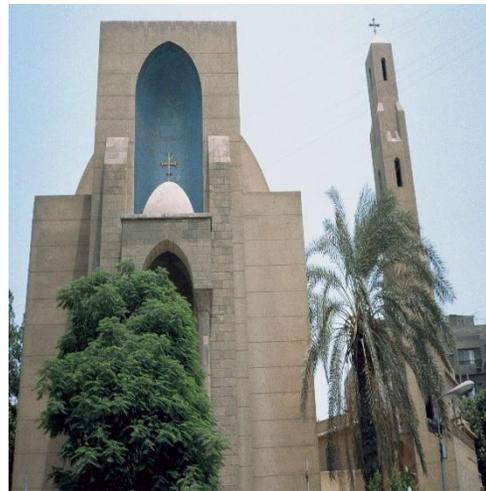




The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era

Elsässer of the Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel offers a detailed account of the status of Coptic Christians under Husni Mubarak's regime (1981-2011). The author defines the "[Coptic question](#)" as a complex of issues ranging from the struggles of daily life to constitutional questions to the problem of political participation.

The author argues that, in the Mubarak era, human rights and civil society groups saw Coptic concerns within the framework of authoritarianism and human rights violations though the rise of public discussion of these issues marked a breakthrough for Coptic grievances. Unlike in previous discourses on national unity and religious patriotism, the debates on citizenship provided a widely accepted conceptual framework in which different problems such as legal and administrative discrimination or human rights violations against the Copts could properly be addressed. Human rights pertain more broadly to all citizens regardless of religion while this is not necessarily the case when defining "unity and patriotism."



Coptic Church in Cairo

Foto: Helmar Gerlach

Of course, the regime denied the existence of any discrimination against Copts. But its bad governance, non-transparency of decision-making, widespread human rights violations, administrative inefficiency, arbitrariness, and corruption exacerbated existing tensions. The author finds that [Muslim](#) and [Christian](#) religious revivalism appeared simultaneously and share similar ideas and social bases (the educated middle class). He posits that Coptic revivalists have little political ideology, certainly nothing remotely comparable to their Muslim rivals such as the [Islamist](#) Sayyid Qutb. Christian revivalism, also, focuses on increased spiritual interest or renewal of the life of the church.

Elsässer sees the current volatile state of Muslim-Christian affairs and rising sectarian tensions as the legacy of the Mubarak era. But the [2014](#) Egyptian constitution for the first time offers a "democratic system," and article three allows Christians and Jews "their Shari'as" as the main source of civil legislation to "regulate their respective personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders." (See [Constitution of Egypt, Jan. 18, 2014](#), art. 3) Perhaps there are some glimmers of [hope](#).

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Sebastian Elsässer, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era*, Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, [2014](#). 319 pp. \$74.