Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies

Journal de la société canadienne pour les études coptes

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Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies
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The Canadian Society for Coptic Studies is a Toronto-based non-profit organization whose purpose is to bring together individuals interested in Coptic studies; and to promotimg the dissemination of scholarly information on Coptic Studies through the organization of meetings and conferences and through the preperation of scholarly works for publication. The CSCS was incorporated as a non-profit organization in June 2009.

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Editor's note

We welcome readers to the first issue of the Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies. The Society, incorporated in June 2009, is the fruit of several years of hard work and the perseverance of devoted individuals, who have adopted promoting Coptic Studies in the cultural circle of Toronto, as their personal mission. This volume contains the papers presented in the First Annual Symposium of Coptic Studies held on 29 March 2008 at the University of Toronto. The attendance to this first symposium was a witness to the need and importance of such an initiative in this city. The purpose behind this venture was to bring together individuals interested in Coptic Studies and to create awareness among academics about the richness of Coptic heritage. Hence the name given to this first meeting "Coptic Heritage Ancient and Modern" expressed the wide range of topics presented at the Symposium: papers about Late Antique Egypt to contemporary studies about the Coptic community. This Journal, lays down a foundation of academic work for Coptologists in Canada and offers a window of opportunity to future young scholars interested in this field of studies.

The papers in this issue cover different disciplines of Coptic Studies. Dr Michael Kaler presents in an original and concise approach the literary collection of Nag Hammadi in the context of early Egyptian Christianity. He succeeds to illustrate how the literary content of these manuscripts reveal the evidence of communication and interaction among early monastic groups. Professor Amir Harrak, expert in the Syriac language and literature, explores with his meticulous methodology the wide collections of Syriac manuscripts in the Monastery of the Syrians and scattered in various international libraries. He demonstrates the role of Takritan community living in Egypt in the dissemination and conservation of the Syriac Culture.

Prof. Jitse Dijkstra analyzes the graffiti and architectural features in the process of conversion of the Temple of Isis at Aswan as a church in Late Antiquity. He suggests a reconstruction of the different phases of occupation of that monument using all existing archaeological traces. The paper on the Christian Remains inside the Temple of Dendara by Dr. Ramez Boutros, presents graffiti as one of the archaeological evidences in the study of the process of conversion of that site. The paper suggests a pattern for the temple's Christian occupation from the fourth century until its desertion by comparing it with similar sites in the Theban region.

The paper presented by Professor Ian Begg gives an account of the archive documents of Bagnani kept in the Trent University in Canada. It highlights the importance of the excavation book notes containing precious remarks that should be used in any future publication of the Churches of Tebtunis. The papers of the two curators Dominique Bénazeth and Anu Lïvandi highlight the wealth of Coptic collections in the Louvre Museum in Paris and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Their papers also reflect how the collaboration between these institutions can offer a virtual reconstruction of artifacts that have been divided before their acquisition and have been for a long time studied separately.

The theology of contemporary icons is explored in the paper of Dr. Helene Moussa. The work of Margueritte Nakhla, one of the leaders of the Modern Egyptian Art in the twentieth century, is deeply rooted in the Coptic heritage. Professor Paul Sedra tackles an intriguing topic of the history of the Coptic Church in the nineteenth century. He presents the role played by the Coptic Patriarch and notables in "cultivating" the Coptic community in that period. The reconstruction of this history is an amazing puzzle completed with a large number of extremely informative and reliable sources. Finally, the study of Carolyn Ramzy is worthy to be in this volume as it illustrates in an innovative method how a community lives and transforms its heritage in the Diaspora through the use of non-liturgical songs.

We are deeply thankful to all the contributors and appreciate the valuable research papers they offered to the publication of this first issue. We are also confident that the support of the academic and civic communities towards this new Initiative will grow and prosper, so as to add another cultural "living stones" to the larger multicultural mosaic of Canada.

Ramez Boutros
General Editor

Linda Northrup

Opening Remarks to the First Annual Symposium

On behalf of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto it is my very great honor and pleasure to welcome you to the First Annual Coptic Studies Symposium. Last year we were thrilled to be able to offer one lecture by a colleague from Leiden University in the Netherlands—perhaps some of you were here. Although we might have dreamed of it back then, never could we have imagined that just one year later, we would be hosting a full day symposium. But here we are!

But then one year ago Dr. Ramez Boutros had not yet arrived on the scene. When Ramez added his energy to the extraordinary efforts of Dr. Helene Moussa and Father Marcos, the Symposium was born. The Department has been so fortunate to have collaboration with these learned and engaged members of the Coptic community. We hope that there will be many future symposia.

Before we begin the program of the Symposium, I would like to tell you a little bit about the history of Coptic Studies at the University of Toronto. The Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations is concerned with the interdisciplinary study of the civilizations and cultures of the Near and Middle East from Neolithic times until the present, including their languages and literatures, archaeology, history, thought, and art. Most observers are amazed at how much we are able to cover with relatively few people. Currently we have a strong program in ancient Near Eastern Studies and a strong program in Middle East and Islamic Studies. The Department also contributes to a Jewish Studies program. One gaping hole in the program is the possibility to study oriental Christianity. We have one full-time appointment in Syriac Studies, but none in Armenian or in Coptic studies. The Department is conscious of the need to expand in this direction to fill the gap but is constrained by the lack of resources.

