

## **Iris Habib Al-Masri and her Role in Ecumenical Work**

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### **Abstract**

*The study dealt with the personality of Iris Habib Al-Masri and her social role in Egypt, and highlighted this through her position in support of the accession of the Coptic Orthodox Church to the World Council of Churches and its calls to preserve Coptic rituals, customs and traditions in churches and its support for the advancement of the status of women, their participation and entry into many fields, by joining many Coptic feminist associations and teaching at the Institute of Coptic Studies and the intellectual wealth she left behind, both in the books she wrote and the lectures she gave at the Coptic Institute and the Seminary. Churches, associations and conferences, hence their personality as a teacher, historian and reformer.*

**Keywords:** *personality, historian and reformer.*

### **Introduction**

The aim of the research is to study the personality of Iris Habib Al-Masri and her social role in Egypt, which was one of the most prominent advocates to introduce Western churches to the Coptic Orthodox Church by calling for the latter to join the World Council of Churches and its diligence in completing this rapprochement with the Christian West, and divided the research into an introduction, four axes, a conclusion and a list of sources.

The first axis was entitled Iris Habib Al-Masri, birth and upbringing, as it clarified the role of her family in her upbringing and the beginnings of her personality, qualities and personal features, and the second axis, was entitled Iris Habib, her education and culture, while the third axis came to show the most prominent books about her, while the last axis showed her role in ecumenical work.

The first axis: Iris Habib Birth and upbringing: Iris Habib was born on May 10, 1910 , in Cairo in a socially distinct Coptic family , and later lived in the villa of Habib Pasha in Heliopolis and its lineage is due to the Egyptian family, which was living in Sohag , and before that it lived in Assiut and belongs to the dynasty of a family deep religious sense, and its lineage is Iris daughter of Habib Ibn Hunayn Ibn Hanna Ibn Shenouda and their nickname (Al Masri), which was widespread in most of regions of Egypt, and almost every city had a family called that .

A - qualities and personal features: Iris was characterized as short stature with brown skin and wide eyes and black hair colored white with age with the presence of prestige and dignity, and was characterized by intelligence since her childhood and was the subject of admiration and appreciation of her professors, characterized by a strong personality accurate in her appointments, and most of her work was voluntary and free and receive

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lectures for free and the proceeds of her books donated by hermit ascetic in everything even in clothing .

Iris had a strong memory, when she was studying at the institute as soon as one of the students mentioned the name of the character she would talk about, she would go on and mention the smallest details about the character, and one of her students mentions that she used to mention more details than what was written in her books, so she tells her students that there are many things that I did not mention in my books, and if I had mentioned them, he would not agree to print the book or would cause a problem in printing, and I mention to you the details here as students of Coptic history, which indicates Her strong memory is that when she was supervising the thesis of one of the students, she was talking at length about the subject of the thesis and was guiding him to the places of references required in any library and in any direction and any shelf and was gifting copies of her books to outstanding students and signed them , keen not to waste her time without work did not tire and did not get bored and did not calm down in research, reading, writing and translation to the point of passion , and this was reflected later on her intellectual and cultural productions of what I possessed it from an open-minded, open-minded and conscious .

B- Her family and her role in her upbringing: Her father Habib Pasha Al-Masri was the agent of the Milli Council , the General of the Coptic Orthodox Church , and Habib Al-Masri was born in Sohag in 1885, he joined the French School of Law , and was included in several jobs , and died in 1953, and was buried in a majestic Shi'a as a flag of the Egyptian flags and his pilgrimage in legislation and laws , her mother is Salima Mina Menkerios was born in 1889, graduated from the American Girls' School in 1907 , and died in 1962 , and Iris had five Brothers of three sisters and two brothers , Iris grew up in an educated and conscious environment, so her family had a great impact on the formation of her personality, but the most influential figure was her father, Habib Pasha al-Masri.

The second axis: her education and culture: The good social situation that her family had gave her the opportunity to receive her education at the American Girls' College in Cairo, which gave her an opportunity to master the English language, and she also got to know in her youth Professor Yassa Abdel Masih , so she learned at his hands the Coptic language , which he mastered reading and writing by virtue of his work as a curator of the Coptic Museum , until she mastered it completely .

