

Jews martyred by the Cossack militia

(d. 1648)

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In 1648, Cossack rebels led by Bogdan Chmielnicki burst into Poland. Chmielnicki, the son of a small landowner of the Ukrainian low aristocracy, was the leader of the Cossack revolt against the rule of the Poles, which led to the unification of Russia and the Ukraine after his death. To strengthen the people's ranks, Chmielnicki and his men resorted to a strong dose of nationalism, a tactic which made them forerunners of modern ethnic cleansing. As soon as they had identified several elements that made the Jews of the Ukraine "extraneous" to the nation, Chmielnicki began to favor their systematic elimination.

On June 10, 1648, six thousand Jews went into hiding in the fortified city of Nemirov, Poland in an attempt to escape the fury of the Cossack militia. But the Cossacks, under their commander Ganya, invaded the city and destroyed the entire Jewish population. Today, there are some who still celebrate Bogdan Chmielnicki as a Ukrainian national hero.

A READING

*Implore grace for me, O heavens,
if within you there is a God!
A path to lead me to him
I have not found:
pray for me, O heavens!
My heart has died,
prayer fades from my lips,
my hand is lifeless,
there is no hope for me.
How long? Until where and until when?
If there is justice, let it show itself!
But if it appears only after I have passed
above the firmament,
may its throne be shattered for all eternity,
and may heaven in its cruelty burst!*

(Bialik, from his *Poems*).

Abraham of al-Fayyum

(1829-1914)

pastor

On June 10, 1914 Abraham, bishop of Al-Fayyum, died at the age of eighty-five, after a thirty-three year episcopal ministry and almost seventy years of monastic life.

A native of the Coptic province of Al-Minya, he was baptized Joseph. At the age of eighteen he entered the monastery of the Virgin of al-Muharraq, near Asyut. He stood out because of his extreme compassion for the poor, which became the evangelical constant of his life. At the age of thirty-seven he became his monastery's abbot. From that time on many monks asked to become his disciples, and the community grew steadily. But as its numbers increased, tensions at Muharraq also increased, and Joseph was forced to leave the monastery after he was accused of giving away its wealth to the poor.

He and four brothers were welcomed by the monastery of al-Baramus in Wadi al-Natrun. The local abbot, who had become patriarch, noted the spiritual integrity of Joseph and his companions and ordained all five of them bishops. It was thus that Joseph became, in 1881, bishop Abraham of Al-Fayyum. As pastor, he felt called first and foremost to serve the poor, without discriminating between Christians and those of other faiths. Abraham's own lifestyle became an itinerary of self-abasement: he refused to sit at a different table from that of the "last" and the outcast, and he rejected all of the exterior and worldly signs of distinction that are traditionally accorded to bishops in almost all of the churches in recognition of their dignity.

At his death, an immense crowd of Christians and Muslims rushed to give him a last farewell.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (3 ba'unah/sane):

Alladius (d. ca. 361), bishop and martyr

Abraham, bishop of al-Fayyum (Coptic Orthodox Church)

LUTHERANS:

Friedrich August Tholuck (d. 1877), theologian at Halle

MARONITES:

Barnabas, apostle

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Alexander and Antonina (d. ca. 313), martyrs

Timothy (d. ca. 362), bishop of Prusa, hieromartyr

Sophronius the Bulgarian (15th-16th cent.), hieromonk (Serbian Church)