Many years ago Coptic was taught in the Department by Professor Redford, an Egyptologist/archaeologist, for Coptic language is central to the understanding of ancient Egyptian culture and early Christian society in Egypt and the links between the two, not to mention early Christianity more broadly speaking, whether scriptural, exegetical, liturgical, hagiographical, or canonical traditions. It is also essential to an understanding of aspects of modern Egypt. However, when Professor Redford retired and left the University, Coptic left with him. It is only recently that the Department, with the help of the Coptic community in Toronto, has been able to reincorporate Coptic language into the undergraduate curriculum. For the last two years Coptic has been taught by Dr. Michael Kaler, a graduate of Laval University in Quebec. The course has been very

successful. Now, with the arrival of Dr. Ramez Boutros in our city, the Department has seized the opportunity, again in collaboration with the Coptic community in Toronto, to offer two undergraduate courses beginning next fall, one an introduction to Coptic Studies and the other Coptic art and archaeology, the field in which Dr. Boutros' expertise lies.

We hope that with this first annual symposium and with the introduction of two undergraduate courses in the field taught by a scholar in the field, we will have the beginnings of a Coptic program in the Department that will fill academic and scholarly needs and better reflect the demographics of our larger community. The Symposium will demonstrate, I think, what the university and the community can achieve when they work together.

Linda Northrup
Professor
Chair, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

Fr. Marcos A. Marcos

The Importance of Coptic Studies for the Coptic Community

It is truly gratifying to see so many of you attending this First Symposium on Coptic Studies at the University of Toronto.

When I think back on the time, in 1964 to be exact, when the Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto was initiated, we found out that almost no one had heard of it. Egypt was known as a Muslim country and as with other Muslim countries all its citizens were thought to be Muslim. The few Christians were assumed to be the product of European and American missionary activities.

However, in the course of 1977 this continent saw the first visit ever by a Coptic Pontif, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, which received a great deal of media coverage. Shortly afterwards the findings of the Nag Hamadi gnostic literary manuscripts were featured in lively media discussions. These events became the catalyst for student interest in Coptic studies at St. Michael's College Theological Seminary. As a result, a course of studies in Coptic Language started. This course of studies struggled to survive for a few years until St. Mark's Church was approached for funding support. We gladly made a contribution towards two semesters over two years beginning in 1989. I believe one of the first instructors is attending this Symposium. Unfortunately continuity of the course could not be sustained.

Then we take another leap to 2001, after a visit to St. Mark's Coptic Museum by some university students in our congregation who pointed out to us that nowhere in the University of Toronto could they find courses that would engage them in the study of Coptic civilization, let alone the Coptic Church. We took up their challenge and decided to survey offerings in various faculties and departments of the university and finally decided to approach the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMC). It seemed like the most appropriate institution because of its regional focus and because the curriculum options for students cover amongst other subjects language, study of original literature and translations, art, architecture and archaeology, history and religion. Furthermore, as we just heard from Professor Northrup, courses in Coptic civilization were at some point offered at NMC until the professor retired. Another important consideration was that the NMC has a very well staffed Egyptology curriculum thus Coptic civilization would seem like an appropriate continuity in the study of Egypt's history. I must say that in all our conversations with faculty members of MNC, we were greatly encouraged by their interest in reinstating Coptic Studies in the

department's curriculum. But of course funding was the major stumbling block! So in 2004 we were asked whether the Coptic Churches could donate a portion of the costs for 3-4 semesters both to test the interest in the student body and assist the next phase of the university's planning process. St. Mark's Church willingly made a contribution towards the first semester course. And because we wanted the Coptic Churches to recognize this as an important investment in the education of Copts and other students at the University of Toronto, we then approached the priests of the Churches of Southern Ontario to make a collective contribution towards two more semesters. Our humble contribution, we hope will have contributed not only enlighten students who enrolled in these language classes about the richness of our Coptic culture and civilization but also to the diversity of their cultural and historical studies.

We are now encouraged that NMC's is planning to offer two courses next academic year, one on "Introduction to Coptic Studies" and the other "Coptic Art and Archaeology." Of course always pending funding! But if we can see the response of students in the past two years and your response to this Symposium as significant stepping stones towards a long term vision, we can perhaps allow ourselves to envision that in the next 10 years we will have young Canadian scholars presenting their research, not only in Canada academic setting but also at the International Congress for Coptic Studies, such as the one that is scheduled for this coming September in Cairo. As you will see from the flier in your kits and the list of main topical themes in Coptic Studies that will be offered, this congress is vast in scope.

I would like to end by adding a few words about Professor Fayek Ishak to whom this Symposium is dedicated. The biographical card in your kits highlights his remarkable academic career. May I just point out that one of his major contributions in the field of Coptology was to translate the Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil into English. This translated version was for many years used in our liturgies in Canada. He also almost single handedly established the highly respected journal *Coptica* - available on the book display table. Professor Ishak was a friend and member of our congregation serving with dedication and great humility both his church and the wider Canadian community – a real role model.

Thank you and I wish the very best in your deliberations.

Fr. Marcos A. Marcos
Protopriest
St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, Scarborough

Michael Kaler

The Nag Hammadi Collection in the Context of Early Egyptian Christianity

The Nag Hammadi collection is a twelve (originally thirteen) volume cache of writings, preserved in Coptic but probably originally composed in Greek. Having been brought together sometime in the mid to late fourth century CE, these codices were discovered in 1945 in Upper Egypt, but due to various issues were not made widely available until the 1970s. The collection contains several sub-collections (for example, codices I, XI, and VII form a three-volume set), and hence the Nag Hammadi collection can be described as an amalgamation of material coming from different sources.