After Iris graduated from the American Girls' College, the Ministry of Education sent her on a mission to London, where she studied psychology and child education at Mary Gray College (Maria Gray College), for three years, so she obtained a higher diploma and returned to Egypt to be appointed as a teacher at the Institute of Higher Education in Zamalek, then she had an opportunity for another mission through the University Alumni Association to study Coptic sciences at Drobsey University (Dropsy) in Philadelphia, and stated in one of her articles in 1956 that she did not She takes the title of doctorate because she was unable to make amendments to the thesis and highlight it correctly while she was there, and when she returned to Egypt, her preoccupation with writing the history of the Coptic Church prevented her from completing it, although her professor is still writing to her and reminding her of completing it and sending it to him, but she was telling him that writing history in her view is more important than that, and if she completed the book, she would devote herself to completing it .

The third axis: the most prominent written about it: Many Copts and non-Copts wrote about Iris to praise the historian and her efforts in serving her church in particular and the Egyptians in general, and we will address some of those writings that were written and published against Iris, including:

Anbagregory : Wrote Anbagregory in his encyclopedia famous in its twenty-ninth part about Iris on the occasion of the anniversary of the fortieth day of her departure and title

blessed and daughter of the Church, and the nun dedicated and maid pure who did well biography and march, and performed her message the best of the performance, and pointed out that he knew her since the thirties when she was going to the seminary with the company of women in order to meet Habib Gerges, director of the seminary, and mentioned some of her services in the establishment and development of the Coptic Institute, as he pointed out that Iris is not only dated to ancient history, but She is a historian of the hadith , as it was mentioned that she is a lady with good Christian goals and a high responsibility for duty, and she represents the Coptic Orthodox Church well.

He also praised her role in her educational services, as she was apprenticed by many students and knew and learned about ecclesiastical history, so she limited her life to serving the church, science and knowledge for young and old, children, youth, women and men, thus continuing her spiritual and scientific career until she rose to eternal life .

Suleiman Nassim : Suleiman Nassim described her in his writings as a servant working in the church does not delay to meet any invitation to lecture or article as well as her efforts in educational bodies, and he also mentioned that the spiritual and family atmosphere of Iris was the main factor for her emergence as a unique personality, the conversation with Iris is of particular importance because of the historical information it contains and has described the brilliant multifaceted crystal she is a teacher, writer, journalist, virtuous educator and historian who has abundant information, an authentic Egyptian Christian who was deeply and consciously associated With its Orthodox Church, and it was an example of strength and a role model for the ladies and girls of Egypt, Suleiman Nassim goes on to talk about Iris, he says despite her belonging to the Pasha family, but she was very humble and went down to popular neighborhoods most of the time to serve and educate poor children and their families, and also referred to her contributions to the establishment of an educational institute for the number of servants and maids of the Coptic Church to spread throughout Egyptian society .

Father Michael Daoud : He mentioned that he got to know her in 1940, after she graduated from the seminary, and worked in the schools of the Coptic Ladies Association for Childhood Education, and from here our relationship with the educator professor began when she was giving her lecture in education, its history and methods, childhood and its problems, curricula and teaching methods, and she was an example of faith in the message, she was a strong believer in her church and Orthodoxy and in the service of childhood in popular neighborhoods and work to solve their problems .

Mina Badie Abdel Malik : Mina Badie Abdel Malik wrote an article in which he dealt with her biography and took some notes about her and nicknamed her "the teacher of the generation and his blessing" He wrote about her relationship with music and how she linked her writings and music under the title "Iris and Beethoven" He mentioned that on the sixth day of February 1955, Iris went to the opera house in order to listen to Beethoven's ninth symphony, and how she listened to all that came in the piece of tune and decided in those moments to write, She recorded her tender feelings in one of her wonderful books, which she called "Love is the basis of all structure," and she actually wrote down those moments in her book, where she wrote. "My mind wandered to the musician himself, who was able to combine various notes in a strange harmony and compose a wonderful symphony from them, while at the same time he is deaf and does not hear a sound, even if it is the sound of thunder! Where did Beethoven hear these powerful melodies? And when my imagination swam between the folds of these melodies and flew with them, the truth of the soul shone in front of me, so I almost realized how human creatures can understand without language or words, so my feelings flowed with the melody, and I flowed towards my father and I sat in the middle of the night after my return from the opera to start writing directly, and I fell asleep while I was sitting writing, and then I woke up and exchanged sleep and awakening several times. Iris continued explaining what I felt that night. Iris wondered, didn't Beethoven give us the proof and proof that man He doesn't need all the senses in order to feel all things .

