947, the second of four sons born to Gabra Abdel el-Sayed, an official in the Aswan Dam administration, and his wife Naquiyah who was an English teacher. After completing his secondary education, Gawdat enrolled at Cairo University; only 16 years of age, he was the youngest student in the Faculty of Arts, where he initially majored in English. But soon he changed his major to Egyptology, earning his BA in 1967. The following year Gawdat began studying for a master's degree, and simultaneously entered the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, predecessor of today's Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Gawdat's initial posting as Inspector of Antiquities took him to Edfu. His first publications, of which he continues to be justifiably proud, were directly related to sites in the area. During this Egyptological stage in his career, he also served as resident EAO archaeologist in Nubia, where, in the context of the cooperative undertaking of the EAO with UNESCO, he was responsible for operations to reconstruct the temples of el-Derr, el-Moharraqa, and el-Dakka. It was during these campaigns that he became acquainted with Professor J. M. Plumley, who invited him to come to Cambridge, England. There he studied the Coptic language privately with Prof. Plumley and deepened his knowledge of Egyptology in courses given by Barry J. Kemp at Cambridge University. Gawdat's increasing facility in Coptic at Cambridge went hand in hand with an increasing interest in Coptology.

1976 was a banner year for Gawdat: not only did it mark his first appointment (as a curator) in the Coptic Museum, an institution which continues down to the present to benefit greatly from his scholarship and commitment to Coptology, but also his marriage to Martha Seif Habashi Malaty who was studying at the time towards a master's degree in electrical engineering at Ain Shams.

In December of the same year, the first international congress of Coptologists was held in Cairo, under the joint auspices of the EAO and UNESCO. Appropriately enough, the theme of this first congress was the future of Coptic studies. In my lecture at the conference, I discussed the Coptology program at the Westfälische Wilhelms University in Münster which provided students with the opportunity to major as well as minor in Coptic studies. At the conclusion of the congress the participants established the International Association for Coptic Studies and elected me its first president. A particular concern of the delegates was the lack of a professorship in Coptic studies at a university in Egypt where Egyptian students might study Coptology in their own country. A resolution was passed and sent to the authorities encouraging the creation of such a position. A suitable candidate to fill the position would need to have a solid background in Egyptology and experience in the EAO, as well as standing as a Coptologist. Labib Habachi, then Chief Inspector of Antiquities for Upper Egypt and Gawdat's immediate superior in the EAO, recommended the promising young man to me as the person who would satisfy all three requirements admirably. A fellowship from the German Academic Exchange Service allowed Gawdat to come to Germany, just after his daughter Nefret was born. He first attended the Goethe Institute in Freiburg to acquire the requisite working knowledge of

German, before commencing his studies in Münster. He enrolled then at the Westfälische Wilhelms University in the winter semester 1978/79, majoring in Coptology, with minors in Egyptology and Islamic studies.

Between semesters and on study trips, which represent an integral part of the combined Egyptology and Coptology program in Münster, Gawdat became familiar not only with the collections of Coptic antiquities in European museums; he also became acquainted with established and respected scholars and their students. As time would tell, the contacts Gawdat made in Leiden were particularly significant for his subsequent career; students and faculty there became good friends as well as valued colleagues.

In tandem with deepening his knowledge of Coptic, Gawdat also studied medieval Arabic. Thus it was only natural that he was drawn to a dissertation topic which involved utilizing both Coptic and Arabic sources. His choice of Bishop Pesyntheus of Coptos appealed to me as his dissertation advisor too, since Pesyntheus was a contemporary of Abraham, Bishop of Hermonthis, whose work and influence I myself had studied. Gawdat and Martha, who had accompanied him to Germany, both earned their doctorates in 1984 (hers in computer science from the university in Dortmund). The referees of his study *Untersuchungen zu den Texten über Pesyntheus, Bischof von Koptos* were unanimous in their praise of his facility in working with the Arabic as well as Coptic literary documentation for the bishop. In the course of research for the dissertation Gawdat had studied additional aspects of the Coptic-Arabic *difnar* which he also subsequently published.

