

THE COPTIC ART



THE COPTIC ART

الفن القبطي

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THE COPTIC ART  
THE ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY ARTS'  
INFLUENCES IN COPTIC ART<sup>1)</sup>

The word Coptic or Copt derives from the word Aiguptios which is the Greek pronunciation of the ancient Egyptian expression Ht Ka Pth meaning the house of the Ka of Ptah who was the ancient Lord of Memphis region in Ancient Egypt. The word Coptic refers to the civilization, the culture, the history and the art of the Christians of Egypt. Coptic art began to be common in Egypt around 300 A. D. The largest and the rich collection of the Coptic artefacts is conserved now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. It contains about 16,000 pieces of different materials. Other Coptic collections are now in so many international artistic and archaeological museums abroad and they contain different artistic objects made also from bone, Ivory, metal, glass and pottery as well as woodworks, textiles and icons. All these objects cover a long period starting from the H<sup>I</sup><sup>d</sup> to the XIX<sup>th</sup> century A. D. In this way, Coptic objects are of course the connection between the artistic collections dating back to the Ancient Egyptian, the Greco-Roman, the Byzantine eras and those dating back to the Islamic period. The major part of interest roused by the Coptic collections derives from the subject matter found in their

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decoration which is an amalgamation of the ancient Egyptian symbols, Greek mythology, Roman styles, Byzantine scenes, early Christian themes and human figures such as those of Jesus Christ, the Holy Virgin Mary, the disciples, the saints, the angels and the martyrs. In addition, there are religious scenes taken from the Old and the New Testaments that had continued to appear together with pagan and Greek mythological topics dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Animals and birds' figures are seen on some examples. Furthermore, floral and geometric motives like circles, hexagons, grapes, fruits and flowers together with Christian symbols such as fish, dolphins and crosses cover so many artistic Coptic objects which are full of life and movement. The Greek, Coptic, Syrian and Arabic inscriptions complete this decoration. The aim of this paper is to focus on the most important ancient and contemporary arts and cultures' influences which appear in the decoration of different artistic Coptic collections In order to well study the Coptic civilization and to have more information concerning the Coptic history, culture, language and art. Such study can also help to advance the Coptic studies in the Egyptian universities for both Christians and Moslems In so many other domains. I hope that scholars and students in other areas who are

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not familiar with such topic may find something of interest. The problem of determining the date of some artistic examples is still going on.

Between the different conflicting trends of the first centuries of Christianity in Egypt, we can see survivals of:

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(1) This paper was presented in the "International Conference of Achievements and Problems of Modern Egyptology", held in Moscow, from the 29<sup>th</sup> of September to the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2009, by the Centre for Egyptological Studies of the RAS under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

#### 1. THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ART INFLUENCE

First of all, we cannot deny that the Copts were influenced by the Pharaohs especially in the decoration of the Coptic wall paintings. One of the most important decorative wall paintings that include the ancient Egyptian art influence (1) is depicting the Holy Virgin Mary holding and suckling Jesus Christ (Virgo Lactans or Maria Galactotrophousa). This typical pose of the Virgin recalls this one depicting the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis suckling her saviour son the god Harpocrate (2) Sometimes the Holy Virgin Mary in

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such attitude is surrounded by angels. Her eyes are usually gazing to her Infant who is looking in the same time to his mother. This ancient topic can be seen now in the wall painting which was discovered by J. E. QUIBELL in the monastery of Saint Jeremiah at Saqqara dating from the sixth century A. D. Another example of this painting is conserved now in the main church of the Holy Virgin Mary within the Syrians Monastery in Wadi Natrun excavated by K. INNEVIEE. The third example exists in the Red Monastery of Saint Pshoi in Sohag which is being renovated now by the scientific members of the American mission under the direction of E. BOLMAN. The same topic is repeated in the decoration of several Coptic Icons and manuscripts conserved in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York (3).

One of the common ancient Egyptian art influences is the equestrian saint motif) which appears on the Coptic wood carvings, textiles, icons and wall paintings. We see usually a cavalier saint riding horse and killing, with his sword, a dragon or a serpent under his horse's legs. J. DORESSE thinks that such a representation was at first the Salomon piercing the demons and later he mentioned(4) as some other scholars like C. GANNEAU (5) that it is a continuation of the pharaonic art because the topic refers to the legend of

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Horus who killed and convinced his uncle Seth. W. DE GRÜNEISEN thinks that this is the pharaoh standing in its char to kill his enemies (7) but according to A. BADAUWY, it may be the Christ Victorious of the aspic which is found in the decoration of the catacombs of Karmouz This may be

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- (1) BOURGUET S. J. P. DU, art. "Art, Survivals from Ancient Egypt", *CoptEnc.*, I, New York, 1991, 280-282.
  - (2) DORESSE J. Des hiéroglyphes à la croix ce que le passé pharaonique a légué au christianisme, Istanbul, 1966, 19; TINH V. T. T. Isis Lactans. Corpus des monuments gréco-romains d'Isis allaitant Harpocrate, avec la collaboration de LABRECQUE Y., Leide, 1973; LANGENER L. Isis Lactans-Maria Lactans. Untersuchungen zur koptischen Ikonographie, Altenberge, 1996, 41, 62-82, figs. 1-15, Abb. 3.
  - (3) M574. Dimensions: 280 x 220 mm. Purchased in 1911. Book of Holy Hermeniae with hymns and so many different liturgical texts. August Company, 72; J. LEROY, Les manuscrits coptes-arabes illustrés, Paris, 1974, pl. 34.
  - (4) For more details, see M. JONES, the Equestrian Motif in Coptic Textiles Including a Catalogue of Textiles in the collection of the Kelsey Museum of Ancient and Medieval Archeology, Michigan, 1974.
  - (5) J. DORESSE, Hiéroglyphes, 20.

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- (6) C. GANNEAU, "Horus et saint Georges d'après un bas-relief inédit du Louvre (Notes d'archéologie orientale et de mythologie sémitique)", *RevArch.*, n. s., xxxII, Paris (1 876), 196-204, 372-399.
- (7) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Les caractéristiques de l'art copte*, Florence, 1922, 62.
- (8) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 83; A. BADAU, *L'art copte. Les influences égyptiennes*, préface par E. Dhont, Le Caire, 1949, 59-60.

also the idea of the good against the evil which enters in the Christian perspective of the history of the world. We know also that the introduction of the horse in Egypt took place in the beginning of the reign of the XIX<sup>th</sup> dynasty. Since its introduction, it was normal to see the pharaohs standing in their chariots to kill their enemies. Later, the Roman emperors appeared in the same attitude of winners on some Alexandrian Ivory objects<sup>(1)</sup> as did the grand hero on horseback Constantine the Victorious as mentioned J. STRZYGOWSKI<sup>(2)</sup> A stone relief depicting the falcon god Horus as Roman horseman lancing a crocodile is now one of the precious artistic Coptic collections of the Musée du Louvre in Paris<sup>(3)</sup> (Fig. 1 a). Dating from the V century A. D. , this small sculpture groups the most different features: Although the topic is pure Egyptian, the facture is Mediterranean and typically Coptic. Furthermore, we see the ancient Egyptian traditions, the Roman and Byzantine influences, the Coptic technique and perhaps some

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Christian ideas. The person figured is Horus hero of all the ancient Egyptian believes and winner of Seth. He is shown with a human body of a cavalier holding his military emblems. In fact, so many Coptic saints are depicted in Coptic art as warriors or cavalier saints like Theodore the Stratelate (Fig. 1 b) especially in the decoration of the Coptic icons, the manuscripts and the interior walls of different Coptic monasteries at Bawit, in Wadi Natrun and in the Red Sea.



B.

Fig. 1 A. Horus killing the crocodile in the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

B. Saint Theodore the Stratelates killing the dragon (Coptic manuscript).

A. BADAWI, Influences, 59-60, figs. 43-44.



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(1) J. DORESSE, Hiéroglyphes, 21 .

(2) J. STRZYGOWSKI, "Der Koptische Reiter heilige und der heilige Georg", ZÄS, XL, Berlin-Leipzig (1902), 49-60; ..., "Hellenistische und koptische Kunst in Alexandria ", BSAA, V, Vienna, 1902, 27-29, Abb. 17.

(3) Height: 49,1 cm. Width: 32 cm. Thickness: cm. S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, Musée du Louvre. Catalogue des étoffes coptes, I, Paris, 1964, 41, n° 8.

According to S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, the Orant or the praying position which appears in the decoration of several Coptic funerary stelae and wall paintings is originally taken from the ancient Egyptian sign Ka °) that's why it continued to appear in Coptic art and for this reason, W. DE GRÜNEISEN and A. BADAUWY assert that the orant attitude was frequent in the ancient Egyptian art. This position usually depicts a human figure stretching out or bending his two arms. According to W. DE GRÜNEISEN, the orants' figures are decorating different doorways from Ancient Egypt preserved now in many European museums. The idea of showing the defunct inside symbolic religious niches is not new but it may be evident in some ancient Egyptian funerary stelae (4). Some Coptic funerary stela are framed by a human head with an Egyptian style between two pillars (Fig. 2 a). A big resemblance exists

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already between its decoration and the stela of Neb Ra whose head appears under the lintel of the door between two doorways (Fig. 2 b).



B.

Fig. 2 A. Coptic funerary stela with a head within a bay.

B. Ancient Egyptian stela of Neb-Ra showing a head below a lintel. A.

BADAWI, *Influences*, 67, figs. 49-50.

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(1) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Christian Subjects in Coptic Orant", *CoptEnc.*, 11, 536-538.

(2) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 68; A. BADAWY, *Art*, 62.

(3) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 68.

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(4) A. BADAUWY, Art, 66-68, figs. 49-50.

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The posture attitude shown in a Coptic wall painting preserved in the Coptic Museum In Cairo seems to be taken from the ancient Egyptian rituals as it is visible in the decoration of the interior walls of one of the tombs in Dair al-Madina. Dating from the VI<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the Coptic wall painting which was discovered in the Monastery of Saint Jeremiah at Saqqara by J. E. QUIBELL is representing four haloed saints in frontal attitude and perhaps a sinner who is praying in front of them which assure the intercession of the saints Two saints are in the orant position and the others are holding the holy books. This posture attitude is principal also in the Islamic praying.

Tetramorphs or the four creatures holding the throne chariot of God or the Saviour bust as mentioned in the Bible are recalling the four goddesses or the cariatides who were holding the Egyptian sky or the Zodiac in the decoration of several temples in Ancient Egypt (Fig. 3/a-b). Such a decoration can be seen inside different ciboria in the Coptic churches.

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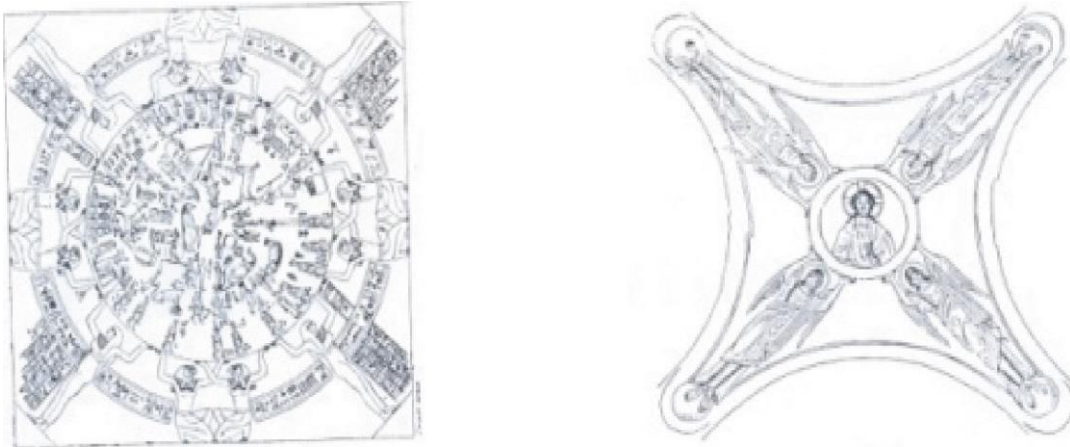


Fig. 3 A. Four goddesses of Egypt holding the Zodiac (Dendera Temple).

B. Four archangels holding the mandorla of Jesus Christ (Chapel's cupola of saint Zenon in Rome). W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 73, figs. 37-38.