In all, there are roughly fifty writings in the Nag Hammadi collection, the majority of them clearly Christian, a few having no obvious Christian features. Most of the works were entirely unknown before the discovery; a bare handful had been known about or rumoured. These are writings that, by and large, would have been unacceptable to most Christian church or monastic authorities. They are almost all gnostic, by which I mean that they assume a basic underlying myth of an original perfect realm inhabited by spiritual beings. For reasons varying from text to text, there was a descent of some of these spiritual beings, a fall into the material world, in which they have been trapped, often due to their forgetfulness of their true higher origins, or through the malevolence of the cosmic powers, or both. In such systems, Jesus Christ tends to be understood as an emissary from the higher, perfect realm, who has descended in order to set into motion the chain of events that will lead to the rescue of the trapped spiritual beings.

Gnosticism was an influential and apparently relatively popular variety of early Christianity, but one that did not survive, due to its complexity, its esotericism, and also the determined opposition of other, more powerful variants of Christianity. Nonetheless, it was a way of understanding Christianity that was attractive to many early Christians, and it was an important but underground influence on the development of the various mainstream churches. The Nag Hammadi collection is by far our largest source for gnostic writings.

But to say that the Nag Hammadi writings are mainly gnostic does not mean that their contents are uniform. In fact, the Nag Hammadi codices give evidence first of all of a group of Christians with extremely diverse tastes in reading material. The works found here stem from a wide variety of esoteric traditions. They are diverse in their literary genres (apocalypses, treatises, gospels, letters, etc.) as in their doctrines. Many of the works have links to contemporary philosophical teachings, and there are Hermetic works as well. We should note too that no Biblical writings, apocrypha, or other common early Christian works (e.g. the *Shepherd of*

Hermas, the letters of Ignatius) are found among the Nag Hammadi material, and yet it is hard to imagine a Christian group with such a large collection of gnostic literature not possessing anything mainstream. It is safe to assume that a group this literate would have also owned such works; the Nag Hammadi collection must be the culled remnants of an originally much larger collection. However, the collection is unified by:

a) the fact that it was found all together, indicating that it was used and owned by one group;
b) further indications of the common ancestry of sub-collections—so for instance codices I, XI, and VII belong together, as do codices IV and VII.
c) the common Christian focus of the vast majority of the works;
d) the near-universal presence of ascetic tendencies in the works; and,
e) the underlying myth of the soul's need to achieve liberation from the fallen material world that is found in or presupposed by the vast majority of the works, as I mentioned above.

Gnosticism does not preclude Christianity, so to say that collectors of these codices were interested in gnostic works also does not mean that they were not Christian. In these codices we find reverence for Christ (if not always for all of his disciples), the use of settings and figures from the Old and New Testaments, frequent allusions to or citations of scriptural sources, and theologies and doctrines that clearly belong to the Christian intellectual tradition—although they often approach this tradition from distinctive angles. There is absolutely no reason not to identify these people as Christian. In fact, as has been generally recognized, these collectors fit into a known context of Egyptian ascetic Christians, especially those associated with monasticism, reading widely and apocryphally. But the Nag Hammadi people also fit very well into the even larger context in Egypt of late antiquity. There were a number of different groups operating in Egypt at that time, making contact, thinking about the liberation of the soul, and reading diversely.

The Nag Hammadi collection also contains evidence of communication and movement between various groups of people, the interchange of books and information. Two of the ways in which this is shown are through scribal notes and through the sub-collections that make up the larger Nag Hammadi collection. In terms of scribal notes, I will quote here the note found in codex VI. The scribe responsible for copying the Hermetic material that is found in this codex writes "I have copied this one discourse of his. Indeed, very many have come to me. I have not copied them because I thought that they had come to you. Also, I hesitate to copy these for you because perhaps they have already come to you and may burden you. Since the discourses of that one, which have come to me, are numerous ..."[1] Here we have clear references to "numerous" texts "coming to" one person and being passed on to people that he/she knows would be interested. Note that the scribe knows that the recipients of his/her work have a collection of other writings, even though he/she does not know exactly what this collection consists of. Furthermore, these Hermetic texts are at the end of a codex that also contains excerpts from Plato and also clearly gnostic material. All of this gives evidence of wide reading, both on the part of the scribe and the readers for whom he/she copied the material, and also interconnectedness between various literary traditions—and hence presumably the people who passed them on.

1 See Robinson, 1988: 389.

In terms of the sub-collections, we know from analyses of the handwriting, dialects, and codex construction that several smaller collections were brought together to make up the larger Nag Hammadi collection. This in itself gives evidence of the transmission of information between various groups; books were being passed around. There is also the case, for example, of subcollection I,XI, and VII, which features the planned interaction of scribes to produce a cumulative and progressive effect on the reader as he/she moves from Valentinian to Sethian works. In other words, it contains works that were deliberately assembled from different places and from diverse doctrinal traditions.[2] It is likely that similar organizational procedures were at work in other codices, for example the collection of apocalyptic writings in codex V.

