

# MERIA

## THE ISLAMIZATION OF EGYPT

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*This article discusses the recent strengthening of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist movements in Egypt. It then looks at the resulting regression in modernization and Westernization efforts in the country. The article also focuses on the adverse effects these changes have had on Egyptian Copts.*

The success of the Muslim Brotherhood to gain a fifth of the parliamentary seats in the latest elections in Egypt (November 2005) seemed to have taken many people by surprise. The recent acceleration in the number of attacks on Copts in the country may also take some by surprise. These two phenomena are in fact linked and should be seen as a natural consequence of relentless efforts over the past few decades to Islamize the country.

Six decades ago, Egypt's ruling system, under a corrupt monarchy and on the verge of collapse, nearly fell into the laps of the Muslim Brotherhood. Established only two decades earlier (in 1928), the Brotherhood appeared to have garnered such strength that to them it seemed natural they would take over the rule in the country and establish an Islamic state from the ruins of the dysfunctional liberal system.

Then came the army's coup d'état (later called a "revolution"). Even though most of the "Free Officers" had previously been Brotherhood members and, as new rulers, it was clear they had special connections with the Brotherhood, the realities of

governance soon led to a clash of interests. As a result, the Brotherhood was banned in 1954, and its aspirations and designs had to be shelved. However, these aspirations never died.

Following the Nasser years, with the wins, losses, and experimentations with Arabism and socialism, those shelved aspirations were revived with the arrival of Anwar Sadat. He began his rule by reopening the doors to the Brotherhood and other off-shoots of Islamic groups. He then initiated what one could, in hindsight, term "the Great Islamic Transformation" of Egypt. The first step was to stipulate in the Second Article of his new Constitution, promulgated in 1971 (long before Khomeini embarked on his Islamic revolutionary campaign), that the Principles of Islamic Shari'a were "a main source" of legislation. In May 1981, the "a" was replaced with "the," making Shari'a the term of reference for the entire constitution, meaning all other articles were to be interpreted in that light.<sup>1</sup>

That change provided the legal, political, and "psychological" basis for the Islamic transformation to proceed in an inexorable fashion. Sadat's famous slogan, "I am a Muslim

president of a Muslim state” was a clear indication of this transformation.

### THE ISLAMIC TRANSFORMATION

The society began a gradual Islamic transformation. Consider the following examples of Egypt’s transformation.

Not only the *hijab*, but also the *niqab*<sup>2</sup> became widespread and a part of a national dresscode of sorts for the Egyptian women. Beyond the push to exhibit ever more piety, this trend was defended, in Orwellian fashion, in the name of “personal freedom.” If Huda Sha’arawi and Qasim Amin—the visionary champions of the women’s liberation movement of the early twentieth century—were still alive, they would find the present scenes on the streets of Cairo utterly devastating.

Mosques broadcast prayers (including at early dawn) over public speakers, and religious recordings have replaced popular music in most transport vehicles (taxis, buses, and minibuses) as well as in shops. It is not unusual to see Metro (subway) cars turned into preaching (proselytizing) forums by feverish zealots. Moreover, owners of apartment buildings who have transformed even part of their building’s basement into a prayer hall (equipped with microphones) receive special local property tax exemptions.

The professional syndicates, organizations, and the Lawyers’ Bar—mostly dominated by Islamists—have been turned into forums for spreading an Islamic—and violently anti-Western—agenda rather than attending to members’ needs and providing them services.

At government administration offices, it is common for employees to spend most of the workday (already among the shortest in the world) performing ritual ablution and prayers. Office managers and senior directors often double as prayer leaders. It is indeed rare to find an office that is not adorned with religious artifacts, such as framed Koran verses and photos of Qa’aba along with photos of the president—a perfect example of the amalgamation of religious and state symbols.