W. DE GRÜNEISEN, assures also that some of the Christological cycle scenes are from an ancient Egyptian origin like the Descent of the Lord in Hell. In addition, the Anathasis of the Christ<sup>(3)</sup> which became very common in the Byzantine world from the beginning of the IX<sup>th</sup>

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(1) *Coptic Art*, 1. Wall Paintings, Cairo, 1989, 14-15.

(2) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 41, 72-73, figs. 37-38; A. BADAUWY, *Art*, 61 .

(3) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 69.

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century A. D. is comparing with the legend of Setne coming down to the inferior world mentioned by a demotic story(1).

As it was in Ancient Egypt, the Coptic painting has a religious aim which is to inform and to excite the believers to the piety. Not pagan are the majority of scenes painted but religious and historical according to what was mentioned in the Bible such as the Sacrifice of Isaac, the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the Lion Den for example. The ancient Egyptian priests are replaced by saints and monks who were donors or founders and superiors of monasteries. Some wall paintings include the Egyptian popular feeling and others are inspired from the Hellenistic and the Byzantine art. Both artists in ancient and Christian Egypt filled in the emptiness in all scenes by floral and geometric motifs as well as inscriptions giving the names of the persons figured or some biblical verses.

In Christian Egypt, the artist by returning back to the ancient Egyptian traditions treated the pictographic composition which means that all human figures have Egyptian faces features for example wide opened eyes with the vague look under the arched eyebrows, the high cheekbones, the unstuck ears attached to the face sides in the same height of the eyes, the rectilinear and

pointed nose which is seen from face, the mouth grinning horizontally and the long beard. These are the main features of the Coptic saints painted in the different chapels of the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit.

W. DE GRÜNEISEN added that the coptic artist has drawn the saints figures in the same attitude of the defuncts shown inside the judgement temple of the ancient Egyptian god Osiris. In their hands, he put the symbols of their faith. He transformed the ankh key into a cross, the open scoll into a book and the funerary crown into the martyr crown On the westem wall in the chapel n° XVII of the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit, the painter draw up his composition by taking care from the scale drawing of the different human figures exactly like what was executed in Ancient Egypt <sup>(3)</sup> The Copt divided the niche surface into two parallel levels or two zones. In the church, the Copts' faces are oriented to the apse of the eastern chapel that's why this niche is usually popularly decorated in any church by a topic in relation with the Christian faith. All the apses discovered in the two monasteries of Bawit and Saqqara are the proofs The apse usually consists of two levels decoration: In the upper level, the Christ in Majesty is seating in a mandorla on his throne hold by the four creatures. In addition, he is holding an open book decorated

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with a small cross on its cover. The stars, the moon and the sun are depicted to the left and to the right with angels or the two archangels Gabriel and Michael. The lower part is depicting the

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- (1) J. STRZYGOWSKI, *Koptische Kunst. Catalogue général du Musée Copte, Einleitung*, Vienna, 1904, XVIII-XIX, A. BADAUWY, *Art*, 61.
- (2) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 36.
- (3) J. CLEDAT, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouit*, MIFAO, 12, Le Caire, 1904, pl. LII; *Coptic Icons*, II, Cairo, 1998, 160.
- (4) P. VAN MOORSEL, art. "Church Art", *CoptEnc.*, 11, 555-557.
- (5) Is. 6; Ez 1.

Holy Virgin Mary as an orant or seated and holding the Infant Christ on her lap. They are flanked by the disciples or some local saints or angels. A wide band usually separates between the two levels of the apse. According to T. KLAUSER, the Christ here is coming at the last Day or perhaps this is the Christ reigning in glory as Lord of the Church ( <sup>1</sup> ) The best example explaining this idea is the niche discovered in the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit and which is displayed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. In the small



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cells' apses, more simple topics are discovered like the figures of the Virgin  
Mary with the Infant surrounded by two angels.

It is advisable to indicate that in the monastery of saint Simon, the square pattern was used as an heritage from the ancient Egyptian popular manufacturing process and what's more the humorous Egyptian sketch or the quickly outlines on ostraca appear in the Coptic painting too. The proof is the grisaille sketch discovered at Baouit <sup>4</sup> (Fig. 4 a) and which depicts a caricatural scene in which three mice offering gifts are seen in front of a big cat probably to make a peace covenant. In this Coptic sketch, traces of a short inscription are executed upon the cat's head. One mouse is holding a scroll and may be a long reed pencil. The second one is holding out his two hands with a flag probably symbol of peace. The last mouse seems presenting a wine bottle and a funnel to the cat which may be considered in this scene as a mayor. In fact, this humorous topic is known in the ancient Egyptian caricature but reversed. On an ancient Egyptian sketch, a cat is paying homage to a mouse installed on a throne (Fig. 4 b). A limestone shard from the New Kingdom and discovered in Dair al-Madina at Thebes may be close to these two sketches. Preserved in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, a cat imitating

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shepherds guiding geese by carrying a bag and holding a whip (Fig. 4 c). The  
cat is standing on its hind paws. Four eggs in a plate are executed in the upper  
part of the shard.

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(1) TH. KLAUSER, "Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom 4. Jh. Bis zur Mitte des 8.

Jh. =

Forshung zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie, 4, Wiesbaden-Steiner, 1960, 8<sup>0</sup>,  
243 S., 27 Text-Abb., 27 Taf., DM 42-gebunden", Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, IV, Munster  
(1961), Review of CH. 1m, 174-179.

(2) N<sup>o</sup> 7118. Dimensions: 220 x 170 cm. U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, La Nubia Medioevale.

Mission archéologique de Nubie 1929-1934, IV, Le caire, 1957, pl. CXLIX\*, G. GABRA, Cairo.

The Coptic Museum. Old Churches, Cairo, 1999, 58-59, n<sup>o</sup> 9.

(3) A. BADAWY, Art, 52.

(4) N<sup>o</sup> . 8441. Coptic Icons, 1, Cairo, 1998, 138.

(5) J. H. BREASTED, Geschichte Aegyptens, Vienna, 1936, Abb. 273; A. BADAWY, Art, 61 .

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The figures of the ancient Egyptian gods like the jackal Anubis and the falcon god Horus who appear in the decoration of the limestone funerary stelae conserved now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo are the most important ancient Egyptian survivals in Coptic art decoration (Pl. I). Dating from the 111<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , one of these limestone gravestones(1) discovered in the pagan necropolis of Kom Abu Bellou, is depicting a defunct standing in a frontal attitude as an orant under a kind of a small chapel supported by two columns in Greek style. The style of the execution of his cloths is reflecting the influence of the Greek art. Holding a long funerary shawl in his hands, the defunct is also flanked by the lifegiving solar falcon ancient Egyptian god Horus and by the jackal Anubis who was supposed to guide the deceased on his journey in the after-life in Ancient Egypt. Such a decoration confirms that survivals of the ancient Egyptian style and decoration continued to appear on the funerary stelae even after the introduction of Christianity in Egypt. According to the Greek inscription which appears below the stela, we knew that the deceased was named Apollo and he died before completing 17 years old in the year 8, Payni 28 (2).

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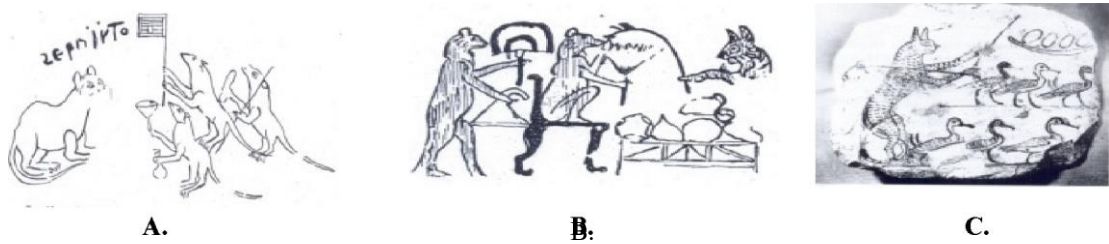


Fig. 4 A. Coptic sketch from Bawit.

B. Ancient Egyptian caricature of a cat offering homage to a mouse. A.

BADAWI, Influences, 62, figs. 45-46.

C. Ancient Egyptian limestone sherd. Egyptian Museum. Coptic Icons, 138.

A rare Icon painted on linen, fixed to a panel and displayed in the Coptic Museum In Cairo shows the figures of the two saints Oghani and Aharqas standing each one beside the other<sup>(3)</sup> In fact, the two saints are seen with cynocephalus or stringer animals faces. Creatures with stringer animals faces are also painted on the southern wall of the chorus of the church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Wadi Natrun and in the archaeological church of Saint Anthony in the Red Sea. Till now, there isn't any scientific interpretation or explanation for such a decoration in Coptic art. It may be referring to the iconography of the jackal God Anubis in Ancient Egypt but it is still a weak opinion.

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- (1) N° 12347. Dimensions: 28 x 20 cm. L'art copte en Egypte 2000 ans de christianisme. Exposition présentée à l'Institut du monde arabe, Paris du 15 mai au 3 septembre 2000 et au Musée de l'Égypte au Cap d'Agde du 30 septembre 2000 au 7 janvier 2001, Paris, 2000, 48, n° 22.
- (2) N° 12347. Dimensions: 28 x 20 cm. G. GABRA, Cairo, 50, n° 1; L'art copte 2000, 48, n° 22.
- (3) N° 3375. Dimensions: 24,5 x 67,4 x cm. The Icons. Catalogue général du Musée copte, Published by P. VAN MOORSEL, Cairo, 1991, 34, n° 32, pl. C, 2.

The frog figure which was associated in Ancient Egypt with the goddess of birth Heket and which is common in hieroglyphics as a resurrection sign appears also in Coptic art. It is depicted on a pottery lamp<sup>(1)</sup> dating from the beginning of the IV<sup>th</sup> century A. D. In Coptic art, the artist added a small cross beside the frog because he wanted perhaps to symbolize the Christ Resurrection.

Even in the social life, one can see the influence of the ancient Egyptian civilization in Coptic art. The proof is a part of a limestone archivolte<sup>(2)</sup> dating from the IV<sup>th</sup>-V<sup>th</sup> century A. D. and conserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Discovered most probably in Coptos, its decoration shows a fisherman, fish, aquatic birds and plants such as lotus and papyrus in a nilotic or a fishing scene in the marshes (Fig. 5). The border of the scene is decorated with heart shaped foliage in Greek style with small pearls. Such scene is visible now on

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the internal walls in so many ancient Egyptian mastabas at Saqqara and also  
in the nobles' tombs in Luxor.

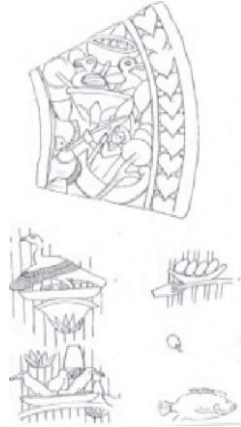


Fig. 5. A. BADAWI, Influences, 69.

These most characteristic decorative motifs of the ancient Egyptian art like barks, papyrus and lotus are also common in the decoration of other Coptic artistic objects especially the fabrics and the woodwork carvings. These decorative elements moved into the art of Alexandria at first and then became indirectly frequent in the Coptic art<sup>(3)</sup>. A wooden frieze fragment<sup>(4)</sup> from unknown provenance conserves also this influence of the ancient Egyptian civilization. It is decorated with a nilotic scene depicting a big crocodile figure, aquatic birds and fish surrounded by lotus flowers and a vine leaves with a small branch. A curtain and a column are seen between these decorative

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elements. The same decoration appears in several examples of the Coptic  
fabrics and other stonework which are

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(1) N° 2834. Dimensions:        x 1 x     cm. G. GABRA, Cairo, 107, n° 48.

(2) N° 8002. Dimensions: 48 x 33 cm. G. GABRA, Cairo, 69, 17.

(3) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 81, 120.

(4) N° 7211. Dimensions: 21 x 95. A. BADAWI, *Coptic Art and Archeology*, CambHdge-London,  
1978, 69; G. GABRA, Cairo, 95, n° 40.

sometimes compared with the tomb reliefs and the paintings of the Ancient  
Egyptians which conserve also nilotic scenes but with hippopotamus figures.  
This topic is shown also in the mastabas of Saqqara.