We know that at this time Egypt was something of a hotbed of spiritual seekers, and that these people often seemed willing to cross or redraw doctrinal lines. Just to take a few examples, we know first of all that there was vigorous and organized Manichaean proselytization, certainly aimed at Christians, but also present in philosophical circles (as testified by Alexander of Lycopolis' treatise *Against the Doctrine of Mani*). The Coptic Manichaean writings and the ongoing excavations at Kellis show the significance of the Manichaean expansion into Egypt at this time. We also know that there was an influx of religiously obsessed and ascetically inclined people from all over coming to Egypt, inspired by its monastic reputation—Evagrius being perhaps the most famous example. To judge by such things as the Origenist crises, Athanasius' warnings (particularly the famous 39th festal letter), and Shenute's polemics, at least some of these people had heterodox reading tastes. Also worth mentioning in this context as a graphic example is the diverse collection of monastic works discovered at Deir el-Bala'izah, where a fragment of what looks to be a gnostic revelation dialogue between the Savior and John (dated to the fourth century) is found amidst selections from the Old and New Testaments and various other texts including some excerpts from the *Apophthegmata*, several monastic *Lives*, and even a sermon by Athanasius.[3] This is, I believe, what an un-culled version of the Nag Hammadi collectors' library might have looked like. Let us also note the ongoing presence of Hermetic material in Egypt and apparently circles dedicated to working with it, collecting it and passing it on. We also have, of course, collections of magical works, and these works tend to be widely syncretic, showing signs of contact with such varied religious/philosophical movements as Christianity, Judaism and Hermetism. Zosimos of Panopolis and his acquaintances show the same overlap with regard to alchemy, and also his work on the Letter Omega gives evidence of interchange and discussion between separated groups of alchemists, with Zosimos rebuking others for being insufficiently concerned with moral development and liberation of the self from the fallen world.[4]

When we put all this together, we get the picture of a great many people interested in esoteric wisdom often having to do with spiritual improvement and salvation, reading widely, passing information and books around, and crossing doctrinal or religious lines. The Nag Hammadi collection, as we have seen, fits right into this context.

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2 See Painchaud and Kaler, 2007; Kaler, 2008.

3 See Khale, 1954.

4 See Jackson, 1978.

The Nag Hammadi Collection in the Context of Early Egyptian Christianity

In addition to seeing this collection as a representative of the reading tastes of some ascetically inclined, heterodox Egyptian Christians, which it of course is, we should also see it in another context, namely that of a representative of a cross-cultural, cross-religious underground scene interested in esoteric wisdom. One unifying factor in all this diversity is a concern for salvation that is conceived of as having to do with transcendence of the body: ascetic salvationism, in other words, an ideal that united Hermetists, philosophers, Manichaeans, gnostics, and monks. At that time in Egypt there were many people, coming from many different angles, who were interested in these sorts of ideas and willing to pass material around across boundaries—often to the displeasure of those authority figures, monastic or ecclesiastical, who were invested in maintaining boundaries.

Consequently, the Nag Hammadi collection affects our understanding of early Egyptian Christianity not just with regard to the wider reading tastes of some early Christians and the circulation of apocryphal texts—although this of course is valuable too—but also in terms of leading us to see these Christians in a cross-religious, cross-cultural context that they share with other seekers and enthusiasts for ascetic salvation from other backgrounds.

There were many people, from many different backgrounds, with many different allegiances, reading each others' material, talking with one another, trying to figure out the nature of things and how they ought to live. Of course, this is not to say that there were not many Christians of a more defined, doctrinally strict tendency as well. It was not at all necessary to circulate in this esoteric, mystical underground in order to be an Egyptian Christian. But the Nag Hammadi collection shows us that you could be a Christian at that time and still fit into a wider context of general spiritual seeking.

Networks of such people had a real, if subtle, effect on the development of Christianity. We have a tendency to see Christian development, in Egypt as elsewhere, in terms of its various defined movements within a larger Christian context. So for instance we talk about defined groups like the Arian or Melitian or Chalcedonian parties within the larger Christian community. But the collection of works found at Nag Hammadi, when considered in conjunction with the wider Egyptian scene at the time, reminds us that for some, things were more fluid than this: that there were also mystical seekers, people who may have adhered to a particular religious group—as the Nag Hammadi collectors clearly considered themselves to be Christian—but who were willing as well to cross religious boundaries to interact with and learn from others who shared their concerns. Because they don't form neat organizations that leave big marks on history, these people and their networks can be easy to overlook. Because organizations are required for power, in religion as elsewhere, there is all the more tendency for these sorts of people and their networks to be overlooked or considered unimportant by later historians. But this is a shame, as in many cases these are the sorts of people that keep things flowing between various groups in society, bringing in the new ideas that revitalize their own communities. The classic contemporary (i.e., 4th–5th century CE) example of this, of course, is Augustine, whose own spiritual quest led him to spend a good part of his life as a Manichaean, and whose subsequent theology was influenced by what he had learned as a member of that group.

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Amir Harrak

The Monastery of the Syrians in Scetis: a Treasury of Syriac Manuscripts

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since the dawn of history trade was the driving force behind contacts between cultures, and nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Coptic monastery located in ancient Scetis (Wadi Natrun). Here monks and traders coming from as far as Takrit in central Iraq came and settled, turning the monastery into an exceptional depository of art and manuscripts.[1] The monastery was built in the middle of the 6th century by Copts, who named it the Monastery of the Theotokos of Abba Bishoi. Its founding near the older monastery of Saint Bishoi may have been the result of the Christological conflict between the followers of Severus of Antioch and those of Julian bishop of Halicarnass.