The national carrier, EgyptAir, which for years has banned serving alcohol<sup>3</sup> on all flights also recites at every take-off and landing the “Invocation of Travel,” originally intended for desert trips on camelback. While alcohol is still not totally banned in the country, local authorities in the governorates have over the past several years gradually restricted its sale to “tourist” areas. This is done to feign public piety or simply to avoid possible attacks by Islamists on bars and other places where alcohol is sold. During the fasting month of Ramadan, alcohol may be served in tourist locations outside the fasting hours (i.e. between sunset and dawn), and only to foreigners. Ironically, an Egyptian non-Muslim would not be served a beer, whereas a foreigner (even if Muslim) would be.

Even the basic and familiar daily greetings of “good morning/evening/day,” using expressions for which Egyptians were long renowned, were replaced with the standard Islamic “*assalamu alaykum*.”<sup>4</sup> The “hello” naturally said in answering the phone, has equally been replaced by the same Islamic expression.

Likewise, the century-old school of fine arts is now filled with hijab-wearing girls and bearded men, all claiming that sculpturing and drawing human models is “illicit.”<sup>5</sup> Already from the late 1970s, depicting nude models has been banned, and all artwork statues showing full or partial nudity once exhibited in the school were moved to the school’s storage rooms. It is worth noting that the drive towards such extremist attitudes is propagated by preachers in the prayer halls of the school itself.

Indeed, the Grand Mufti of Egypt recently declared statues “illicit.”<sup>6</sup> In response to criticism by some writers worried that such *fatwas* would further blemish the image of Islam in the world, the Mufti said that he was only reiterating this old fatwa based on a *hadith* (a saying by the Prophet)<sup>7</sup> and that he was not in a position to deny or negate “what is established in the matters of religion” no matter what. Will the treasures of the pharaohs one day meet the same destiny as that of the Buddha statues demolished by the Taliban? One woman already smashed statues in the Hassan Heshmat Museum in Cairo following the famous fatwa.

Propagators of extremist thought are given a free hand to spread their ideas by all means (as long as they are not overly critical of the regime). On the other hand, efforts by civil society are systematically obstructed, and the defenders of liberal and progressive ideas have—until very recently—been extremely marginalized. The bases of critical thinking and respect for the “other” are not even taught in school.

Establishing political parties in Egypt is subject to the approval of a

special commission headed by the speaker of the Shura Council (The “Consultative Council,” or the upper parliamentary chamber, which has limited legislative powers). According to the Parties Law, a new party must meet certain criteria in order to become eligible. A main criterion is that the “party’s principles, objectives, programs, politics, and approaches in performing its activities do not contradict the principles of Shari’a; these being the main source of legislation in the country.”<sup>8</sup> When the new party “Egypt the Motherland” applied in February 2004, the Parties Commission (currently headed by the secretary general of the ruling National Democratic Party) quickly denied its approval, essentially because its program spoke of the necessity to adopt some kind of secularism in the country. The party duly challenged the decision in the courts in July of the same year. After lengthy procedures, the Supreme Administrative Court decided to uphold the Commission’s decision, asserting that the party’s program “does not define the secularism (it calls for), or how to separate between the religious and political authorities...”

Egyptian nationalism and patriotism have receded and have been replaced by a new sense of Pan-Islamism in which a fellow Muslim from Pakistan or Malaysia is considered to be much closer than a Coptic co-citizen. For instance, in a recent interview with the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in a government-owned paper, he stated with no ambiguity: “*Tuz fi* (To hell with) Egypt,” “Our nationality is Islam,” and “The Rule of the Ottoman Empire over Egypt was not an occupation, because it was a

Muslim Caliphate.”<sup>9</sup> To show his zeal for Pan-Islamism, he said, “We don’t mind to have a Malaysian president for Egypt (as long as he is Muslim).” Surprisingly, few voices arose to reject such abhorrent discourse.