After his return to Cairo, Gawdat was appointed Director of the Center of Coptic Studies and then, in 1985, Director of the Coptic Museum where a sensational find awaited him, a Coptic manuscript of the Old Testament Psalter. It had been discovered in 1984 in the Coptic cemetery of al-Mudil, beneath the head of a thirteen-year-old girl. The text, composed in the Coptic dialect known as mesokemic in the 4th or 5th century, represented an invaluable source for the study of Coptic dialects, palaeography, and codicology. After conservators completed their work on the manuscript, the EAO granted Gawdat a leave of absence to prepare its publication. An Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship allowed him to spend two years in Münster undertaking research in cooperation with scholars in residence there, as well as with his colleagues in Cairo.

When Gawdat returned to Egypt to resume his post as Director of the Coptic Museum (which he continued to hold until 2001) he initiated the reorganization of the permanent exhibition and authored a series of catalogues and brief guides to the collection which also included the near-by churches of Old Cairo. Between 1987 and 1992 he laid the ground work for a scholarly *catalogue général* of the collection, inviting European and American specialists to participate in the project (see the contribution of Samiha Abd el-Shaheed, Pp. 23–25, *infra*). Volumes on metalwork and icons have appeared; and a completed manuscript on the textiles by Claudia Nauwerth is about to go to press.

In addition to his work as director of the museum, Gawdat offered courses in the language and culture of Egypt from pharaonic times down through the Coptic Period, initially at the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies (1985–1988), and then at the Higher Institute for Tourism at Mokattam (1995–2001), and at the American University in Cairo (1997). He has been visiting professor at Portland State University, Portland, Oregon (2002); at the American University in Cairo (2003); and, since 2004, at Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California. (At nearby Orange Coast College, Martha teaches Computer Science and Information Systems.)

With his reports on his own research and on the progress of the Coptic Museum *catalogue général*, Gawdat is a welcome, regular participant at the International Congresses of Coptologists and of Nubiology and at the Leucorea colloquia in Halle an der Saale. From Halle he has made it a practice to come for some weeks each summer to Münster where he can consult the latest literature in the library. These sojourns always prove very productive, resulting in his publication of one study after another!

As a member of the board and editor in chief of the Saint Mark Foundation for Coptic History Studies, headed by its president Fawzy Estefanous, Gawdat has collaborated with Hany N. Takla to organize international symposia on Christianity and its expression in Egyptian monastic traditions. Five of these meetings have taken place so far; a sixth is planned for 2012. Gawdat serves jointly with Hany as editor of the volumes publishing the papers presented at these conferences. The symposia which take place every two years focus on Christianity and monastic traditions in specific geographic areas of the country, from Wadi Natrun in the north southwards to Nubia. Along with scholars from Europe and North America, Coptic monks and religious leaders participate in these meetings where laypersons also receive a warm welcome. The conferences benefit not only scholarship but also the monasteries where they are held with improvements in their facilities. Reports in the local and national press also reach an international audience and thus help to increase awareness abroad, as well as in Egypt, of the Coptic heritage, a subject dear to Gawdat's heart.

Indeed, if one particular aspect of Gawdat's career be singled out for special mention it would be his impassioned, unflagging commitment to fostering understanding and appreciation of the literary and artistic legacy of Christian Egypt. This is reflected in his enthusiastic teaching, and especially in his efforts to produce not only informative but also beautifully illustrated books on Coptic art and architecture for non-specialists. It was only natural that a state-of-the-art reinstallation of the Coptic Museum was also a major preoccupation of his. Reopened to the public in 2006, the museum provides annually increasing numbers of visitors from all over the world with an intellectually stimulating and aesthetically satisfying experience.

Gawdat's efforts to encourage the establishment of a professorship of Coptology and the introduction of Coptic studies into the curriculum of public universities in his homeland have not yet met with success, but he makes sure that whenever Coptologists congregate, an appropriate resolution is passed and sent to the authorities, reiterating these *desiderata*. Labib Habachi's prescient recommendation has provided us with a colleague highly regarded internationally for his person, as well as for his scholarship.