It is not known when the Syrian Orthodox Christians of Takrit began their trade between Mesopotamia and Egypt and how they came in direct contact with the Orthodox Copts. The fact that both peoples shared Orthodox Christianity must have been the reason behind very close ties between the two groups to such an extent that the names of their respective patriarchs were often mentioned together in dating formulas. There was a colony of Takritan traders in Fustat (old Cairo), which must have facilitated more contacts with the Copts. At the beginning of the 9th century Syriac monks settled in the desert of Maris in Upper Egypt, were able to produce Syriac manuscripts for use by the Syriac communities within Egypt. One such manuscript dated to AD816 was ordered by two brothers, natives of Takrit, for the Monastery of St Michael in Maris. Not only does it contain spiritual writings of Syriac and Coptic authors, its colophon is dated to the "leadership of the heads of the holy Churches, Mōr Cyriacus, the patriarch of the Apostolic See of Antioch of Syria, and Marcus of Great Alexandria."[2]

Another manuscript dated "in the days of our blessed patriarchs Dionysius of the Syrians and Jacob of the Egyptians, I mean the people of Alexandria, and Basil the Metropolitan of the city of Takrit," was written "in the desert of Scetis".[3] This fact suggests that sometime between AD819 (beginning of the patriarchate of Jacob) and AD848 (end of the patriarchate of Dionysius of Tel-Mahrē), some Takritan monks moved somewhere in Wadi Natrun, where the Monastery of the Theotokos of Abba Bishoi was located. This manuscript too contains a variety of spiritual writings by Syriac and Coptic authors.

1 Innemée and van Rompay, 1998.
2 Wright, 1871: 696 (Add. 14, 582).
3 Wright, 1871: 762 (Add. 17, 172).

Soon after AD816, three lectionaries were produced for the church of Ahudemeh in the caravan city of Harran on the Upper Euphrates where a "blessed community of Takritans," most probably traders, lived. The lectionaries were donated shortly after by Takritans "to the monastery of the Mother of God Abba Bishoi," called now and for the first time "of the Syrians."[4] One of the lectionaries is dated to AD824–825, by which time the Coptic monastery came under full control of the Syrians. For this reason, lectionaries, crucial for holding the Syriac liturgy, were dispatched to the monastery from as far away as Harran.

The inscriptional and artistic materials uncovered lately by an international team of conservators and researchers working mostly in the church of the Virgin Mary at Scetis are nearly all dated after the beginning of the 9th century. One inscription commemorates "the holy Cyriacus patriarch of Antioch," whose patriarchate took place between AD793 and 817.[5] Another one dated on paleographical ground to the end of the 8th or the beginning of the 9th century, mentions two Takritan men, Morutho and Popo. The inscription is found to the left of a 10th century impressive painting representing the Three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A third inscription dated to AD818–819 commemorates the Coptic patriarch Jacob and his Syriac counterpart Dionysius.

From the beginning of the 9th and until the 15th centuries, the Syriac Orthodox filled the monastery with wall paintings reflecting Syriac art and liturgy, an impressive collection of Syriac manuscripts, and numerous Syriac inscriptions often dated to both Coptic and Syriac patriarchs. The dating system was used not uniquely at the monastery of the Syrians but also in the monastery of Mar Behnam the martyr near Mosul Iraq; here it is dated to the patriarchates of "Mōr Atha[nāsiōs of Syria]n Antioch and Mōr Ēwannīs [of Alexandria]." By the beginning of the 17th century, Syriac colophons began to claim that the monastery was "purchased" around AD710, but without tracing the history of how the monastery came under the control of the Syrians. This means that their control over the monastery was contested by the Copts, probably as a consequence of changes brought about by the Ottomans which must have affected the trade of the Takritans. These started fleeing their city toward the north of Iraq from the beginning of the 9th century under the pressure of Islam. Though we do not know how the presence of the Syrians ended in the monastery, we do know that for nearly seven centuries there was a spectacular Syriac-Coptic symbiosis in Egypt.

THE ORIGINS OF THE LIBRARY IN THE MONASTERY OF THE SYRIANS

It is a well known fact that the monastery of the Syrians owned a unique library of Syriac manuscripts, called *bēth-kthobē d-dayrō*, literally "House of the books of the Monastery."[6] The person who played a crucial role in establishing that library was one of its abbots, Moses of Nisibis,[7] between AD906 and AD944. Several colophons commemorate his name and credit him with working tirelessly to enrich the monastery with manuscripts at all cost. We will survey a few colophons that shed some light on Moses and on his efforts in establishing the library of Syriac manuscripts in this monastery:

4 Wright, 1870: 149 (Add. 14, 485).
5 Van Rompay-Schmidt: 2001: 49.
6 Wright, 1871: 546 colophon 2.
7 On Moses of Nisibis, see Leroy, 1974; Blanchard, 1995.

> 1) Emmanuel, ʿAbbās, Yūhanōn, and Salība sons of ʿAbd-Allōhō Abū-al-bishr of Takrit endowed this book for the Monastery of the Mother of God of the Syrians, which is in the Desert, so that through the prayers of the Mother of God and of the holy ones, the Lord may make good memory for their dead ones in the company of the Righteous. May he forgive their sins and increase all good things of the earth and the blessings of Heaven in their possession (...). The book reached the Monastery in the year one thousand two hundred and eighteen of the Greeks and the year two hundred and ninety-four of the Arabs, through the sinner Moses of Nisibis (...).[8]

Removal of the manuscript, the Ecclesiast, from the monastery is prohibited under heavy curses expressed in the colophon. The date corresponds to AD907, thus in the early career of Moses, and the manuscript would have been one of the first he acquired for the library.