The hunting scene that may be a topic taken from the ancient Egyptian art  
will continue to appear in the Coptic art also after the Arab conquest which  
took place in 21 A. H./641-642 A. D. by the Arab prefect Amr ibn al-Ass. The  
Hippopotamus and the gazelles' figures were very common in the reliefs and  
the paintings of many temples built in pharaonic periods. It passed later to the  
Hellenistic art. Gazelles' hunters (1) are usually seen on feet. According to S.  
J. P. DU BOURGUET, such an idea may be borrowed from the Roman

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decoration of many paintings and textiles but hunters on horseback with the Phrygian cap may mark an oriental influence<sup>(2)</sup> found much more on Coptic fabrics. The Hunting scenes are frequent also in Coptic art especially the gazelle hunting. Hunters are shown on foot and on horseback on both Coptic textiles and wall paintings. The best example is a wall painting conserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. It shows a lion and gazelles bounding. Another hunting scene in the chapel n° VIII in the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit is depicting two gazelles in flight <sup>(3)</sup> The decoration within the chapel n° XXXVII in the same monastery is showing several hunters wearing Persian clothes with swords Such scenes illustrate the biblical versus "Then like a hunted gazelle" .

Coptic textiles show at which degree was the influence of the Copts by the Ancient Egyptian artists even in the technique and the tools of this industry. Fibbers particularly flax was the base upon which was based the technology of the Coptic textiles<sup>(6)</sup>. The ancient Egyptian tombs from the Middle and the New Kingdoms at Beni Hasan and Thebes show all details concerning the different episodes of the textiles industry even the use of the horizontal and vertical ground looms. It seems that an upright type of loom was inherited by



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the Coptic weavers. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston conserves a piece of linen and wool fabric<sup>(7)</sup> dating from the VII century A. D. on which a standing man figure is shown turning his head towards a cup in his left hand. In his right hand, he may hold a long spoon(?). It seems that the technique of the looped fabric which is very ancient in Egypt had survived also till the Coptic era. This technique consists of inserting a short and a thin stick between two parts of the frame and to take it off later.

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(1) *Is.* 13:14.

(2) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, *Catalogue*, I, n° C 22.

(3) J. CLEDAT, *Monastère*, 49-52, pl. 30; S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Hunting in Coptic art", *CoptEnc.*, VI, 1258-1261.

(4) J. CLEDAT, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouit*, MIFAO, 39, Le Caire, 1916, 38-39.

(5) *Is.* 13:14.

(6) D. L. CARROLL, *Looms and textiles of the Copts*, *Memoirs of the California Academy of Sciences*, n° 11, Washington, 1986, 15-16.

(7) Height: 128 cm, Width: 94,5 cm. S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, *Catalogue*, 1, n° 15.

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The ankh key sign IS one of the most curious exceptional decorative survival elements of the ancient Egyptian civilization which became the crux ansata. It is visible in several forms( <sup>1</sup>) in the decoration of different pieces of Coptic fabrics, several Gnostic codices and their bindings. It is traced also on the Christian shrouds. It will be multiply in the sober decoration painted or graved of many different buildings. In the Musée du Louvre in Paris, a fragment of Coptic fabric dating from the IV<sup>th</sup>-v<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , conserves also the influence of the Pharaohs. Made from linen and wool, its decoration consists of a band of five ansata crosses. Three crosses include the monogram of Jesus Christ coloured in red or in black. Below, the two Greek letters alfa (A) and omega (Q) are visible in the damaged part of the fabric which may be a tablecloth of an altar which was used during the liturgy. The two others have two starry chrism or two other red Greek crosses with a green pearl in the angles. The fragment is damaged in some of its parts. Other similar fragments are now preserved in Victoria and Albert Museum in London. J. DORESSE wrote about this sign to clarify how it was transformed from its pagan value to its Christian significance After the demolition of the Seraplum, all the Serapis busts, which were graved in front of the entrances of the houses or below the windows, were destroyed in the City. The sign of the cross was

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traced in its places. Other examples of this cross are shown on various Coptic bas-reliefs preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, the Egyptian Museum in Berlin and the Pushkin Museum of fine Arts in Moscow. The decoration of another eighth century Coptic tapestry conserved in the Musée du Louvre in Paris includes the Udgat sign which was the Ra sacred eye in Ancient Egypt.

In the Coptic Museum in Cairo, the decoration of other limestone funerary stelae(4) shows the monogram of the Christ within a bark with several ansata crosses. Such a decoration may lead us to the Ancient Egypt life in which the defunct needed usually a bark to be associated with the solar Egyptian god Ra during his journey in the sky.

Beside the acanthus capital, the Copts knew Egyptian forms especially the palmform types dating back to the ancient times (5) used in al-Baghawât cemetery. On top of that, the columns capitals having the form of the rams' heads recollect the use of the symbolic animal of God Amon Ra in Ancient Egypt but in Coptic art, the ram IS one of the most Important symbols of Jesus Christ.

It is absolutely essential to note that even the limestone pulpit with its six steps and which was discovered in the monastery of saint Jeremiah at Saqqara

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is the imitation of the same element put in the ancient Egyptian pavilion of the  
Heb-Sed with its chair having a high

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(1) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 74, fig. 39.

(2) N<sup>o</sup> AF 5556. Dimensions: 46 x 30 cm. Department of Egyptian antiquities. S. J. P. DU  
BOURGUET, *Catalogue*, 1, 228, E 107; M. H. RUTSCHOWSCAYA, *Tissus coptes*, Paris,  
1990, 80; *L'art copte* 2000, 47, n<sup>o</sup> 21.

(3) J. DORESSE, *Hiéroglyphes*, 25.

(4) N<sup>o</sup> 7730. Dimensions: 38 x 29 cm. Received firstly in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo in 1939.  
W. E. CRUM, *Coptic Monuments*. CGC, Cairo, 1902, n<sup>o</sup> 8574; *L'art copte* 2000, 129, n<sup>o</sup> 108.

(5) A. BADAUWY, *Art*, 16, fig. 5.

straight back (Fig. 6). The upper part of the Coptic pulpit back is decorated  
with a small circle shell having in its middle a small cross. Its external border  
is finely ornamented with a short Coptic inscription translated as follow: "the  
Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen". Such an architectural element will  
be very common later in the Islamic architecture of the mosques and the  
colleges but it will be named minbar.

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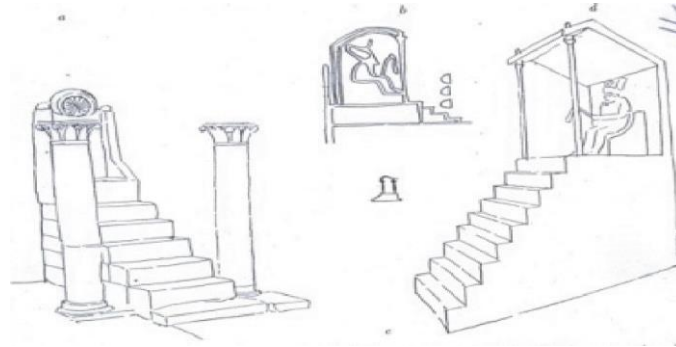


Fig. 6. A. Coptic limestone pulpit from the monastery of Saint Jeremiah at Saqarra.

B. The seat of king Den Setoui in Ancient Egypt. C. Hieroglyphics.

D. Reconstruction of the Kiosk of king Narmer. A. BADAWI, Influences, 23, fig. 12.

The Coptic palette is as rich as it was in Ancient Egypt and more different tones and various degrees of colours are taken from mixing together the basic colours taken from natural ochre. As colours were an Important part of the Coptic artistic collections ornament, the Copts used the same colours which were used by the pharaohs in paintings and icons.

We cannot omit to mention that the tempera technique used in wall paintings and icons IS purely borrowed from the Ancient Egyptians. It consists of gouache colours mixed to a gelatine material or glue. Then the artist started to put this mlxlng on a back of gypsum or stucco.

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Even the Coptic architecture, for example al-Baghawât cemetery contains several chapels and tombs built according to the same Ancient Egyptian architectural style and technique. A. BADAWY maintains that the chapel partially or totally graved in the cliff of the mountain is inspired from the ancient Egyptian temples which include a big hypostyle hall ended by a niche or a sanctuary sometimes with a cruciform plan.

The custom of lighting up the sacred interior places by high holes or windows placed in the walls or in the cupola is due to the ancient Egyptian mysticism in the ancient temples and tombs built in ancient times. In the White Monastery at Sohag and Qasr Ibrim<sup>(2)</sup> the walls recall the technique of using the blocs borrowed from the monuments of the Ancient Egyptians with their methods. The brick was used in the walls with big thickness. The external face presents the same slope in the White and the Red monasteries, at Bawit and Baghawât like in the pyramidal complex of the King Zoser at Saqqara. In the same

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(1) A. BADAWY, Art, 11 .

(2) U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, Nubia, IV, pl. cxlll.

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foundations<sup>(1)</sup> there is the Egyptian gorge or cornice that can be seen in the external facades except for Bawit monastery. It is seen now in the upper parts of the pylons of the ancient Egyptian temples. It was also placed as a door's cornice.

The wall in slope had persisted in the Coptic architecture in stone and brick on the facades and the brick pylon. A brick pylon framing a niche flanked by two columns with cut sides was discovered at the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit. The mud brick ramps framed with two parallel low walls and which lead axially to the entrance doors of the cemetery of al-Baghawât are perhaps the imitation of the causeway leading to the ancient Egyptian funerary temple in the pyramidal complex. Some ties are inserted in regular heights towards the angles and on the external face of the wall following the ancient Egyptian method. The brick appears in all forms: arches, vaults, cupolas were the only used after the VIII century A. D. Like his Egyptian predecessor, the Copt knew how to erect an arch, a vault or a cupola and he conserved even the handle arch of the Egyptian basket as in the Monastery of Mustafâ al-Kâshif in Khârgha Oasis or the subbasement profile in the Red Monastery and in Baghawât. The Copts adopted the arches, groined vaults and semi circular

cupola as in the White and the Red Monasteries. The red stone replaced the mud brick in several constructions.

In the White monastery at Sohag, the brick staircases put on the vault back are not less Egyptian technique which was common in the Hellenistic period and which became later frequent in the Coptic architecture<sup>(4)</sup>. The Coptic constructor is fond of the monolithic elements: columns, doorways, lintels and rebates borrowed from the ancient Egyptian and Roman temples<sup>(5)</sup>.

The wall is sometimes animated by blind arcatures in the upper part of the external face like in Baghawât necropolis (6). One must remember well that, the doors having superior gudgeons and gratings are similar to those in the ancient Egyptian buildings<sup>(7)</sup>. The cupola placed on pendentives like in the Red Monastery, was probably like in the Mesopotamian and Persian architectures.

In Dair Abu Hennis, the niche with a circle or surbased arched pediment put on pillars with Corinthian capitals, may refer to the ancient Egyptian facades of vaulted kiosks or

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- (1) J. DORESSE, Hiéroglyphes, 33.
- (2) A. BADAUWY, Art, 23.
- (3) A. BADAUWY, Art, 13.
- (4) A. BADAUWY, Art, 21.
- (5) A. BADAUWY, Art, 12.
- (6) W. DE BOCK, Matériaux pour servir à l'archéologie de l'Égypte chrétienne, éd. Posthume, St. Petersburg, 1901, 10-11 ; H. ZALOSCHER, Die Kunst im christlichen Ägypten, Wien-München, 1974, fig. 3.
- (7) A. BADAUWY, Art, 17-18.

surmounted by a vaulted roof. It is a common motif also in the Greco-roman art in Egypt and it is repeated in the Pompeii monuments originating from Alexandria(1).

## 2. THE GREEK ART INFLUENCE

In addition to the ancient Egyptian influences mentioned above, it has been proved that the Greek art influence (2) appears in the Coptic art. Several Coptic sculptures are decorated with the influence of the alexandrine art. Because the fabulous Alexandria was the capital of Egypt and the greatest city of the world, the Greek art and civilization were established in the Egyptian art even after the arrival of saint Marc in Egypt may be for the

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sixth century A. D. The Greek style did not disappear at once. The numerous remains of Greek work which were discovered in Lower and Middle Egypt give evident persistence of earlier traditions among the Egyptian population(4).