It would require volumes to document the drastic role played over the past few decades by the government-owned media, which are typically mouth-pieces reflecting the government’s directives in the process of Islamic Transformation. Yet one recent example says a great deal. On December 9, 2005, a guest on one of the regular religious programs broadcast on Cairo’s main television channel used the opportunity to pour out his wrath on “secularists” in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> He emphasized that Islam’s tenet as “a state and a religion” was one of the fundamentals without which the faith could not be upheld. He went on to explain that the objectives of legislation in the Muslim state must be within the boundaries of defining what is licit and illicit (as stipulated by the Shari’a).

This, coming only a few weeks after the “surprise” success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the parliamentary elections may indicate that in essence, there is little ideological difference between the government and the Brotherhood. The main issue, therefore, is who holds the reigns of power and to what extent (or rather how fast) the ideology is implemented.

## **THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT**

The examples mentioned above demonstrating the Islamic Transformation of Egypt would not be

complete without attempting to examine the state of the religious establishment in the country.

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Egypt had five religious (Koranic) schools with about 3,000 students, some of whom would ultimately join al-Azhar Mosque/University to become imams. Today, the number of institutes has mushroomed to seven thousand, with no less than 1.5 million students.<sup>11</sup> Even considering the population growth, this is still a huge proportional increase, most of it taking place over the past few decades.

In regards to the religious curricula and material taught in these schools, the prominent thinker Lafif Lakhdar reports<sup>12</sup> that the students are taught under the topic of the “Rules of Dhimmitude” that “the meaning of the dhimmitude contract is to accept that some infidels (*kuffar*) remain in their infidelity (*kufr*) on the condition that they pay the tribute (*jizyah*) in utter humiliation, according to the commands of the Highest (Allah) in the Koran.”<sup>13</sup> Lakhdar further identifies examples of flagrant religious discrimination as he quotes from the same book that orders dhimmis “not [to] be buried in our tombs.... [T]hey can enter public baths only if porting bells or having their necks stamped; they ride donkeys without saddles, not horses; they should not take a lead position in meetings; one should not stand up [to salute] them, nor be first to greet them or congratulate them or visit them when sick; they should not be allowed to ring their (church) bells; and should be forced to go through the narrowest of alleys.” No wonder then, as Lakhdar concludes, that Shaykh Mustafa

Mash'hur, the (previous) leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, demanded that Copts not be allowed into the Army.

Over 400,000 students in 70 faculties are currently enrolled in al-Azhar University,<sup>14</sup> and there are over 7,000 faculty members. During the 2005/2006 academic year it accepted over 83,000 students,<sup>15</sup> becoming one of the largest universities in the world. It is only open to "believers," though some of its faculties offer secular studies in engineering, medicine, or commerce (albeit always tinged with religious teachings). Incidentally, the university provides free education to some 20,000 Muslim students from over 60 countries. A simple calculation would show that in all, 1.9 million students are enrolled in various stages of religious education.

Egypt boasts over 120,000 mosques, in addition to some 900,000 prayer areas. By mid-2005, some 92,000 mosques<sup>16</sup> were run by the "Ministry of Endowments" (which, in reality, is the Ministry of Islamic Affairs). A plan was under way to integrate an additional 2,500 mosques in the 2005/2006 fiscal year, offering 10,000 new employment positions for imams and preachers (as government employees). The Ministry builds and runs new mosques and also covers all management costs of privately-built mosques that become integrated under its auspices. Its vast expenses are partially covered by endowments, but largely come from the general state budget (i.e. at the tax-payers' expense). The budget for building and furnishing mosques alone in 2005 was LE 320 million (approximately US \$60). To this, one must add the costs of maintenance and the salaries of over 400,000 employees. Indeed, the

minister of endowment once boasted (in 2004) that his ministry's budget had grown forty times in twenty years to reach 1.5 billion pounds (about US \$270).<sup>17</sup> Showing where the government's priorities lie, such large expenditures drain the national budget, leaving less for vital issues, such as education, health, environment, etc.