> 2) This *panqīthō*–volume was endowed to the holy Monastery of the Mother of God of the Syrians in the Scete Desert which is in Egypt. The virtuous priest Mōr Yūhanōn son of Gīwōrgīs son of Qritway entrusted it into the hands of Moses, nicknamed of Nisibis, the abbot of the above mentioned Monastery, in the capital Baghdad—he went there on account of the poll-tax imposed upon the monks, in the year one thousand two hundred and thirty-eight. The tax was removed from them. May God to whose name this book was devoted and consecrated make the priesthood of Moses shine through righteous deeds; may he protect him, his sons, and brothers; may he bless these, rewarding them here and thenceforth with virtues and with his heavenly Kingdom (...)[9]

The *panqīthō* is not liturgical, but a volume containing homilies, the Doctrine of Apostles, Letters of Severus, Cyril, Jacob of Sarug, etc. The year corresponds to AD927.

> 3) This book of letters and other accounts that are gathered in it—life and pleasure to whoever finds them—is of the holy, illustrious in triumphs, and powerful fighter Mōr Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria. Moses endeavoured to acquire it—I mean he bought it along with many other books when this blessed Mōr Moses the Abbot went to Baghdad on account of this holy Desert and the monks who inhabit it. He returned in victory and comfort. He endowed this and the other ones that we mentioned to the holy Monastery of the Syrians in the Scete Desert, called the Monastery of the Mother of God (...). Let he who reads (them) pray for Mōr Moses the Abbot, and for the sinner who wrote (this) on behalf of Mōr Moses and at his command.[10]

The colophon does not include a date but Wright dated the donation of the manuscript to the monastery to AD932, the time when Moses was in Baghdad (see the following colophon).

> 4) For the glory, honour and exaltation of this holy monastery of the Mother of God, of the Syrians, in the desert of Scetis. The poor and the sinner Abbot Moses, called the Nisibian, was diligent to acquire this book with many others (totaling) 250. He purchased most of them while the rest were given to him as gifts when he went to Baghdad on behalf this desert (of Scetis) and the monks who are in it (...). These books arrived with the Abbot Moses mentioned above, in the year one thousand two hundred and forty-three of the Greeks.[11]

8 Wright, 1870: 97–98 (Syriac text; translation by the author).
9 Wright, 1870: 740 colophon 1.
10 Wright, 1870: 720.
11 Wright, 1870: 418 colophon 1.

The year corresponds to AD932, in which the library's acquisitions increased tremendously thanks to Moses. The manuscript to which the colophon refers contains the treatise of Basil of Caesarea on the Holy Spirit.

> 5) The arrival of these books to this monastery was through Moses the Abbot of this monastery of the Mother of God in the year one thousand three hundred and eight (=AD997). He went for these manuscripts to Baghdad, Takrit, and Mosul, bringing them with great effort for the understanding of the Brothers that live here—most of them among (the Syriac Orthodox) faithful, namely the people of Takrit.[12]

As noted by Wright, the year in this colophon must be when this colophon was written, much later than the time of Moses of Nisibis. Another colophon confirms that the manuscript was donated sometime between AD819 and AD830:

> Mōr Mathew, Abraham, and Jacob, spiritual brothers of Takrit, a city of true Christians and the Metropolis of the East, deposited this spiritual endowment out of what the grace of God has given into their hands. They deposited this endowment in the Desert of Scetis for their own salvation etc. This book was written, I mean copied, in the days of our blessed patriarchs: Dionysius of Syria, Jacob of Egypt, I mean of Alexandria, and Basil, Metropolitan of the city of Takrit. May God set his tranquility and peace in the whole world, especially in his holy churches ands monasteries, through their virtuous and holy prayers. May mercy befall the owners of this book in both worlds, etc. For the sake of our Lord, let he who reads in this book pray for the dinner and needy of mercy, Theodore the frail, and every one who copied this book according to his ability etc.

The Dionysius of the colophon must be of Tal-Mahre whose tenure as patriarch lasted from AD818 to 845. Basil must be of Balad who died in AD829–AD830, and as Wright suggested, the date of the manuscript was between AD819 and 830. Although this is not the time of Moses of Nisibis, the first colophon dated probably to AD997 keeps the memory of the Abbot's travel to Mesopotamia on behalf of the monks in Egypt and his task of collecting manuscripts during his trip.

> 6) "The virtuous Sergius Tubana son of Yaqqira of Takrit, of the monastic community of the Monastery of the Easterners in Resh-'Ayna and his cousin Isaac, the abbot of this monastery, endowed this book for the Monastery of the Syrians in the Scete Desert. They entrusted it to Moses the Abbot of the Desert, when he passed by them. May God parson them altogether.[13]

Wright mentions that a note in the manuscript containing the colophon bears an incomplete date, "probably A. Gr. 898, AD587."[14] Whether or not this date is real, Sergius and Isaac seem to have written the dedication of the codex in Moses' presence, as is suggested by the wording of the colophon.

> 7) This book was completed in the year one thousand two hundred and forty-seven of the Greeks. It was written in the Monastery of the Syrians in the Scete Desert. Yūhanōn the Stranger, monk in name only, and in a priest in rank, wrote it. He wanted to write it for Moses the Abbot of the place who is called Nisibian.

12 Wright, 1870: 762 colophon 2.
13 Wright, 1872: 1089–1090.
14 Wright, 1872: 1089, colophon 2.

> May he who reads in this book of the holy Gospel pray for the sinner who copied it so that he, his dead ones, and all the children of the holy Church may find mercy, like the thieve on the right side (....).[15]

The date is AD936. Here Moses ordered codices for his library copied not in the Near East but in Scetis.