It is necessary to survey all the limestone sculptures discovered in Ahnas (Heracleopolis Magna) as they reflect the Greek influence by executing the plump forms, the vivacious movements, the large heads and the wide eyes. In the hard style of Ahnas, we can find also the sharper lines and the deeper shadows. Other examples of limestone works from the Coptic collections of the Coptic Museum in Cairo conserve also the exuberant late Greek style and the workmanship like the pagan themes and the Greek mythology of Dionysus which is particular so widespread on Coptic textiles, Aphrodite (Pl. II), Zeus, Eurydice and Orpheus, Leda and the swan Apollo and Daphne, Hercules and the lion, Gaia, the Amazons (6) the nereids (7) the god Pan with a dancer and Cupit(8) as well as the bacchantes who are a part from the cortege of the Greek wine god Dionysus and who are dancing and singing in the fortress One may say that the development of the Coptic art

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- (1) A. BADAWY, *Art*, 17-19.
- (2) L. DEL FRANCIA, art. "Mythological subjects in Coptic art, Amazons", *CoptEnc.*, VI, 1750-1752.
- (3) W. DE GRÜNEISEN, *Caractéristiques*, 1 19.
- (4) J. COONEY, "Problems of Coptic art", in: *Coptic Egypt. Papers Read at a Symposium Held Under the Joint Joint Auspices of New York University and the Brooklyn Museum, February 15, 1941 in Connection with the Exhibition. Paganism and Christianity in Egypt Shown at the Brooklyn Museum January 23 to March 9, 1941, New York, 1944*, 36.
- (5) For more details about the Greek mythology, see *Ägypten. Schätze*, 36; J. SCHMIDT, *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine*, Paris, 1986.
- (6) L. DEL FRANCIA, "Mythological subjects in Coptic art: Amazons", *CoptEnc.*, II, 1750-1752.
- (7) J. STRZYGOWSKI, *Kunst*, 42-46.
- (8) *Ägypten. Schätze aus dem Wüstensand. Kunst und Kultur der Christen am Nil. Katalog zur Ausstellung, Gustav-Lübcke-Museum, Hamm, 16.6.-13.10.1996, Landesmuseum, Mainz, 24.11.1996-23.2.1997, Staatliche Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst, München, Sommer 1997, Renaissanceschloß Schallaburg b. Melk, Niederösterreich, Sommer 1998, Wiesbaden, 1996-1998*, 33-34.
- (9) H. ZALOSCER, *Quelques considérations sur les rapports entre l'art copte et les Indes. Suppléments aux annales du service des antiquités égyptiennes, Cahier n° 6, Le Caire, 1947*, 20-21.

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was due to the Greek civilization and culture which was the origin of the  
Egyptian education for several centuries.

These pagan themes appeared in the decoration of the daily life objects as well as clothes and sculptures alongside with Christian subjects. One of the most important Greek art influences is the Medusa appearance which decorates a neck of a light-brown pottery water jar (1) preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Grapes with small circles and branches are decorating the central upper part of the jar belly dating from the III-IV<sup>th</sup> century A. D.

The decorations of some earliest Coptic artistic collections depict a Hellenistic decoration or a pagan topic with a small cross or fish. The influence of the Greek art appears in the decoration of so many examples of Coptic fabrics, limestone works and Icons. One of the masterpieces of the Musée d'Etats des Beaux-Arts in Moscow (2) is decorated with the naked human bust of the Greek god Nilos symbol of fertility. With its tapestry-weaving technique, this fragment of fabric is made from linen and wool. Dating from the III<sup>th</sup>-IV<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , it shows the Nilos bust as a strong or a powerful man surrounded by a garland with realism and naturalism which are the most important Greek art main features. The god Nilos bust seems to

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come out of the frame. His name IS written in Greek NEILOS to the left and to the right of his face. Another similar fabric also from linen and wool, which was brought from Egypt by V. G. BOCK in 1889, is now in the Hermitage Museum<sup>(4)</sup>. Dating from the 111<sup>th</sup>-IV<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , its decoration depicts the Greek earth goddess Gaia drawn on a dark blue background of a medallion or a garland of flowers. She is wearing a roman tunic and a yellow mental. Her hair is decorated with two flowers and a solar disc with uraeus which recalls the sacred serpent of the Ancient Egyptians. Her brawn eyes and her red cheek reflect the life and the realistic Greek style. Her Greek name rH is visible around her head. The two pieces of fabrics are distinguished by the Goblines technique. In fact, all Coptic textiles reflecting the Greek art influence are decorated with clear dancers and musicians figures, hunting scenes showing wild animals and birds with domestic animals in movement. The best example is the linen and wool tapestry hanging dating from the IV<sup>th</sup> century A. D. and discovered in Antinoé<sup>(5)</sup> Displayed in the Coptic Museum, its main decoration is presenting a piper wearing green and red cloths, riders and dancers figures which are included in a vertical large band to his right side.

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- (1) N° 8972. Height: 61. Rim diameter: 21 cm. Base diameter: 19,8 cm. G. GABRA, Cairo, 106, n° 47; L 'art copte 2000, 197, n° 224.
- (2) Coptic Textiles. Collection of Coptic Textiles State Push/än Museum of Fine Arts Moscow, Introduction and catalogue by R. SWRINOVA, 1967, n° 3, fig. 12.
- (3) I, I a 5822. Dimensions: 29,6 x 29,4 cm. Received in the Museum in 1911. V. S. GOLENICHEV, L'art de Byzance dans les collections soviétiques, Moscou, Musée National des Beaux-Arts A. S. Pouchkine, Moscou, 1 977, 167, n° 321 ; Ägypten. Schätze, 308-309, 349; L 'art copte 2000, 38, n° 1.
- (4) N° 11440. Saint Petersburg. Dimensions: 25,5 cm. L. KYBALOVA, Les tissus coptes, Paris, 1967, 52; A. Effenberger, Koptische Kunst, Leipzig, 1975, 110, 112; A. BADAWY, Coptic, 287; M. H. RUTSCHOWSCAYA, Tissus, 66, 79-80; Ägypten. Schätze, 307; L 'art copte 2000, 38, n° 2.
- (5) N° 7948. Dimensions: 142 x 103 cm. G. GABRA, Cairo, 75, n° 23.

Greek inscriptions giving proper names, dates, hymns and biblical verses complete sometimes the decoration of the Coptic artistic objects. In Christianity, the Alpha and the Omega which are the first and the last letter in the Greek alphabet refers to the following Christ speeches: "I am the beginning and the end". The two letters are frequently shown suspended from crosses on the Coptic wall paintings, the textiles and funerary stelae. According to L. DEL FRANCIA, in the Middle Eastern astrology, these two

signs are in relation with the cosmos, the zodiac and the twenty four hours of the day ( <sup>1</sup> ).

In Greek art, the conch shell(<sup>2</sup>) was usually in connection with the beauty goddess Aphrodite and it was associated in addition to the Nereid Thetis and in general the sea divinities. It was firstly in Alexandria city that the Copts borrowed it from the Greek artists that's why it is very common in the decoration of several Coptic textiles and stone sculptures. It was a frequent decorative element inside different chapels in the monastery of Saint Jeremiah at Saqqara. The Coptic artist replaced the figure of Aphrodite by a small cross to symbolize the resurrection of Jesus in Coptic art.

The dolphins(<sup>3</sup>) didn't appear in the art of the Ancient Egyptians but the Egyptians borrowed its figures from the Greco-roman art. The dolphin which is one of the symbols of Jesus Christ is the saviour of the shipwrecked. Together with the Nymphs or the cupids shown in some cases on its back, this is the decoration of several Coptic artistic objects displayed today in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, the Egyptian Museum in Berlin and the Coptic Museum in Cairo. In the British Museum in London, the dolphin is accompanied with a crocodile figure on a Coptic sculpture. A

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bronze lamp from the IV<sup>th</sup> century which is conserved in the Musée du Louvre in Paris is also decorated with the figure of a dolphin holding putti on its back. The dolphin figures holding the spout are seen in other examples preserved in the Egyptian Museums in Turin and Berlin. In the Hermitage Museum, crosses are also shown on a dolphin's forehead. The appearance of the dolphin with the woman holding netting is frequent on the Coptic fabrics. The dolphin appears sometimes alone without the woman or accompanied with putti. Being a very ancient decorative element frequent in the classic art, it was also a common element in the Cretan art(4).

Discovered in Karanis (Kümm Ushim), Gerzah and Oxyrhunchos, some wooden children toys cavaliers, which are displayed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo and in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, may be the survival of the Greco-Roman art because the majority of these toys are on wheels and it is well known that wooden horses and birds on wheels were very frequent in the Greco-Roman period. One of these examples<sup>(S)</sup> shows a painted cavalier on a horse back or only horses and birds with holes most probably for strings.

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(1) L. DEL FRANCIA, "Symbols in Coptic Art: Alpha and Omega", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2160-2163.



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(2) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Symbols in Coptic art: Conch shell", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2163-2164.

(3) D. BÉNAZÉTH, art. "Symbols in Coptic art: Dolphin", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2166-2167. (4) H.

ZALOSCER, *Considérations*, 15.

(5) N° 8890-8894-8895. Height: 19 cm - 18, 2 cm. G. GABRA, 98; *L'art copte* 2000, 218, n° 270 a-b.

In crafts such as pottery objects, ivory and bone-carving, Greek influence is particularly obvious perhaps because the centres of their production were in Greek cities and colonies in the south of the Delta and which were the centre for the majority of the wealthy and well educated Greek-speaking people in Egypt<sup>(1)</sup> This may be also because Alexandria was one of the most important markets for both African and Indian ivory under the Greek rule in Egypt. Even while examining the acanthus leaves' elements decorating the borders of so many niches and chapels, we remember immediately that it is originally one of the Hellenistic survivals<sup>(2)</sup>.

### 3. THE INDIA ART INFLUENCE

The rapports between the art of Egypt especially after the introduction of Christianity and the art of India are already mentioned by several authors and researchers. The best study is certainly this one of BERSTL<sup>(3)</sup> who is based on two principal attitudes: The first one is a man sitting and having the cross-

legged or on one leg tucked under him, the arm folded on the bust, in a meditative attitude. The second attitude is showing a naked standing woman with one raised arm and one cross-leg. BERSTL mentioned the two attitudes by their Indian names: the Yogi and the Yakschini which were known in the West till France and which became common also in Egypt particularly in the Coptic period. According to H. VILLEFOSSE (<sup>4</sup>) the Yogi appeared at first in India and then in Egypt by the intervention. He mentioned also that the foreign cults especially the isiac mysteries frequent in Sweden favoured the introduction of such a decoration in the West. H. ZALOSCER added that BERSTL maintained that in India, the Yogi was the meditation attitude which was supposed to be adopted by Buddha himself. The Yakschini: the naked woman with her jewellery is usually standing below a tree. Her cross legs are in a lascivious lop-sided walk. Her raised arm clutches to the tree branches. Her bust is opulent and the sex IS marked(<sup>S</sup>). A relief from from the Coptic Museum in Cairo and another one discovered in Ahnas and preserved in the Civico Museo in Trieste prove that such a topic is a frequent in Coptic art.

- (1) J. COONEY, Problems, 36.
- (2) Late Egyptian and Coptic art, New York, 1943, I 1.
- (3) H. ZALOSCER, Considérations, 6-7.
- (4) H. VILLEFOSSE, Le dieu gaulois accroupi de Bouray, Mémoires de la société des antiquaires de France, Paris, 1912, 244.
- (5) H. ZALOSCER, Considérations, 7-8, fig. 5, pls. 111, VIII.

In Coptic art, the woman is holding sometimes a scarf or cult objects like sistrum or a cross. It is the imitation of the Indian Yakschini decorating the stūpas buddhic from the 11<sup>th</sup> century A. D ( <sup>1</sup> ) Dancers' statues and sculptures holding sistrum and other musical instruments in hands are also preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo(2).

The figure of a woman with scarf is from unknown provenance. In the Civico Museo In Trieste, a relief from Ahnas( <sup>3</sup> ) is showing two naked and standing women with jewellery. Their cross-legs, in their raised hands, they hold a plat bandeau which is large in the middle. The significance IS uncertain. Discovered also, in Ahnas, another relief) in the Coptic Museum IS presenting a woman with the cross-legs on marine monster back. Around her arm, a floating scarf passed under her head. A similar decorative topic

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which is found in the Hellenistic art is depicting Nereids on dolphin back<sup>(S)</sup>.  
The woman with scarf is also seen in the Dionysus cortege which decorates  
a relief of a sarcophagus from the Hellenistic period in the Museo Nazionale  
di Napoli. The gestures on the Greek and the Coptic artistic objects are the  
same but the Greek woman is usually wearing without jewellery and she is  
dancing.