Father Matthew the poor : As mentioned by Father Matthew the poor on more than one occasion, where he wrote emerged in Iris features of the historian diligent who does not stop adding, and her writings, which are unique historical dictionaries characterized by living touches that told the story of the homeland and the church in their conflict with the colonizer, and the historian had a sense of patriotism never restless and if she left writing about her patriotism, she tends to write about Coptic art to highlight through it the originality of the Copts, and proved with convincing evidence the presence of Coptic art in Europe .

The fourth axis, their role in ecumenical work: Women have been at the forefront of the ecumenical movement since the middle of the twentieth century, and the role of women has taken several manifestations, including women's associations and conferences, in which Coptic women participated and were among the most important pioneers in ecumenical work Iris Habib al-Masri.

Participation in associations: During the early years of the issuance of the Compulsory Education Law in 1943, Coptic women's associations began to support the government by establishing compulsory schools as part of fulfilling their obligations towards children's education. In 1940, a number of Coptic women were presidents, including Iris Habib al-Masri.

Participation in conferences: In 1959, she traveled to Helsinki in Finland to attend the International Conference of University Women , and in 1961 the women of the world organized three conferences to celebrate the seventy-five years of the International Day of Prayer, which was called the International Day of Prayer for Women, and one of those conferences was held in the city of Madras, India and Iris was among the invitees, nominated by Pope Cyril VI , a delegate for Egypt , and Iris was among the members of the Preparatory Committee for the conference, which was held For the global celebration of the nineteenth anniversary of the introduction of Christianity to Egypt, which was held in Egypt in 1968.

### **Conclusion:**

The study dealt with the personality of the historian Iris Habib Al-Masri and her social role and intellectual activity in Egypt and highlighting that role through her writings and articles on the one hand and her positions towards the Coptic Orthodox Church on the other hand, and based on what was stated in the study, the researcher reached the following results:

The environment in which Iris grew up had a great impact on her scientific and intellectual orientations, especially her family and those around her, as she grew up in a Coptic family that loves science and has great experience in politics.

Iris excelled in more than one field, as she was a teacher and a historian educator who taught and wrote at the same time, and emerged as a role model as a result of her interest in research and education.

Iris proved to be an advocate to reform all changes in Coptic Orthodox customs and traditions while insisting on getting rid of the negatives.

The Coptic Library has been enriched by many books, showing through its historical, intellectual and cultural productions its scientific and open mind, in addition to its mastery of English and Coptic languages, which made it search, read and analyze Coptic manuscripts in British and American libraries.