The colophons listed above give an idea about a man whose love of manuscripts led him to establish a library of hundred of codices, some very rare. He traveled extensively to collect them, paid high prices to purchase them, and took the trouble to take them to the Monastery of the Syrians, probably on the back of donkeys from central Iraq to Upper Syria, the Mediterranean coast, Palestine, the Sinai, and down to Egypt. He traveled to the Near East in AD906-907, 927, ?-932, and 936, and in one single trip in AD932 he took with him up to 250 Syriac codices. We know some of the cities he visited: Edessa, Sarug, Damascus, Amida, Harran, Mardin, Baghdad, Takrit, Mosul, and others in Syria and Iraq for the sake of manuscripts.

Moses' collection of manuscripts covers a great variety of topics just as the monastery's library did. Liturgical books, Bibles, and lectionaries are particularly numerous as expected in a monastic community. Spiritual and other writings of the Fathers come next in line. In the domain of history, there is the ecclesiastical history of Eusebius, and perhaps the gem of the library, the first Syriac universal chronicle called the Chronicle of Zuqnin. Zuqnin is a Syriac Orthodox monastery located near Amida, which Moses must have visited, and it was from there that he must have acquired or brought this unique manuscript. One can only wonder why the Monastery of Zuqnin would give up this item that proved to be an autograph. The chronicle was even repaired in Egypt by a monk named Elisha of Zuqnin who not only left us a note within the Chronicle but also copied a variety of Syriac sources in Egypt. Moses' zeal for defending the rights of the monks of the desert in Baghdad and his determination to turn the monastery of the Syrian into a centre of learning won him the highest degree of praise. One colophon proudly calls him, and rightly so: "The pride and beauty of the entire holy Church, Mōr Moses the Abbot of the holy monastery of the Syrians in the desert of Scetis."[16]

THE ACQUISITIONS OF THE LIBRARY IN THE MONASTERY OF THE SYRIANS

Thanks to the dry weather of the Egyptian desert, most of the manuscripts collected by Moses of Nisibis were preserved in excellent condition throughout the centuries, which would not have been the case in Mesopotamia or Syria on account of the humidity, invasions, and massacres that these lands had suffered throughout their history.

To get a fuller picture of the library of the Monastery of the Syrians, dated manuscripts once owned by the library will be listed, following Hatch's still useful work, *An Album of Dated Syriac Manuscripts*. The list below is by no means exhaustive, since there are many other Syriac manuscripts deriving from the monastery of the Syrians that are not necessarily dated and which Wright included in his *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 volumes). The list here is meant to give an idea about the kinds of manuscripts once owned by the

15 Wright, 1870: 76, colophon 1.
16 Wright, 1870: 394.

Monastery of the Syrians. Manuscripts acquired by Moses of Nisibis are marked with an asterix against their dates :

Date	Type of Codex	Place of Origin	Place, AD year in Egypt	Current Place
463-4	Incomplete Pentateuch	Amida	St. Mary Deipara[17]	British Library
473	Life of Simeon the Stylite, etc		St. Mary Deipara	Vatican Library
509*	Basil: On the Holy Spirit	Amida?	St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
518	Ephrem's Hymns	Edessa?	St. Mary Deipara	Vatican Library
532*	Book of Daniel		St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
532	Monastic History		St. Mary Deipara	British Library
565*	Jacob of Sarug's memr‘	Edessa	St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
584	John Chrysostom on 1 Cor	Gubba Barraya	St. Mary Deipara, 870	British Library
593*	John Chrysostom on 1-2 Thess		St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
598-9	Book of Joshua		Abba Bishoi	British Library
603	Jacob of Sarug's memr‘		St. Mary Deipara, 851-2?	British Library
604*	Isaiah the Younger		St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
615	John Chrysostom on Ephes		St. Mary Deipara	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
621-2*	Epistles of Paul		St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
734	Gregory Nazianzia, Discourses		St. Mary Deipara	British Library
770	Book of Ezra, Nehemiah	Qartmin	St. Mary Deipara	British Library
774-5*	John Lycopolis, Discourses	Edessa	St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
790*	Gregory Nazianzia, Discourses		St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library (Serto)
816	Compendium	Mar Michael	Maris Desert	British Library (Serto)
819-30*	Compendium, NT, vitae...		St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library
823	Compendium	Thebaid	St. Mary Deipara, 851-59	British Library (Serto)
823-4	Lectionary	Harran	Abba Bishoi	British Library
850*	Martyrology		St. Mary Deipara, 932	British Library (Serto)

17 The colophon is damaged and the name of the person "who was diligent and worked to purchase this *panqīthō* for his holy church [...]" did not survive, but the fact that it was found in the Monastery of the Mother of God in Nitria indicates that it was purchased for this Monastery.