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(1) The most ancient statues are found on the Torana East of Santschi on a pillar at Barhut de Stüpa and Bodhgaya in addition to other Barhut statues in the Indian Museum in Kalkata in India. Other similar examples are dating from the 11th century A. D. and can be found upon the temple of Räjarañi in Buvaneshvara. The Yakschini motif is rich in significance. It is a very ancient decorative and religious element symbolising the sacred tree. W. COHN, *Indische Plastik*, Berlin, 1923, pls. 3, 14, 59; H. ZALOSCER, *Considérations*, 8, pl. II, fig. 5.

(2) N<sup>o</sup> E 25393. Dimensions: 22 x 10,6 cm. Bought in 1954. H. ZALOSCER, *Kunst*, pl. 111, fig. 33; *L'art copte* 2000, 226.

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(3) H. ZALOSCER, *Considérations*, 9, pl. 111.

(4) H. ZALOSCER, *Considérations*, 9, pl. IV

(5) Many Coptic reliefs with the Nereid on dolphins back are preserved in different international archeological museums such as the Coptic Museum and the Civico Museo in Trieste. H. ZALOSCER, *Kunst*,

(6) This scene includes the figure of Silene who opens the march, sloping drunk on a cat, behind him, a choir dancing Satyrs. Finally, Dionysus appears in a chariot drag by Centaurs. *Mythologie générale*, publiée sous la direction de F. GURAND, Paris, 1935, 156.

#### 4. THE ROMAN ART INFLUENCE

The Roman art was very popular during the first centuries of the Roman rule in Egypt and some early Coptic sculptures retain its influence. The Faiyum mummies' portraits<sup>(1)</sup>, which may be the imitation of the masks produced in Ancient Egypt<sup>(2)</sup> are the most important realistic artistic objects that have come down to us from the Roman period and it is considered to be one of the strong Roman traditions specially for the urban elites showing their different cultures in Egypt. Painted during the lifetime of the person in a wax technique and apparently used and hung on the walls of his house, these portraits date back from the first three centuries after Christ and they are distinguished by their surprising and vivacious style in addition to their surpassed dynamism.

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We received also a few examples from these portraits dating to the fourth century A. D. but more simple and modest. The Faiyum portraits which were undoubtedly descend from Hellenistic paintings (3) are an excellent example of the Greek and Roman class work. Such tradition seems to be limited to a small group of Greeks. This influence of the Roman art is conserved in so many Icons and in fact, these Roman portraits are an early stage toward the Coptic icons development or they are considered also to be the origin of the Coptic wooden tablets showing the dead.

More important is the architecture of the majority of the Coptic churches in Egypt which IS Inspired from the Roman architecture: the basilica shape consisting of the narthex, the central nave flanked by two lateral aisles and the chorus followed by the three eastern chapels. These churches are usually covered with a ceiling looking like Noah's Arch. In fact the basilica architectural style which is the oldest one before the Byzantine and the Coptic is common in the entire world. Several opinions and theories find its origin in the ancient Roman architecture where judgement took place and where commercial affairs were accomplished.

Others see the basilica style origin in the hypostyle hall in the ancient Egyptian temple especially in the New Kingdom. According to MUSTAFA ABDALLAH SHIHA <sup>(4)</sup> this shape may be found also in the tombs of Beni Hasan in Middle Egypt. This may be acceptable because it is proved that after the Christianization of Egypt; the first Christian generation transformed immediately the ancient Egyptian temples into churches after covering the pagan scenes by new Christian figures and symbols. Moreover, in the Coptic churches, the ground level is increasing while moving from the entrance door towards the three eastern

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(1) About seventy years ago, these portraits were discovered in Faiyum cemeteries by the French archeologist J. CLEDAT and his friend the British scholar FL. PETRIE. The majority of these portraits have about 30 cm in width and 40 cm in length. For more information, see E. DOXIADIS, *Portraits du Fayoum: Visages de l'Egypte ancienne*, préface de D. J. THOMPSON, traduit de l'anglais par D. COLLINS, Paris, 1995; M. F.

AULBERT, *Portraits funéraires de l'Egypte romaine: cartonnages, linceuls et bois*. II. M.-F.

AUBERT, R. CORTOPASSI, G. NACHTERGAEL et al., Paris, 2008.

(2) *Coptic Icons*, 11, 84-92.

(3) J. COONEY, *Problems*, 36.

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(4) MUSTAFA ABDALLAH SHIHA, *al-Fann al-qibtz*, II<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cairo, 2003, 93-96.

chapels. This idea is already interpreted in the ancient Egyptian temple to reach the holy sanctuary or the *Dsr Dsrw*.

#### 4. THE BYZANTINE ART INFLUENCE:

The culmination of the Byzantine art influence (1) is shown in the decoration of the interior walls of the Peace chapel in the cemetery of al-Baghawât in Khârghâ Oasis that's why this chapel is known as the Byzantine tomb by the scholars and the archaeologists<sup>(2)</sup>. In fact, all human figures painted are wearing cloths according to the Byzantine style especially in the scenes depicting Saint Paul and his disciple Saint Thekla, Noah 's Arch, the Annunciation and the Sacrifice of Isaac.

In the main archaeological church of the monastery of Saint Anthony in the Red Sea<sup>(3)</sup>, although they have Coptic features' faces, the Byzantine art influence appears in the postures of the equestrian saints shown on the walls of the martyrs' nave. The small churches or buildings drawn under its horses' bellies are presenting also Byzantine artistic



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Wall paintings discovered in the monastery of Saint Jeremiah at Saqqara and in the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit are depicting saints or monks with garments which match examples found in the chapels of Ravenna (4). We must mention also the semi circular fresco wall painting discovered at Bawit<sup>(5)</sup> because of its decoration depicting the Christ face with a Byzantine art features: The long hair on his shoulders, the thin and long nose, the fine moustache, the thin lips and the short beard. Jesus is drawn in bust within a garland carried by two winged angels in movement. The martyr Selbane is visible to the left side of the wall painting. In the opposite, Coptic art features appear on the angels' faces. Above Jesus halo, the word saviour IS written Söter. The Greek words angelos kiriou (angels of the Lord) are legible on the wall painting dating from the VI<sup>th</sup> century A. D.

In addition, a sycamore wooden lintel<sup>(6)</sup> which was discovered in the Hanging church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Old Cairo shows the influence of the Byzantine art in the Coptic art. The main decorative topics here are two religious scenes taken from the New Testament: The victorious Entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem and the Ascension. Four lines of Greek inscriptions appear above the scenes. The inscription, including a hymn In praise for the

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Christ, gives also the names of the Holy Virgin Mary, the abbot Theodore and a deacon named George. The influence of the Byzantine art appears in the larges and longs

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- (1) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Art, Byzantine influences on Coptic", *CoptEnc.*, I, 241-243.
  - (2) W. DE BOCK, *Matériaux*, 28, pls. XIII-xv.
  - (3) P. VAN MOORSEL, *Les peintures du monastère de saint-Antoine pres de la Mer Rouge, avec les contributions de P. GROSSMANN, K. INNENFFE et P. H. LAFERRIERE*, I-II, Le Caire, 1995.
  - (4) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Byzantine", *CoptEnc.*, 1, 242.
  - (5) N° 12089. Dimensions: 165 x 330 cm. G. GABRA, *Cairo*, 94, n°39.
  - (6) N° 753. Dimensions: 36 x 274. G. GABRA, *Cairo*, 96, n° 41 .

clothes' details and tunics with several draperies and pleats of the disciples and the other human figures shown in different attitudes.

The Coptic fabric piece conserved now in the Textiles Museum in Washington, D. C. is showing the figure of Alexander on horseback in a Byzantine style. In the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the decoration of other silk pieces which were discovered in Antinoé depicts some of the influences of the Byzantine art. In the Cleveland Museum of Art, the decoration of a Coptic

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tapestry hanging is executed according to the Byzantine art: The Holy Virgin Mary is seated with Jesus Christ the Infant. Both are surrounded by the busts of the disciples.

Coptic icons depicting pain, suffering, crying or persecutions of saints and martyrs recall the Byzantine art influence. Dating from the XVII century A. D. , the icon of the Holy Virgin Mary holding the blue Crucifix<sup>(1)</sup> is the proof. If we look carefully to her face, she seems ready to cry. Dating back to the XVIII<sup>th</sup> - XIX<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the icons depicting Zachariah Decapitation<sup>(2)</sup> and the Christ Dead lamentation<sup>(3)</sup> reflect also pain and suffering feelings and a horizontal line indicates the noses and the mouths of the human figures depicted like on Byzantine icons. Much more the last icon, in which the Christ is lying and wearing a white loincloth and surrounded by his mother, Mary Magdalene, saint John, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, reflects also Greek art style influence.

Dating from the VI<sup>th</sup>-VII<sup>th</sup> centuries A. D. , one of the ancient icons of the Christian world which is now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris is considered as a point of transition between the portraits of Faiyum and the Byzantine icon art. The icon is depicting Jesus Christ standing beside the abbot Mina the

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superior of the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit. The figures are immediately drawn on wood according to the Tempera technique. The bodies are thickset and divided in simple zones without leaving appear the forms. A Coptic inscription is executed to the right side of the head of the abbot and it is legible as follow: proeistos (superior of monastery). The word Söter which means saviour appears to the left side of Jesus head. The folds of the pallium are seen in concentric convergent curves towards the head suffused with light till the very rounded eyes. The Byzantine art influence may be also conserved in the decoration of the holy book decorated with precious stones and seen in the left hand of Jesus. Even the saints' clothes and the Christ face features are executed according to the Byzantine style.

Dating most probably from the VI<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , one of the most important marble columns capitals<sup>(S)</sup> preserved in the Coptic Museum is imitating the conically-shaped

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(1) N<sup>o</sup> 3472. Dimensions: 26,1 x 35,7 x cm. The Icons, 96, n<sup>o</sup> 106, pl. 26 a.

(2) N<sup>o</sup> 3869. Dimensions: 43,0 x 37,0 x cm. The Icons, 1 10, n<sup>o</sup> 122, pl. 32 c; Coptic Icons, 1, 26.

(3) N<sup>o</sup> 3461. Dimensions: 28,1 x x cm. The Icons, 125, n<sup>o</sup> 140, pl. 37 c.

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(4) Height: 57 cm, Width: 57 cm. Thickness: 2 cm. C. ZIEGLER, *Le Louvre-les antiquités égyptiennes*, avec la collaboration de CH. BARBOTIN et M. H. RUTSCHOWSCAYA, Paris, 1990; *L'art copte 2000 ans, 108-109' I'Égypte au Musée du Louvre*, Paris, 2000, 129.

(5) N° 7178. Length: 107 cm. Width: 104,5 cm. Height: 83 cm. Diameter: 55 cm. *Coptic Art*, 11. *Sculpture Architecture*, Cairo, 1989, 93; G. GABRA, Cairo, 72, n° 20.

capitals existing now in San Vitale church in Ravenna. The capital looks like a basket. In its centre, the union of papyrus and lotus illustrates the influence of Ancient Egypt. It may have also the form of a basket baptismal font discovered in the Old Cathedral of Alexandria and which is today in the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. Dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , it has a hole for draining the water of it (1).

Some of the decorative elements in Coptic monasteries and churches may have been taken from the Byzantine decoration including the foliated scrolls which appear on some limestone friezes. In Middle Egypt, the interior walls of the main church of the Coptic monastery dedicated to Abu Fana in Malawi which dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , are also decorated with crosses with Byzantine style. Byzantine crosses are also decorating so many different Coptic fabrics dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century A. D.

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Furthermore, the corbelled capitals are from a Libyan origin from Sabratha and also Leptis Magua which means that they are earlier than the Byzantine style<sup>(2)</sup> Plant branches elements with vine leaves and buds springing from a vase are also taken from both Roman and Byzantine arts and can be seen in the decoration of one of the two leaves of the sycamore and the pine wooden door (3) discovered in the church of saint Barbara in Old Cairo. Dating from the VI-VII<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , while speaking about the wooden panels' technique used in this door, some Arabist scholars may see in this door an Islamic art influence dating from the fātimid period. Their proof is the wooden door belonging to the fātimid caliph al-Hākim Bi Amr Allah<sup>(4)</sup> and which is one of the most precious masterpieces of the Museum of Islamic art in Bāb al-Khalq in Cairo.