## References

- Historians differed about the date of her birth, some of them mentioned that she was born in 1918 AD and other sources mentioned in 1910 AD, which is closer to health based on what was mentioned by her sister Dora, where she referred to the date of her birth in her book, which she collected and edited on the occasion of the first anniversary of the death of her sister Iris, for more see: Dora Habib Al-Masri, *Iris Habib Al-Masri, Historian of the Coptic Church Story*, Victor Cyril Press, Cairo, 1996, p. 21.
- Malak Luke, *Copts of the Twentieth Century*, Angelos Library, Cairo, 2009, p. 430.
- Theodore Hall Patrick, *History of the Coptic Orthodox Church*, translated and commented by Archidiakon, Michael Maxi Iskandar, Harmony Printing, Cairo, (d.t.), p. 148.
- One of the neighborhoods of Cairo, located in the east, and near it is Cairo International Airport, the Belgian New Cairo neighborhood was founded by Baron Empain in 1905, the owner of the Baron Palace and the neighborhood was built when he signed a contract to establish the Ain Shams Oasis Company. For more information, see: *Al-Ahram* newspaper, and thus Belgian capital entered Cairo, December 9, 1960.
- It is one of the agricultural governorates that are located in the desert region and the governorate is geographically a narrow strip of land on both sides of the Nile River with a length of 125 km The impact of this site in the spread of the population in the governorate and the period of their reconstruction of the different parts of the land of the region, and it is one of the four areas that make up the southern region of Upper Egypt and the capital of the governorate is characterized by the city of Sohag as it is located halfway between Cairo and Aswan. For more information, see: Mustafa Farraj Al-Akadori, *Al-Mukhtasar fi Geography of Sohag*, Al-Ashrafin Library, Sohag, 2020, p. 8.
- A governorate located 75 km south of Cairo and is bordered to the north by Minya Governorate and Sohag Governorate to the south. For more information, see: Asmaa Mohamed Haridi Abdel Rahman, *Tourism Development in Assiut Governorate (An Analytical Study)*, Scientific Journal, Issue 75, Faculty of Arts, Assiut University, July 2020, p. 230.
- Iris Habib Al-Masri, *Love is the basis of all structure*, Al-Mahaba Library, Cairo, 1989, p. 12.
- A phone call made by the researcher with Mrs. Nada Gregory (niece of Iris, 1947, BA Faculty of Journalism), on February 28, 2023.
- A phone call made by the researcher with Akmal Kamel Waheeb (one of the students of IRIS, 1964, MA in Polar History), on May 1, 2023.
- Dora Habib al-Masri, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
- A phone call conducted by the researcher with Nada Gregory, on March 1, 2023.
- A form of judiciary for religious communities of non-Muslims, which serves as Egyptian national courts with jurisdiction to eliminate their followers in their personal status, was founded in 1874 and included educated elements of the Copts to take care of all matters of Copts, and the order came to form a list of its members from Khedive Ismail after the death of Patriarch Demetros and be of 24 members elected from the Copts during a meeting whose attendance is not less than 150 people and the candidate must be at least 30 years old His year, and Boutros Ghali assumed the presidency of the Council because of his positions in the state, and the duration of each session lasts five years, and later there were problems between the Council and Pope Cyril V, because the Council considered itself the guardian of the Church, he was not born within the Church, but came as a result of supreme orders. 'Abd al-Hadi Sarhan, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Tadros Yacoub Malti, *Coptic Orthodox Church*, St. Mark's Library in Anba Ruwais, Cairo, d.t., p. 132.
- Wafaa Wasfi, *Contemporaries of Athar fi Ecclesiastical Life*, Rose Al-Youssef (magazine), Issue 4882, Cairo, January 9, 2022, p. 20.
- Iris Habib al-Masri, *Love is the basis of all structure*, *op. cit.*, 19-23.
- Egyptian Gazette*, No. 122, Cairo, September 1941.
- Unknown writer, *Mar Girgis* (magazine), ninth year, issue 5, Cairo, November 1953, p. 34.

Iris Habib, Love is the basis of all structure, previous source, p. 21.

Anonymous Writer, Mar Girgis (magazine), Fourteenth Year, No. 10, December 1962, p. 34.

Dora Habib al-Masri, previous source, p. 113.

Iris Habib Al-Masri, Love is the basis of all structure, Al-Masdar Al-Saiq, p. 23.

Yassa Abdel Masih was born in 1898, in Minya Governorate, one of the pillars of the Seminary College and obtained a seminary diploma in 1922, he taught at the Coptic Fruit of Conciliation Association School 1918-1922 during the period of his studies at the college and was an expert in Coptic manuscript and printed books and studied the Coptic language at the Egyptian University and was in the first generation that established the Institute of Coptic Studies and teaching in it, where he studied the history of the church, Coptic rituals, Greek and Coptic languages, and published many articles and studies in Coptic, English, French and Arabic. He died in 1959 at the age of 61, devoting his life to research and science to serving the Church, for more information see: Group of Authors, Dictionary of Coptic Translations, Marmina Al-Ajaibi Association for Coptic Studies, Alexandria, 1995, pp. 275-276; Antonius Antony, previous source, pp. 200-201.