Another simple calculation would then show that the number of Egyptian Muslims who devote their lives to religion—whether studying, teaching, preaching, or attending to other supporting activities—exceeds a staggering 2.5 million. There are then, when including the families of employees, some eight to ten percent of Egyptian Muslims whose lives revolve around religion. It is worth noting that such individuals often know little about those things that are not related to Islam and have never had any personal acquaintances who are not Muslims.

It would be difficult to estimate accurately national expenditure on religious affairs, including—in addition to the above-mentioned activities—those related to *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and foreign religious missions (proselytizing) that fan the world. However, it would be quite safe to say that these exceed the foreign financial aid that Egypt receives from the United States, EU, and other donors.

At the annual Koran studies (reciting and rote learning) celebrations and the Prophet's Birthday, Egypt's president takes it upon himself to hand out in person awards to students and scholars, not only from Egypt but also from all over the world.<sup>18</sup> A new international Islamic studies award

carrying Mr. Mubarak's name was created last year. In addition there is an annual award to the governorate in Egypt that "excels in the efforts to expand the centers of Koran learning to every village and hamlet." This occurs at a time when there are no competitive efforts across the nation addressing such areas as illiteracy, environment, reduction of road accidents, cleanliness, attracting more investments, or reducing unemployment.

The special fatwa department in Egypt issues about 100,000 fatwas (religious opinions) per year,<sup>19</sup> and it has a database containing over one million fatwas. In March 2005, Egypt and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement on "cooperation in the domain of *da'wa* (preaching, proselytizing), preparation and qualification of imams to inform others of Islam and its tolerance and its stance towards modern issues... and to the service of Koran and *Sunnah*, through publishing and translations...." However, keeping in mind the reputation of the Saudis' Wahhabi Islam when it comes to "tolerance" and "modern issues," the prospects for the religious establishment in Egypt look grim.

One need not look beyond the following two examples for indications of the kind of message the religious establishment currently spreads:

First, the Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar, the highest religious authority in the country wrote recently: "The belief of the believer and the Islam of a Muslim would not be complete unless he fully believes that all what Islamic Shari'a contains, as rules, manners, orders and prohibitions is the Truth that must be followed, implemented

and lived in its light."<sup>20</sup> Shari'a harbors several objectionable stipulations according to current human rights standards (such as cruel punishments by stoning, amputation, and flagellation;<sup>21</sup> or the prohibition—through apostasy rules—on freedom of belief). Therefore, it was rather shocking to see Shaykh Muhammad Sayid Tantawi—otherwise known for his moderate views—make such sweeping statements. They simply imply such forms of punishment should be put back in the penal code, more than a century after having been removed.

Second, the official website of the "Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs," an official body of the "Ministry of Awqaf," (The Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs)<sup>22</sup> posted an article entitled "Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab: Past and Present."<sup>23</sup> The author, Dr. Maryam Jameelah, attempts to answer the question "how can we be certain that Islam is the only infallible Truth?" The article concludes by emphatically stating:

Peaceful relations and mutual respect among us can only be achieved through strength. We must cease indulging in apologetics and present the Islamic message to the world honestly and forthrightly. Before we can hope to succeed with Tabligh (proselytizing) on a large scale, we must first convert the nominal Muslims into true believers. We must establish a full-blooded Islamic state where the world will witness our precepts translated into action. Finally, we must crush the conspiracies of Zionism, free-masonry,

Orientalism and foreign missions both with the pen and with the sword. We cannot afford peace and reconciliation with the Ahl al Kitab until we can humble them and gain the upper hand.

### THE SITUATION OF THE COPTS

Those who have suffered and who continue to suffer most from this drastic transformation are undoubtedly the Copts. "I can no longer stand the insults and the spitting in my face because I don't wear *hijab*. I have become a stranger in my own country." This statement made by a young Coptic woman from Alexandria, as quoted by the correspondent of *Le Figaro* (April 17, 2006) after a series of quasi-simultaneous attacks on three churches, speak loudly of the overall situation of Copts in Egypt. This statement, however, represents only the tip of the iceberg of the Copts' suffering.