Some Coptic churches were built according to the Byzantine architectural style which is common in the Christian world especially in saint Vitale church in Ravenna, Saint Mark church in Venice and the Agia Sophia church in Constantinople. Its name derives from the name of the Byzantine or the eastern Roman Empire. Square in shape, the Byzantine church IS usually divided in four iwāns covered by a vault or a cupola with semi-domes. In

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general, mosaics and marble ornamentations are covering its interior and external walls in the Byzantine church. This Byzantine architectural style may be close to the tomb of Seneb built in the West of the great pyramid at Giza because the tomb is preceded by a square covered by a dome. The stone vault is also found in the funerary room in the step pyramid at Saqqara. This cruciform architectural style will continue to appear after the Arab conquest of Egypt in some religious construction dating from the mamlük period like the Madrassa of sultan Hasan in Cairo for example.

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(1) Coptic Art, II, 34.

(2) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Byzantine", *CoptEnc.*, 1, 242.

(3) N° 738. Dimensions: 240 x 107 cm. J. BECKWITH, *Coptic Sculpture 300-1300*, London, 1963, 23, figs. 9798; M. T. CECHELLI, "Notes sur la porte de sainte Barbe au Vieux Caire", *Enchoria*, VIII-Sonderband, Wiesbaden (1978), 71-79, pl. 1/b•, G. GABRA, Cairo, 103, n° 45.

(4) ZAKI MUHAMMAD HASAN, *Kunüz al-fätimiyin*, Cairo, 1937, 202, pl. 52.

## 5. THE CHRISTIAN ART INFLUENCE

The Christian topics<sup>(1)</sup> and scenes taken from the Mariological and the Christological cycles started to appear in the decoration of the Coptic

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monasteries and churches especially after that Egypt became a Christian country. It is normal to see the scene showing the archangel Gabriel arriving to announce the birth of the Christ to the Holy Virgin Mary in Coptic art. Dating from the v<sup>th</sup>-VI<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the oldest Annunciation scene is this one decorating the small damaged wooden panel<sup>(2)</sup> conserved in the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

The Adoration of the Magi is one of these themes generally associated with the Nativity scene of the Christ. It is a subject which is rarely found in Egypt and it wasn't also a frequent decorative scene in the early Christian world. In such a scene, we see usually an adolescent, an adult and an eldest man with a long beard. They come to offer their gifts to the Infant. The Adoration of Magi scene is decorating one of the pages of one of the Coptic manuscripts which are preserved now in the Institut Catholique de Paris<sup>(3)</sup>. The page is divided into six sections. One is decorated with the figures of the Magi shown in front of the king Herod. The Adoration of the Magi scene is repeated also in the decoration of the bronze censor (4) composed from a short smooth neck without decoration, a belly and a base decorated with a continuation of leaves. Below, the decoration includes a small rose from 10 petals surrounded by



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garlands. The belly of the censor is richly decorated by other biblical scenes such as: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Announcement to the shepherds, the Baptism in the Jordan River, the victorious Entry into Jerusalem, the Crucifixion and the Myrrhophores in the tomb. The Adoration of the Magi scene IS one of the religious scenes also executed on a copper censor (5) discovered in Sohag and on ten cedar wooden different panels of a door discovered in the Hanging Church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Old Cairo and which are preserved now in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities in the British Museum<sup>(6)</sup> in London. Dating from the XIII<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the panels are decorated with Christological scenes such as Annunciation and Baptism, Nativity and Adoration, Victorious Entry into Jerusalem, Ascension and the Descent into Hell. The eldest king of the Magi is also kneeling in front of the Virgin in the decoration of one of the panels of the wooden door. The wood work style may include a little Islamic influence

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(1) BOURGUET S. J. P. DU and others, "Christian subjects in Coptic art", *CoptEnc.*, II, 526-544.

(2) Height: 28.5 cm, Width: 14.5 cm, Thickness: 2 cm. RUTSCHOWSCAYA M. H., *Musée du Louvre. Bois de l'Égypte copte*, Paris, 1986, 113, n° 368.

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(3) F 4v- scenes évangéliques. J. LEROY, *Manuscrits*, 158, n° I, pl. 77.

(4) Height: 9 cm.05. Opening at the top: 11 cm of diameter. Col: 2 cm of height. Base: 1 cm.05. J. LEROY, "L'encensoir 'syrien' au couvent de saint Antoine dans le désert de la mer rouge", *BIFAO*, LXXVI, Le Caire (1976), 381-390, pl. LXII, A.

(5) In addition, the Annunciation, the Baptism, the Victorious Entry of Jesus to Jerusalem, the saint women in the tomb, saint Thomas incredulity and the Assumption. N° 5144. Height: 13 cm. Diameter: 14,6 cm. Received in 1907 in the Coptic Museum. Date: Medieval times. *L'art copte* 2000, 182, 192.

(6) *MLA* 1878, 12-3, 1-10. J. BECKWITH, *Sculpture*, 142, 56; R. G. COQUIN, *Les édifices chrétiens du VieuxCaire. I. Bibliographie et topographie historiques*, Le Caire, (1974), 64, 84; *L'art copte* 2000, 176-177.

particularly when it is compared with the minbar of the mamlük sultan Husâm al-Din Lâghin in the mosque of Ahmad ibn Tülün in Cairo. The figures of the Magi, holding baskets including their gifts, are seen till now in the decoration of the southern semi-dome covering the chorus of the main church of the Holy Virgin Mary in the Syrians monastery at Wadi Natrun. Dating from the IV<sup>th</sup> A. H./X<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , Adoration with Nativity scenes are shown in relief also in the decoration of one of the five wooden small panels of the central wooden screen within the church of the two saints Sergius and Bacchus in Old Cairo.

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The Nativity or the birth of Jesus Christ scene is one of the most interesting and very common Christian scenes in the decoration of many Coptic artistic collections. This is the common decoration of several Coptic wall paintings discovered in the church of Abdallah Nirqi in Nubia, in the main church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Wadi Natrun (1), in the Hanging Church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Old Cairo as well as a small wooden panel<sup>(2)</sup> inserted in the central wooden screen of the church of Sergius and Bacchus in Old Cairo. The scene is showing the Holy Virgin Mary lying and her son beside her in the crib. They are surrounded by angels, three shepherds and Joseph the Carpenter.

Moreover, the Baptism scene was seen early in the Roman catacombs. Although it is a common topic in Byzantine art, it is not very frequent in Coptic art except for icons. The figures of the evangelists and the disciples which are depicted individually or in a group of twelve are nevertheless very common in the decoration of several Coptic icons, wall paintings and manuscripts. Sometimes we can see only the two saints Peter and Paul together holding a small chapel in the center of which is shown the Christ in bust.

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Although the Massacre of the Innocents scene is not one of the most common decorative subjects in Coptic art, it is shown in Dair Abu Hennis in Mallawi and in the chapel n° XXX in the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit. Remains of the same scene can be seen in the ceiling of the chapel of Saint Paul the Hermit in his monastery in the Red Sea. In such a scene, details show how the king Herod ordered to kill all the male children less than two years hoping to kill Jesus the Infant.

Beside all these Christian topics, the appearance of the twenty four elders of the Apocalypses who are surrounding the throne of the Lord is one of the most important Christian scenes in Coptic art. The most ancient depiction of the twenty four elders in the Coptic art is a wall painting dating from the VIII<sup>th</sup>-IX<sup>th</sup> century A. D. and decorating one of the interior walls of the monastery of Abba Hedra in Aswan. The figures of the twenty four elders of the Apocalypses are frequent in the apses of several Coptic monasteries and churches like the chapel of Saint Thekla Hemanot the Ethiopian in the Hanging church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Old Cairo. Their figures appear also in the decoration of the main church of the monastery of saint Macarius the Great in Wadi Natrun, in the central cupola

- (1) J. LEROY, *Les peintures des couvents du Ouadi Natroun*, Le Caire, 1982, 68.
- (2) H. ZALOSKER, *Kunst*, n° 50.
- (3) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Christian Subjects in Coptic Art: Bath of the Infant Jesus", *CoptEnc.*, II, 530531.

of the main church inside the monastery of saint Anthony, in the chapel bearing their names within the monastery of saint Paul the Hermit in the Red Sea and on one of the precious Coptic icon (1) painted on a panel and conserved in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo. They are standing or sometimes they are sitting, wearing crowns and holding calices in their hands. According to the Coptic tradition, the twenty four elders are venerated on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Hätür/20 November as mentioned in the Coptic synaxarion(2).

The figure of saint Minas the Miracle Maker who suffered martyrdom under the rule of the roman emperor Diocletian appears a lot in Coptic art. On pottery flasks, this saint is usually depicted in the orant attitude standing between two camels. Some Icons and manuscripts depict him as an equestrian saint killing a dragon. Some rare examples of his pottery flasks discovered in his monastery in King Mariout in the west of Alexandria are showing only his head from profile.

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In the Coptic decoration, the figure of Saint Shenute the famous superior of the White Monastery in Sohag is executed also on a Coptic limestone gravestone which is displayed in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. Standing in full-face under an arcade, he is wearing a long pleated tunic covered by a cloak. In his right hand, he holds a long staff ended with cross. The saint is not haloed and his name IS is graven down the stela dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century A. D. His figure is drawn also in the decoration of one of the Coptic manuscripts<sup>(4)</sup> discovered in the monastery of the archangel Michael in al-Hamüfi and dating from the IX century A. D.

In Coptic art, when the name of Jeremiah is mentioned, it recalls usually both the prophet of the Old Testament and the abbot of the Coptic monastery built at Saqqara. Not only in the wall paintings of his monastery at Saqqara has he appeared with the prophet of the Old Testament Enoch but also in the monastery of saint Apollo at Bawit.

In the decoration of some Coptic objects, we see also the figure of saint Thekla who was the famous disciple of Saint Paul and who was venerated in Asia Minor. Both were venerated in the Khârgå Oasis that's why their figures are seen now inside one of the well known chapels of this cemetery: The

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Peace chapel which dates from the VI<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Few examples of Saint Minas pottery flasks are decorated with her figure shown standing between two wild animals like the example preserved in the Musée du Louvre<sup>(S)</sup> in Paris. Dating from the VI<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the saint is depicted in a frontal attitude between two wild animals. A Greek inscription is running all around the external border of the flask. It is

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(1) N<sup>o</sup> 3443. Dimensions: 75,4 x 62,5 x (85,5 x 74,0 x 4,0). The Icons, 22, n<sup>o</sup> 14, pl. .

(2) R. BASSET, "le Synaxmre arabe jacobite (rédaction copte). II. Les mois de Hatour et de Kihak", *PatiOr.*, III, texte arabe publié, traduit et annoté par R. BASSET, Paris (1906), 335.

(3) H. ZALOSKER, *Kunst*, fig. 45.

(4) M. 604. S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Christian subjects in Coptic art: Shenute Saint", *CoptEnc.*, II, 538539.

(5) N<sup>o</sup> 1926. Dimensions: 27 x 17,5 x 7 cm. *L'art copte* 2000, 41.

translated as follow: "Bless of saint Minas. Amen". The name of saint Thekla is written to the left side of her face.

One of the most important Christian decorative topics that passed at first to the Greeks and then appeared in Coptic art is the Parthian Horseman (1). From

250 B. C. to 225 A. D. the empire of the Parthians was extended from the Caspian Sea to the Indus River. In their beliefs, the mounted figure raising its right arm to bless with two fingers has a funerary meaning which decorates some Coptic fabrics in the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

Christian symbols<sup>(2)</sup> are also main elements in the decoration of the majority of the Coptic artistic collections in several archaeological museums. It is normal to see these symbols on the interior walls of the Coptic monasteries and churches. For example, the cross<sup>(3)</sup> is the Christ and the crucifixion. It is not well known when the appearance of the Sign of the cross was in Coptic art and it is still a matter of controversy. From the fourth to the thirteenth century A. D. , the cross at right angles of two lines of equal length appeared and it was influenced by the Greek cross in addition to the crux ansata inspired from the ancient Egyptian ankh key in Coptic collections ornamentation as it was said above<sup>(4)</sup>.

The importance of the eagle figure started first in the Hellenistic and Roman art <sup>(5)</sup> It grew after Egypt became a Christian country as it is considered in funerary art as symbol of Jesus. It may be sometimes the symbolic meaning of the Christ's resurrection. Being symbol of power and authority, his wings



offer protection. In Christianity, the eagle is also compared to the archangels and the clericals. It is also Saint Jean the Evangelist's symbol. Its figure is depicted on wooden doors, friezes and limestone sculptures in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. To conclude his article published in the *Etudes nubiennes* in 1978, E. P. LUCCHESI<sup>(6)</sup> mentioned that the eagle accomplished the following roles: This bird is the messenger and the mediator between the sky and the earth. It is also the protector against the hostile powers, a pagan tradition adopted in Christianity. By some Syrian influences, the figure of the eagle was introduced in Egypt accompanied with certain elements of the roman apotheosis. The Copts added to this figure the bulla strongly widespread between them and some other Christian symbols.