It is the ancient Egyptian language used in the era of the pharaohs, so Coptic was the last stages of its development, as it was written in Coptic script since the third century AD and is the ecclesiastical language used by the Copts in their religious rituals and rituals until the Greek language spread in Egypt for a long time and was followed by the Arabic language, which replaced the Coptic language in most prayers and the Coptic language has many dialects, the most important of which are the Upper Egypt, Beheira, Fayoumi, Akhmimiya and Akhmimiya sub-dialects and according to the region in which it is located and consists Of twenty-four letters were added seven letters of the Greek alphabet, written from right to left. For more information, see: Kamal Farid Ishaq, History of the Coptic Language, Peter Printing Foundation, Cairo, (d.t.), p. 16; Kamal Farid Ishaq, Coptic Language, Ibdaa (magazine), No. 2, Cairo, February 1, p. 87; Alexis Malone the Jesuit, On the Origin and History of the Coptic Language, Al-Mashreq (magazine), No. 19, Cairo, October 1, 1900, p. 891.

The Coptic Museum was established in 1910, in ancient Egypt by a thick disotheque, who was interested in collecting Coptic antiquities, and the contents of the museum varied and varied to include manuscripts, books, metal and copper tools, crowns and other materials. For more information, see: Mark Semeika Pasha, Guide to the Coptic Museum and the Most Important Ancient Churches and Monasteries, Al-Amiri Press, Cairo, 1930, p. 33; Morcos Semeika, Coptic Museum, Excerpt (Magazine), No. 3, Cairo, March 1, 1926, p. 285, Nour Galal Abdel Hamid, Excavations and Archaeological Museums: Science and Art, A Comprehensive View, 3rd Edition, Faculty of Arts at Ain Shams University, Cairo, 2009, p. 139.

Majid Kamel, on the anniversary of her passing, the article is available at: <https://www.copts-united.com>.

It is an extension of the Diwan of knowledge, which was created in 1836 AD by some students of scientific missions and some graduates of Al-Azhar as well as some French scientists who were hired by Muhammad Ali Pasha in the organization of the administration and entrusted the management of this Diwan to Mustafa Bey Mukhtar, who is the first Minister of Education in the history of modern Egypt. , 2013, p. 58.

It is the first college to train women teachers in Great Britain opened in 1878-1976 named after Maria Georgina Gray, who was an advocate for women's education and founder of the organization that became a day school for girls and the college was attached to a school in order for teachers to test their skills in the case of the classroom, for more see : The archive of Mary Gray College is available at: <https://www.brunel.ac.uk>.

This institute was affiliated with the Ministry of Education, graduated by girls who will become teachers, and the first institute of this type was established in 1938 and the duration of the study in it is four years and joined by those who have a high school diploma to be no more than 22 years old and has more than one section, and attached to the Institute of Musical Arts in 1947, and transferred its subordination to the Ministry of Higher Education. For more information, see: Ali Salem Sajit Al-Moussawi, Higher Education in Egypt 1952-1970,

unpublished doctoral thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education, Al-Mustansiriya University, 2022, pp. 122-123.

The first state-accredited academic institution to grant a doctorate in Jewish studies over the eighty years of its existence from 1907 to 1986, awarding more than two hundred doctoral degrees and listing Iris Habib al-Masri as a Coptic researcher and historian of the most famous students of Drobsey University. For more information, see: <https://repository.upnn.edu>

Iris Habib Al-Masri, *Sunday Schools* (magazine), Tenth Year, No. 8, Cairo, October 1, 1956, p. 18.

Waheeb Atallah Gerges was born in 1919, in Aswan and obtained a high school diploma in 1936 and joined Cairo University and obtained a Bachelor of Theological Sciences, and received a doctorate in philosophy and Coptic studies from the University of Manchester in 1954, and then worked teaching at the Seminary College and the Institute of Coptic Studies, where he became head of the theology department at the Institute, and was a member of the National Council for Culture, Arts, Letters and Sciences, a member of the African and Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization and a member of the He died in 2001. For more information, see: Anba Gregory, *Encyclopedia of Anba Gregory Martyrdom, Martyrdom and Characters of the Bible and Saints*, vol. 18, Society of Anba Gregory, Bishop of Scientific Research, Egyptian Printing Company, (Cairo, 2006), pp. 8-9, Angel Luke, previous source, p. 465.