Apart from the scores of violent attacks against them over the past 35 years, they have been forced into a de-facto dhimmi status.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the infamous Second Article of the Constitution provides the legal basis to discriminate against and marginalize the Copts in their own homeland.

There are numerous indications pointing to the status of the Coptic minority, which makes up around ten million in a country of 74 million. Following are but a few examples:

The media is not only inundated with Islamic religious material, but also routinely ridicules Christianity and Judaism as "falsified" or "perverted" religions whose original "Books" have

been lost and/or "tampered with." The message propagated by mosque preachers is no less derogatory. The issue does not relate to a (indecent) "theological" debate. Rather, the issue is that such discourse, repeated and hammered incessantly, would only turn an ordinary Muslim into a fanatic, if not a radical. Hence, such harassment and violence against Copts would be rendered perfectly justifiable, if not desirable, indeed becoming a "religious duty."<sup>25</sup>

A presidential decree is required for every permit to build a church (which unlike a mosque, would be paid for entirely by the faithful.) The process, dominated by the state security apparatus, is deliberately entangled and usually takes many years. The government hailed a recent presidential decree that delegates to provincial governors the power to authorize rebuilding "a ruined or fallen church on its site."<sup>26</sup> The real power to authorize still remains with the state security apparatus, with little change in the painful process. The irony, however, is that the decree appears to be fully in line with the spirit and letter of the "Chart of Omar"<sup>27</sup> in that it restricts building churches replacing existing ones at their exact site and of the same size.

During the most recent parliamentary elections, the ruling party fielded only two Coptic candidates. The result was that only one, who was also a government minister, was elected (with difficulty) among 444 members. Not only did the other candidate fail, but Islamist riots broke out at the district where he ran in Alexandria and led to attacks on churches as well as ransacked shops and properties. There were only two

Copts elected in the previous elections of 2000, and none in 1995.

The numbers of Copts accepted to military and police academies, judiciary posts and diplomatic corps, and teaching posts at universities are limited to a one to two percent quota. Such quotas are obviously never declared, but are consistent and relatively easy to demonstrate based on the published lists of acceptances.<sup>28</sup> There are no Copts in “sensitive” sectors, such as state security organs or the presidency. The entire local governance system is practically free of Copts. Not a single Copt occupies a university or faculty dean post.

The curricula of public schools, established by the Ministry of Education, ignore the Coptic era in Egypt’s history. Courses glorifying Islam (the “Only True Religion”) and its history, while vilifying the crusaders (i.e. Christians) and the Jews, are imposed on all students. Religious (Islamic) references permeate various courses, including science. Most schools have replaced the daily salute to the flag with the Islamic proclamation “*Allahu Akbar*.”

The city of Alexandria, once the capital of the Mediterranean culture, which as recent as the 1950s was a flourishing and cosmopolitan city in which religions and races mixed, has become a hot point of Islamic fanaticism and repeated aggressions against Copts. The numerous cases of attacks on lives, churches, and property of Copts are often conducted under the negligent—if not complacent—eyes of the security apparatus. Culprits, if caught, are seldom “found guilty” by the courts. A flagrant example is that of al-Kosheh village in Upper Egypt

where 21 Copts were massacred on January 2, 2000. Despite arrests of over one hundred persons, nobody was found guilty by the lower, appeal, or Cassation courts. Doubts on the neutrality of the judiciary system apart, the police investigative authorities simply never provided sufficiently reliable data to support the case against the real perpetrators.

One successful “technique” often adopted by the authorities is to declare the culprit as “mentally (or psychologically) unstable” and thus not in a condition to be tried. Another technique is to force the Copt victims to retract their complaints and enter into “reconciliation” with their attackers for the sake of preserving “National Unity.” In all cases, attacks *against* Copts are systematically referred to as “sectarian conflict (or sedition),” thus implying that “both sides” are to blame.