The fish<sup>(7)</sup> was seen early as being the regeneration symbol in the decoration of the ancient Egyptian art as it was in relation with the Nile and the Osiris legend. It is shown also in the Greco-roman art especially in the decoration of several mosaics which are

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(1) Length: 19 cm. Width: 18 cm. S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Christian subjects in Coptic art: Parthian Horseman", *CoptEnc.*, 11, 538.

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- (2) Several authors, art. "Symbols in Coptic Art", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2160-2170.
- (3) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, art. "Symbols in Coptic art: The cross", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2164-2166.
- (4) PP. 11-12 in this article.
- (5) P. E. LUCCHESI, art. "Symbols in Coptic art: Eagle", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2167-2170.
- (6) P. E. LUCCHESI, "Observations sur l'iconographie de l'aigle funéraire dans l'art copte et nubien" dans: *Etudes nubiennes, colloque de Chantilly 2-6 juillet 1975*, Le Caire, 1978, 190.
- (7) D. BÉNAZETH, art. "Symbols in Coptic art: Fish", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2170-2171.

displayed in the Musée du Louvre and the Historical Museum of Textiles. Later it became very popular in Coptic art. As it is the one of the Christ symbols, it appears on a fresco wall painting from the catacomb of Karmüz in Alexandria. The fish appear also in the Annunciation and the Baptism scene of Jesus Christ on different icons and in the decoration of several chapels in the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit. In addition, this decorative element can be shown in the nilotic scenes decorating the different Coptic woodcarvings, the bronze censers and some textiles conserved in the Coptic Museum and in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. The letters of the Greek word meaning fish *ikhtius* are the abbreviations of the Greek name of Jesus which mean "Jesus Christ son of God the Saviour".

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The nimbus<sup>(1)</sup> which is the halo or this light circle surrounding the heads of the saints, the martyrs, the angels and the archangels in both Christian and Coptic arts, is mostly in yellow or light green colour with a dark brown or black external line. It is easy to know Jesus because his halo is usually decorated with a cross having three equal branches.

#### 6. THE ISLAMIC ART INFLUENCE (SASSANIAN ART INFLUENCE)

As Egypt was conquered by Khosrow II from 619 to 629 A. D. , it was normally to see the direct influence of the Sassanlan art (2) in the Coptic art decoration. The proper Sassanlan motifs like the Woman at the Window are Important decorative elements which decorates a piece of textile discovered at Antinoé. Roundels with rams or winged horses are distributed between other elements on textiles.

Other motifs which occur on Coptic textiles are all of Sassanian art origin. Being one of the masterpieces of the Brooklyn Museum in New York, a wool tapestry hanging with human figures is dating from the early VII<sup>t</sup> century A D<sup>(3)</sup> The figures are standing in different attitudes under arcades. Four of them (one up to the right and three down) are wearing simple and classical tunics. At the upper left side of the tapestry, a man wears a Persian costume. Lower

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to the left, another one is wearing an animal skin and he may be the Greek  
god Heracles or one of the followers of Greek god Dionysus. All human  
figures have haloes surrounding their heads. Persian wearing is already seen  
within the chapel n° XXXVII in the monastery of Saint Apollo at Bawit(4).

The Centaur appearance in the decoration of different pieces of Coptic  
textiles reflects also the influence of the Sassanian art. It is a fabulous creature  
with a human or a horse bust winged. According to a legend, these centaurs  
lived in Thessaly. They were conflicting

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(1) Z. KISS, art. "Symbols in Coptic art: Nimbus", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2171-2172.

(2) H. ZALOSKER, *Considérations*, 30-35; R. GHIRSHNIAN, *Persian Art: The Parthian and  
Sasanian Dynasties, 249 B. C. - 651 A. D.*, New York, 1964; D. G. SHEPHERD, *Iran: Between  
East and West*, 84-105. *Offprint of the East-West in Art*, Bloomington, Ind., 1966; M. ROSEN-  
AYALON, art. "Sassanian influences on Coptic art", *CoptEnc.*, VII, 2097-2098.

(3) N° 46. 128. Height: 51 cm. Width: 57 cm. CHARLES EDWIN WILBOUR Fund. *Brief Guide.  
Ancient Art. The Brooklyn Museum*, New York, 1970, 104-105.

(4) P. II in this article.

against the Lapides (centaureomachie)<sup>(1)</sup> but this meaning was missed in Coptic  
art and the centaur depicted on the decoration of any artistic Coptic object is

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not more than a simple decorative motif. It is important to mention also that, at an earlier date, more new colours appeared in the decoration of several artistic Coptic collections as result of the Sassanian art influence: Blue backgrounds or dark blue being used sometimes In conjunction with turquoise(2).

From the beginning of the IV<sup>d</sup> century A. H./VIII<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the Islamic art continued parallel with Coptic art. The idea of repeating the same decorative unite in order not to leave emptiness in Islamic fabrics appeared also on Coptic textiles with stylisation and disproportions. All elements and scenes are inserted carefully within narrow horizontal bands and sometimes the Kufflc inscriptions complete the decoration. In the Coptic Museum in Cairo, two parts of wool covering<sup>(3)</sup> from unknown provenance are asserting this ommon. Most probably dating from the 11<sup>th</sup>-m<sup>th</sup> century A. H./vm<sup>th</sup>-x<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the two parts are decorated with Nereid stylized figures, biblical scenes such as the Sacrifice of Isaac and Jonah with the Whale. Stylized floral motifs flank the large horizontal band including all these elements.

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One cannot neglect the Islamic art influence which appears till now in the two examples of the stucco decoration shown within the two churches of the monastery of the Syrians In Wadi Natrun. The first example is flanking the entrance of the central chapel of the main church of the Holy Virgin Mary (Pl. III) and the second one is surrounding the main chapel of the church of the forty martyrs. This decoration, which was added by the hegomenos Moses of Nisibis (907-943 A. D.)<sup>4</sup>, is reflecting the influence of Samara styles<sup>(S)</sup> which were introduced in Egypt in the Tülünid era in the 111<sup>th</sup>/IX<sup>th</sup> century A. D. after the arrival of the tülünid prefect Ahmad ibn Tülün. These floral and geometric designs associated together are shown anywhere on the interior walls, the cross-beams and the wooden panels of his mosque in Cairo (Pl. IV). It was decorating all the soffits of the arches but today some soffits of the outer arches in the southwest and the northeast riwäqs include these patterns.

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(1) Aufil du Nil. Couleurs de l'Egypte chrétienne, Paris, 2001, 297.

(2) A. DE MOOR (ed.), Coptic Textiles, Zottegem, 1993, 20.

(3) N° 1740. Dimensions: 45 x 154. G. GABRA, Cairo, 77, n° 25.

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- (4) G. GABRA, *Coptic Monasteries. Egypt 's Monastic Art and Architecture, With a Historical Overview* by T. VIVIAN, Cairo-New York, 2002, 35, 48.
- (5) There are three artistic styles from Samara: The first one includes bunch of grapes, five and tri-lobed vine leaves. The second style consists of bi and tri-lobed calyx leaves. The last one contains usually palmettos and split palmettos leaves, winged leaves, split double and triple calyx leaves.
- (6) A. FATTAL, *Ibn Tulun 's Mosque in Cairo*, Beyrouth, 1960, 31-32, pls. 32-33, 36, 43-71; MUHAMMAD FAHIM and ALI ZAGHLUL, *the Great Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tülün*, Cairo, 1973, 20; ZAKI MUHAMMAD HASAN, *al-Fann al-islāmifi Misr min al-fath al-arabi ilä al-asr al-fätimi*, Cairo, 1994, 28-30, 70-75, pls. 2-4.

The Coptic woodworks carvings include also the influence of Islamic art especially in the fätimid era. Even after the arrival of the Arabs in Egypt the woodwork remained in the hand of the Copts who executed skilfully examples for both Christian and Islamic religious foundations(1) In this way, all Coptic woodworks dating from the fätimid time show arabesques motifs and revival of realism with a big delicacy. The sycamore wooden screen(2) discovered by A. BUTLER in 1881-1884 inside the church of Sainte Barbara and these wooden panels found inside the Monastery of Saint George the Copt for Girls in Old Cairo are the proofs. Sassanlan art influence is clearly visible in the flying ribbons surrounding the animals' foreheads in the figure of the pairs of peacocks facing each other in the central upper most panel of the

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wooden screen. Furthermore, the sculpture on two levels or backgrounds technique IS one of the main features of the Islamic art in the fâtimid period that continued to appear In some Coptic wooden panels like those discovered in the Monastery of saint George the Copt for the Girls in Old Cairo and which are displayed in the Coptic Museum.

The idea to pursuit wild animals in the bushes by using lions which appears on Coptic sculptures, wall paintings discovered at Bawit<sup>(3)</sup> and textiles may be the influence of Islamic art especially in the fâtimid era. The Islamic Ivory fragments, the wooden panels and friezes dating from this time and conserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Bâb alKhalq in Cairo are the proofs.

Another wool piece of Coptic fabric decorated with narrow linen friezes IS conserved in the Détroit Institute of Art in Michigan. Dating from the IX<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the bust of a beard man IS seen inside an oval medallion The man holding a red book is seen from <sup>(3)</sup> 4) <sup>(3)</sup> 4) three quarters. Below the oval, a stylized bird figure IS visible. The most ancient example is decorating a piece of textile showing the goddess Gaia Although the topic IS Greco-roman because of the same portraits which appeared on the decoration of the mosaics in the houses and the defunct portraits in the tombs which were also drawn In



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medallions, the blue and the yellow or the golden colours are very dominant  
in the textiles of the tülünid period as well as the manuscripts dating from the  
mamlük era. In fact, the Copts started the translation of their scriptures from  
the Coptic language to the Arabic during the Islamic era. Four Gospels<sup>(6)</sup> with  
an introduction, executed on an oriental paper and copied by the priest Abü'l-  
Fadl in Damascus in 1057 A. M./1340 A. D. , are now

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(1) L'art copte. Petitpalais 17 juin-15 septembre 1964, Paris, 1964, 47.

(2) N° 778. Width: 2 m. 68. Height: 2 m. 18. E. PAUTY, Bois sculptés d'églises coptes  
(époque fätimide), avec une introduction historique par G. WIET, Le caire, 1930, 13-25, pls. I-  
xv•, ZAKI MUHAMMAD HASAN, Atlas al-funün al-zukhrüfiya wa 'I-tasäwir al-islämiya,  
Cairo, 1956, 113, figs. 348-349; R. G. COQUIN, Édifices, 1, 129.

(3) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, Catalogue, 1, n° C 70, D 117.

(4) S. J. P. DU BOURGUET, Catalogue, I, 55, n° 19.

(5) See p. 16 in this article.

(6) 345 folios. Dimensions: 36 x 24 cm. G. GABRA, Cairo, 74, 22; Coptic Illustrations, Cairo,  
2000, 108-109. 109.

conserved in the Coptic Museum Library in Cairo. The polygons including  
crosses coloured in blue and gold which decorate the manuscript reflect this

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mamlük art influence. The title of the manuscript is written in Kuffic on two pages.

The assembling and the flush fitting of several panels together in addition to woodcarvings inlaid with ebony, Ivory and mother-of-pearl which started to appear by the end of the fātimid rule in Egypt and which was largely developed under the rule of the mamlüks and the ottomans left their souvenirs in the decoration of some different wooden screens and doors in the Coptic monasteries and churches. From unknown provenance, a wooden litter<sup>( 1 )</sup> from the ottoman period inlaid with bone, Ivory and mother-of-pearl and which is displayed now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo proves it by its inlaid small panels and its geometric patterns. Carried by two camels, it was supposed to be the most conformable mode to travel in this time. It was used to transport the rich women to accomplish the pilgrimage in the Holy Lands.