Anba Gregory, previous source, p. 479.

See Appendix 6

Bishop Gregory, previous source, p. 481.

Suleiman Nassim was born in 1923, in the neighborhood of Qolly in Cairo and received a Bachelor of Arts from the Department of History at Cairo University in 1945, a diploma from the Higher Teachers Institute in 1947, and a Bachelor of Theology from the Seminary College in 1954, then he worked as a teacher in secondary education and then a teacher at the Private Teachers' Institutes 1957-1959, and became the head of the Department of Education at the Public Teachers' Institutes 1957-1959, and obtained a master's degree in education during the year 1963 and was seconded to teach at the University of Sulaymaniyah in Iraq 1977-1978, He founded the Department of Education and Psychology at that university, then obtained a doctorate in arts in the principles of education in 1978, and progressed in jobs until he became head of the Department of Education at the Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo, he has many books, including the history of Coptic education and the principles of education and education in the Coptic era and Copts and education in modern Egypt, as well as many articles published in Egyptian magazines and newspapers, died in 1998. For more information, see: Group of Authors, *Dictionary of Translations*, previous source, pp. 119-120; Caesar Naguib, *Damaa Wafa - Ya Habib Al-Omar*, *Sunday Schools* (magazine), Fifty-second Year, Issue 8, Cairo, September 1988.

Dora Habib, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

Bishop Michael was born in 1921 in the village of Rahmaniya in Qena Governorate, to a wealthy Coptic family and finished his primary preliminary studies and moved to Qena to complete his secondary education and after obtaining a baccalaureate degree was passionate about reading religious books and retired in his town, then took refuge in the monastery of St. Abu Makar in Wadi Al-Natroun and was approximately eighteen years old and then went to the monastery of St. Abu Makar in 1939 AD and after three months in the monastery was ordained a monk and got the priesthood, Then he received the secretariat of the monastery and in 1942 the news Yosab II chose him as his private secretary until he was ordained bishop of the chair of Assiut on August 25, 1946 and became called Michael after his name was Metas Hanna Daoud, and he died in 2014. For more information, see: Joseph Mamdouh Tawfiq, *The Life Story of the Triangle of Mercy, Bishop Michael, Bishop of Assiut and Abbot of Abu Makar Monastery*, (D.M.), 2017, pp. 6-7.

Quoted from Dora Habib al-Masri, p. 362.

Mina Badie Abdel Malik was born in 1950, in Alexandria, he obtained a Bachelor of Engineering at Alexandria University in 1972 and a Bachelor of Mathematics at the Faculty of Science,

Alexandria University in 1974, then a doctorate in mathematics in Canada in 1981, and included in teaching positions at the Faculty of Engineering at Alexandria University and worked as an assistant professor at the American University in Cairo. He participated in many conferences and won a number of awards such as the Alexandria University Award for Scientific Encouragement in 1987 and the State Incentive Award in Engineering Sciences in 1995 and 2001, and gave many lectures and many research papers have been published in international scientific journals in Sweden, England, America, the Netherlands, Germany and other countries. For more information, see: Group of Authors, *Dictionary of Translations*, previous source, p. 238; Mina Badie Abdel Malik, *Luminous Flags in the History of Egypt*, previous source, p. 582.

-Iris had decided years ago to write about her father Habib Pasha al-Masri, and she wanted to ask her father to dictate his memoirs about his life in order to write a book from them, but she retreated because she felt the sanctity of his life and her privacy, but after her father died, she felt that writing about a person who moved to the other world was more decent, so she decided then to implement her idea; Iris Habib, *Love is the basis of all structure*, previous source, pp. 7-8.

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Mina Badie Abdel Malik, *Iris, historian of the Coptic Church in the twentieth century*, previous source, pp. 27-28.

Quoted from Iris Habib Al-Masri, *The Story of the Coptic Church*, vol. 8, previous source, pp. 9-10.