Organized, and well-dissimulated, groups target young girls and women to convert them to Islam. The entire state is mobilized to facilitate the conversion procedures, even if those concerned are minors in the eyes of the law. On the other hand, a Muslim choosing to convert to Christianity faces despicable treatment by the authorities and often ends up having to live incognito or to flee the country altogether, if possible.

In the case of a father of a Christian family converting to Islam, his minor children are forced to follow suit: The mother’s custody rights—a well established legal principle—are ignored in this case, as children, according to typical court rulings,<sup>29</sup> are supposed to follow the “better (or ‘more noble’) of the two religions.”



Under current laws, if one partner in a Christian marriage changes to another denomination (say from Orthodox to Evangelical, or Catholic), the stipulations of Shari'a immediately apply to the marriage in case of any intra-marital dispute.

It is an obligation to declare one's religious affiliation (among a very short list of "recognized" religions) in all official formalities, including the national identity card. Such measures facilitate discrimination practices. Furthermore, the Civil Status Department's "computer system" often list Christians as Muslims. Attempts to correct such errors invariably prove to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, with severe ramifications on the lives of those concerned.<sup>30</sup>

Recently, an administrative court ruled that the Coptic Orthodox Church remarry a divorced person.<sup>31</sup> Since according to Church teachings marriage is a sacrament and not merely a civil partnership, this ruling, which was duly referenced by the court to "constitutional principles," amounts to a license to override the beliefs of the Church. The same court would never dare attempt to order the Islamic authorities in the country to marry a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim, as such unions are prohibited by Shari'a. Some years ago, another court ruled that polygamy was permissible in Christianity.

Yet what is especially sad about the abuse of the Copts' citizenship and human rights is that, on the one hand, the Egyptian government still adamantly insists that there is no such thing as a "Coptic problem." Continuous appeals by numerous Copts to the president to take charge of

the situation—as part of his constitutional responsibilities—go unheeded. A call to establish a special council composed of leading Muslim and Coptic figures to report issues of citizenship rights to the president was totally ignored. On the other hand, such abuses are taking place before the watchful eyes—with few protests or objections—of the "freedom-loving" nations of the world and the various international institutions that are meant to correct such wrongs.

## CONCLUSION

The media has consistently played a major role in the process, but when questioned about the excessive religious material in the government media, Egyptian officials usually offer a pretext that the government, in its efforts to defeat the violent Islamist groups, has been trying to "pull the rug from under their feet" (by outdoing them in religiosity). However, the problem is believed to be deeper than a simple reaction to Islamist violence; it is more likely a deliberate process that has continued over the past few decades.

Nevertheless, and without trying to minimize the potential catastrophic risks associated with a possible establishment of a fully Islamist regime in Egypt, it is only fair to conclude that the "Great Islamic Transformation," implemented (and/or tolerated) by the government over the past few decades has paved the way for the Muslim Brotherhood to take over the rule in a perfectly natural and even "democratic" fashion.

Indeed, that the Islamists (only) won a fifth of the Assembly's seats can

be misleading; one must not forget that they had fielded candidates in no more than a third of the total constituencies. In other words, the Brotherhood would be bound to sweep the vote in fully-open, fair, and free elections in the future. Hamas's recent victory in the Palestinian Authority elections is another eye-opener.

Furthermore, Islamization, especially the stipulation in the Constitution that Shari'a is the main source of legislation, has also led to a serious deterioration of the Coptic minority's conditions; they have become subject to a de-facto dhimmi status, relegated to second-class citizens.

Overall, Egypt, which has undergone serious modernization and Westernization efforts since the days of Muhammad Ali Pasha<sup>32</sup> (who ruled after the awakening cultural shock caused by Napoleon's Conquest) seems to have regressed. Egypt badly needs a leadership that will reverse the trend and put the country back on a course of enlightenment and modernity.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> By way of comparison, Article 1 of the French Constitution states: "France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs."

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<sup>2</sup> An all black garment, with only a narrow slot for the eyes.

<sup>3</sup> Sharing that honor only with Saudi Airlines in the Arab world.