The Islamic architecture features can be evidently seen in the enclosure walls surrounding today several Coptic monasteries particularly in the arrow slits or the loopholes used for surveillance, guard and protection. Even the main facade of the Coptic Museum In Old Cairo was copied from this one of the small fātimid mosque al-Aqmar which was built during the reign of the

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fātimid caliph al-Amir Bi Ahkām Allah<sup>(2)</sup> in al-Mu'izz street in Ghammāfiya  
(Pls. V-VI). Instead of the Kuffic inscriptions decorating the external walls of  
the mosque, Coptic inscriptions and crosses are shown apparently in the  
decoration of the main facade of the Museum.

Mashrafiyas produced to hide women at the Arabic houses from passengers  
in the streets, covered also the external walls of so many Coptic foundations  
in different areas and through several ages. These beautiful wooden curtains  
are shown today in the Museum of Gayer Anderson (3), in the houses, the  
religious and commercial buildings in Ghammāfiya, Ghūriya, in Old Cairo  
and Rosetta(4).

Other Islamic floral decorative elements from the mamlūk period like the  
Būkhāriya appear on the interior walls of some Coptic buildings like the  
Nuptials hall in Old Cairo (Pl. VII). This element was added perhaps during  
the renovations work that took place recently there.

On the other hand, the Islamic artist borrowed in exchange from his Coptic  
colleague some Christian symbols like the fish shown in the decoration of a  
lustre ceramic dish<sup>(S)</sup> in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo and which dates  
from the tūlūnid era. Fish figures

- (1) N° 716. Dimensions: 12 x 195 x 105 cm. G. GABRA, Cairo, 100-101, n° 44.
- (2) AMAL AL-IMARI AND ALI AL-TAYIS, *al-Imära Ji Misr al-islämiya (al-asrain al-fätimi wa 'I-ayyübi)*, Cairo, 1996, 86-93, pls. 27-28.
- (3) N. WARNER, *Guide to the Gayer-Anderson Museum Cairo*, Forward by Z. HAWASS, Preface by R. GREG, Cairo, 2003, 7, 41.
- (4) KAMAL AL-DIN SAMIH, *al-Imära al-islämiyafi Misr*, IV<sup>th</sup> ed., Cairo, 1991, 230-233.
- (5) Z. M. HASAN, *Atlas*, 6, fig. 18; Z. M. HASAN, *Fann*, 107-108, pl. 26.

surrounded by small stipple and interlaced circles are decorating also a wooden comb<sup>(1)</sup> dating back to the fätimid period in the same Museum. These small circles are visible in the decoration of several wooden Coptic combs in the Coptic Museum in Cairo and the Musée du Louvre (2) in Paris. The flying dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit in Coptic art appeared also within medallions on a marble rectangular sculpture<sup>(3)</sup> from the fätimid time in the same Museum.

The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo conserves between its collections a fragment of a lustre ceramic with metallic reflection (4) dating from the v<sup>th</sup> century A. H./XI<sup>th</sup> century A. D. The main decoration is representing the Christ in bust in an oriental attitude. His halo is decorated with the traditional

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cross. Although the technique and the colours are purely fātimid, the features of Jesus face are recalling the Byzantine art. Holding most probably the Holy Book in his left hand and blessing with the other, the Christ bust is surrounded by floral motifs executed according to the artistic fātimid style. His shoulders are covered with a mantel. A similar cup gathered in the Victoria and Albert Museum In London is showing the figure of a monk or a priest.

According to E. DRIOTON, Coptic art is sometimes similar to Syrian art especially while comparing between the decoration of one of the doors in the Red Monastery at Sohag and this one in the church of Babiska or between the friezes of Bawit and the lintel of the church of Khirbit Tezin A BADAWEY wrote that the Coptic sculpture is Inspired from the Syrian technique for the rendering especially after the Arab conquest. The surfaces are with weak relief and the effigies are losing life and vivacity(6).

We would like to mention that the influence of the ancient civilizations was not only in Coptic art but also in the daily life of the Egyptian society. Before ending our speeches about the ancient Egyptian heritage in Coptic art, it is important to mention also the ancient civilization believes in Coptic culture. According to J. DORESSE, the spirit weighed by the archangel Michael in

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front of the celestial tribunal is one of the beliefs which came in direct line  
from the heart weighed of the defunct by the ancient Egyptian god Thoth in  
front of the Osiris tribunal as it was mentioned in the Book of the Death<sup>(7)</sup>.

The Coptic traditions and habits are influenced also by the ancient Egyptian  
civilization for example the Coptic Tattoo is a very ancient Egyptian habit that  
is still going on in the Coptic and Islamic society in Egypt especially during  
feasts, mülids and wedding celebrations. The majority of the Copts decorate  
their forearms by small Coptic crosses as

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(1) N° 4954. Dimensions: 0,12 x 0,010 cm. Provenance: al-Fustât. MESSIHA, Madkhal ilâ al-Athâr  
al-qibtiya, Cairo, 1994, 32.

(2) N° E13504/3. Length: 24,3 cm. Width:           cm. Bought in 1928. L'art copte 2000, 210, n°  
254.

(3) N° 6950. ZAKI MUHAMMAD HASAN, Kunüz al-fâtimiyyin, Cairo, 1937, pl. 6.

(4) N° 5397/1. Dimensions:       x 1       cm. L'art copte 2000, 180, n° 189.

(5) É. DRIOTON,           syrien et art copte", BAAC, 111, Le caire (1937), 30, n° 1.

(6) A. BADAWY, Art, 64-65.

(7) J. DORESSE, Hiéroglyphes, 53.

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symbol of their Christian faith. Coptic mü lids(1) are the extension of the ancient Egyptian feasts of the Gods in Ancient Egypt but with a new aspect and according to the Christian religion. Mü lids shall be celebrated later by Moslems also but according to Islam traditions and believes.

Some habits from the Coptic daily life like the play named in Arabic "Sallah", finds its orlgn in Ancient Egypt. Dating from the 111<sup>th</sup>-Iv<sup>fl1</sup> century A. D. , one of the most important Coptic fabrics in the Coptic Museum in Cairo is showing this play going on by three standing human figures executed with Greek artistic style on dark background.

Celebrating the seventh day of a new child in the Coptic family is also inherited from the ancient Egyptian family's customs. The boys' clrcumclslon which is today one of the main Coptic traditions IS an ancient Egyptian custom (2) especially in villages and rural regions. The funerals contain also some customs inherited from the Pharaohs like crying, mourning and wailing as it is drawn In an Icon (3) painted on linen and fixed to a panel. Conserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo and dating from the XVIII<sup>th</sup> and the XIX<sup>th</sup> century A. D. , the main decoration is depicting Jesus lying and surrounded by his mother and most probably Mary Magdalene who is stretching her

hands up. Saint John, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are shown from the other side. Visiting tombs by taking foods and plants or flowers is also one of the Ancient Egyptian civilisation influences in the life of both Christians and Moslems.

In the Coptic liturgy, priests are holding censors to kill the unclean spirits as it was exactly done in the ancient Egyptian temples. To held religious ceremony in the fortieth day after the person's death is purely an ancient Egyptian tradition which is still going on till now in the Egyptian society by both Christians and Moslems.

The cult of certain sacred trees in the life of the Copts like the Tree of saint Evram the Syrian in Wadi Natrun, this one of the Holy Virgin Mary in Matariya, Her palms in Giza and Ahnas may be a direct continuation of the cult of the Persia tree of the Ished mentioned in the legend of the god Ra For Moslems also, the holy trees are mentioned in the Koran Koran especially the fig and the olives (5).

We cannot forget that the Coptic music finds its origins in the ancient Egyptian music as well as the use of some musical instruments like the



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sistrum<sup>(6)</sup> which accompanied the liturgical songs in the Coptic Orthodox  
Church.

It had been asserted that the Coptic calendar is the extension of the ancient  
Egyptian one which is in direct relation with the agricultural cycle in Egypt.  
Even in the Coptic language,

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(1) O. F. A. MEINARDUS, *Christian Egypt Faith and Life*, Cairo, 1970, 214-219.

(2) J. DORESSE, *Hiéroglyphes*, 33.

(3) N<sup>o</sup> 3461. Dimensions: 28,1 x x cm. *The Icons*, 125, n<sup>o</sup> 140, pl. 37 c.

(4) J. DORESSE, *Hiéroglyphes*, 26-27, 29.

(5) Koran XCV/I

(6) J. DORESSE, *Hiéroglyphes*, 34.

many ancient Egyptian and Greek words and expressions in addition to the  
names of the year's months, those of different localities have survived till now  
in the Arabic spoken language and the daily life of the Modern Egyptians.  
Some proper names which perpetuate the souvenir of the well known  
pharaonic gods and goddesses are common till now in the Egyptian society

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between the Copts like Amon, Anoup, Besa, Horus, Isis, Merit,  
Osiris, Onnophris, Pahor, Pamoun, Seraplon and Sarapamon.

Before ending, it is important to know that dating in Coptic art is one of the biggest problems which any researcher usually finds while searching in Coptic studies for many reasons. First of all, this is due to the various and the intensive decorative elements including all these ancient civilizations' influences in the majority of the Coptic artistic collections. What's more, so many Coptic objects are without any decoration. The re-use of other ancient architectural elements in several places for different aims through the ages aggravate the matter.

In conclusion, the Coptic collections are the artistic expression the most brilliant of an original civilization which flourished in the Nile banks from the IV<sup>d</sup> century A. D. Because of its relationship to other art forms of the ancient periods, Coptic art represents today a particular interest to the scholars, the art historians and the archaeologists. Several motifs are borrowed from earlier Ancient Egypt, from the art, the mythology and the architecture of Greece and Rome. So many skills inherited from the Pharaohs, the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs were developed by the Coptic artists

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to produce luxury items for trade and for general consumption. Some elements are borrowed from the art of India and perhaps the central Asia. So many symbols, figures, techniques and habits are the most interesting ancient Egyptian survivals in Coptic art. Mythology, Greek inscriptions and realistic artistic style are the most important Greek heritage in Coptic decoration. The main features taken from the Roman art are the naturalistic and interlace designs. From the early Byzantine art, the high stylization and the abstracted decorative elements remain till now in the Coptic art. The Sassanian art decoration which had influenced several civilizations in the Middle Ages had its influence also in Coptic art. Repetition, Arabic inscriptions and intensive geometric and floral motives such as arabesques are also still visible in the decoration of different Coptic artistic objects. All these decorative elements and topics were taken by the Copts from ancient and contemporary arts and civilizations in the beginning because of the cruel persecutions that took place immediately after the introduction of Christianity in Egypt. This took place also perhaps because the Copts were influenced by their ancestors' civilization as it happens usually in any other society. The Copts were so skilful in treating all these borrowings according to their faith. Although all these ancient and contemporary arts' influences, Coptic art is a unique one of its kind. It is an

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autochthonous, popular and personal art which has its own and exceptional  
features and aspect.

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BIFAO: Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale. (Le Caire).

BSAA: Bulletin de la société archéologique d'Alexandrie. (Alexandrie).

BAAC: Bulletin des Amies de l'Art Copte. (Le Caire).

CGC: Catalogue général du Musée Copte du Caire. (Le Caire).

CoptEnc.: Coptic Encyclopedia, 8 vols. , New York, 1991.

Enchoria: Enchoria. Zeitschrift für Demotistik und Koptologie. Inst. Für  
ägyptol., univ. Würzburg (Wiesbaden).

MIFAO: Mélanges de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale. (Le Caire).

PatrOr.: Patrologia Orientalis. (Paris).

RevArch.: Revue archéologique. (Paris).

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**Planches**



Funerary stela from Kom Abu Billu.

The Coptic Museum in Cairo, 11<sup>th</sup> century A. D. G. GABRA,

Cairo, 50.

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Limestone fragment depicting the figure of the Greek goddess

Aphrodite.

The Coptic Museum in Cairo, 111<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Coptic Art,  
II, 10-11.

m. 111

Wall painting depicting a Coptic saint flanked by the Samara stucco  
decoration. The

Chorus of the Holy Virgin Mary Church in the Syrians Monastery.

Wadi Natrun, century A. D.



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The uppermost part of the interior walls of Ahmed ibn Tulun

mosque.

Cairo, 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Photo taken by SH. S. EL GENDI

The main facade and entrance of the Coptic Museum. XX<sup>th</sup>  
century A. D.

The western main facade of al-Aqmar mosque. 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century  
A. D.

Photo taken by SH. S. EL GENDI

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m. VII

Interior walls of the Nuptials Hall in Old Cairo reflecting the Islamic  
art influence. 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Photo taken by SH. S. EL

GENDI