<sup>4</sup> This literally means "peace be upon you," which is not at all bad in itself. The real issue is that of forced vestmental and behavioral codes in all aspects of life.

<sup>5</sup> Reported by *Rose-elyoussef Magazine*, April 13, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> See Dr. Hamed Ammar, *al-Kahera*, April 4, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> In this particular case, the hadith in question infers that "angels" would never enter a house adorned with statues or where dogs were.

<sup>8</sup> According to Article 4 of Law 40/1977 on Political Parties.

<sup>9</sup> *Roza* newspaper, April 17, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The guest was Dr. Mohamed Imara, among the most popular extremist leaders. He is a regular guest on government TV shows and writes a weekly column in the government-owned *al-Akhbar* newspaper.

<sup>11</sup> Information based on a series of articles by Shaykh Ali Goma'a, *al-Ahram*, July/August 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Refer to article: [http://www.mettransparent.com/texts/alafif\\_hadatha.htm](http://www.mettransparent.com/texts/alafif_hadatha.htm).

<sup>13</sup> These ideas reflect the stipulations of the "Chart of Omar." Refer to endnote 29 below.

<sup>14</sup> Information based on a series of articles by Shaykh Ali Goma'a, *al-Ahram*, July/August 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Exactly 83,331 students. Refer to *al-Ahram*, September 22, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Reported in *al-Ahram*, June 23, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Ahram*, May 10, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Reported in *al-Ahram*, April, 15 and 21, 2005, October 30, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Refer to *al-Ahram*, August 6, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Ahram* newspaper (government-owned), May 15, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Collectively called *hudud* (penal limits).

<sup>22</sup> See article at: [http://www.islamic-council.com/non-muslims\\_u/Chapter3.asp](http://www.islamic-council.com/non-muslims_u/Chapter3.asp).

<sup>23</sup> People of the Book, Jews and Christians.

<sup>24</sup> Under the dhimmitude status, the “People of the Book” are allowed to keep their faiths, while living under complete submission to the reign and rules of Islam, including the payment of *jizyah* “in humbleness.” In 1856, that status was abolished de jure by the Ottoman Empire (under European pressure), but it still prevails de facto.

<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, when a few cartoons—however offensive they may have been—were published by a Danish paper, it was turned into a major international crisis (in which Egypt played a major role), with demands to implement laws in Western countries incriminating “insults” to Islam or any of its sacred figures.

<sup>26</sup> Decree 291 of December 7, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> The “Chart of Omar,” usually attributed to Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab, is the basis of the dhimmitude status as it stipulates several obligations and prohibitions by dhimmis, and concludes with: “If they break any of their conditions, there is no valid pact with them and they deserve from Muslims whatever the adversaries do.” Refer to article by Lafif Lakhdar at: [http://www.mettransparent.com/texts/ahd\\_omar.htm](http://www.mettransparent.com/texts/ahd_omar.htm).

<sup>28</sup> One example, reported by al-Kalema Center for Human Rights based in Cairo, in 2004, only 12 Copts were

admitted to the Police Academy, out of a total 1,050.

<sup>29</sup> A recent case at hand: On May 18, 2006, the Court of Appeals in Alexandria upheld (in the case 679/43) the ruling of a lower court whereby the (Coptic) defendant mother Camilla Lotfi was ordered to give up her twin children Andrew and Mario (aged 11 years) to their father, Medhat Ramses, who had converted to Islam. Ignoring the applicable law, which grants the custody of children below 15 years to their mother, the court decided to implement the precepts of Shari’a instead. It stated that: “Aged 11, the children can discern... moreover, there is a danger, if left with their Christian mother, that their (Islamic) faith would be ‘spoiled.’”

<sup>30</sup> Numerous cases have been reported by the Coptic weekly paper *Watani* during 2005 and 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Reported by *al-Ahram*, March, 15, 2006. The Coptic Church has rejected and appealed the ruling.

<sup>32</sup> He ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1847. The last descendant of his dynasty was deposed in 1954.