866	Spiritual letters, memr‘ ...	Edessa	St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
867-8	Severus: Homilies	Amida?	St. Mary Deipara, 895	British Library (Serto)
873-4	Psalms, Ephrem, etc	Edessa	St. Mary Deipara	British Library
874-5	Spiritual compendium		St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
876	Spiritual compendium		St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
876-7	Funeral Service	Nitria Desert	St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
887-8	One leaf of a codex	St. Mary Deipara	St. Mary Deipara, ca. 869	British Library (Serto)
892-3	Choral service, homilies	St. Mary Deipara	St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
902-3	Athanasius, vitae, letters	Abba Paul Desert		British Library (Serto)
927	Psalms	St. Mary Deipara	St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
935-6*	Gospels, Harclean	St. Mary Deipara	St. Mary Deipara	British Library
1007	Choral Service Book	Takrit?	St. Mary Deipara	British Library
1015	Festal, Other Discourses		St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
1081*	Catena Patrum, OT, NT[18]	St. Mary Deipara	St. Mary Deipara	British Library
1085	Samuel, History of Barsawma	St. Mary Deipara	St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
1089	Gospel Lectionary, Harclean	Gazarta, near Alexandria	St. Mary Deipara, region of Alexandria	British Library
1102	Daniel of Salah, Commentary	Gazarta-Scete		British Library (Serto)
1191	Gospels	St. Mary Deipara in Edessa		Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
1192	Gospels, Harclean	St. Mary Deipara in Edessa		Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
1222	Gospel Lectionary, Harclean	St. Mary Deipara in Edessa		St. Mark Convent, Jerusalem
1222	Offices (Melkite)	Dara?	St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Melkite)
1230	Lessons and Prayers	St. Mary Deipara in Edessa	St. Mary Deipara	British Library
1251	Psalms, Canticles	St. Mary Deipara		British Library
1255	Lectionary	St Mary Deipara		British Library

18 There is another Catena Patrum brought by Moses of Nisibis for the Monastery of the Mother of God in 932. The date of this codex is not known but on the basis of paleography, Wright dated it to the 8th-9th centuries; Wright, 1871: 904-908.

1264	Gospels, Harclean	St. Mary Deipara		Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
1291-2	Orders of commemorations		St. Mary Deipara	British Library (Serto)
1480-1	Gospel of John, lections	St. Mary Deipara		Vatican Library
1483-4	Services for feast days	St. Mary Deipara		British Library (Serto)

The above list sheds much light on the library of the Monastery of the Syrians in Scete and related activities in Egypt.

First, the library included and preserved for future generations some of the oldest Syriac manuscripts ever. Out of six manuscripts securely dated to the 5th century, two survived in Egypt, and out of thirty manuscripts dated to the 6th century, nine of them came from Egypt. Egypt's role in preserving the Syriac heritage is clearly very great.[19] Some of the manuscripts are unique, as in the case of the incomplete Pentateuch dated to AD463–464 and now in the British Library (Add. 14425). It was copied in Amida in a most beautiful Estrangela script, "during the days of the venerable and God-loving Mōr Mārā the bishop, in the peace of the Great Church."[20] The colophons of the manuscript do not mention Moses of Nisibis but he was surely behind its presence in Egypt. The value of this manuscript is immense, first because it is the oldest *dated* version of the Peshitta (oldest Syriac rendering of the Old Testament), and second, because of its epigraphic value—the fact that the codex is dated helps dating undated manuscripts of the period.[21] A decade after the production of the Pentateuch, another manuscript containing, among other documents, the vita of the popular Simeon the Stylite saw light. It was copied in AD473, barely fourteen years after the death of the holy man which took place on September 2, 459. Unlike the usual Seleucid computational system encountered in most Syriac manuscripts, the date in this manuscript follows the Antiochene system, which begins in 49BC.[22] The manuscript once belonged to the Nitrian desert before it became the property of the Vatican Library.[23]

In AD 509, another manuscript was produced containing Basil of Caesarea's treatise On the Holy Spirit: "I, Jacob of Amida, wrote this book. Let he who reads it pray for me so that our Lord may pardon the weakness of my thoughts…" Elsewhere in the codex it is stated that the book of St Basil was completed "in the holy monastery of Fa'nur," which must have been located near Amida.[24] We know how this ancient manuscript reached the monastery of the Mother of God in Scete, thanks to the lengthy colophon mentioning Moses

19 It is very interesting to note that the earliest manuscript dated to AD411 and now in the British Library (Add. 12150) coincides with the appearance of the first Syriac Christian inscription, dated to AD 433-4 and coming from Syria; on the manuscript see Wright. 1871: 631–633 and Hatch, 1946: Plate I and page 52, and on the inscription see Briquel Chatonnet-Desreumaux, 2004: 15.

20 Wright, 1870: 5 colophon 1 (Syriac text).

21 Hatch, 1946: 55, Plate IV.

22 Hatch, 1946.

23 Assemani, 1756–1759: 319.

24 Wright, 1871: 417–418.

(see item 4 above). Another manuscript dated to AD518, contains the Hymns on Nativity,[25] Paradise,[26] and other themes all composed by St. Ephrem the Syrian who lived one and a half centuries earlier. Not only is this codex most faithful to the original texts of Ephrem, it is dated not to the Seleucid but to the Apamean era, although both computational systems are similar: "This book is of the priest Simon of [...]. It was completed in the year eight hundred and thirty, in November, according to the computation of Apamea. It was written by Julian, the writer of Edessa. Let he who reads in it pray for the one who was diligent to acquire it and for he who toiled and wrote..." Wright, who catalogued the manuscript, wrote:

> "[This] ancient note, which followed this colophon, was carefully erased, and over it there was written another, stating that the volume belonged to the convent of S. Mary Deipara, but this in its turn has been almost erased. A third note, on the same page, referring to some person or persons from the city of Takrit, has shared the same fate."[27]

We know from other colophons and inscriptions that the traders and monks of Takrit donated several manuscripts to the Monastery of the Syrians in Scete, and it is quite possible that the mention of the Takritans in the last note was part of the note which mentioned the monastery of St. Mary. Second, the manuscripts in the list cover the entire history of Syriac literature and beyond.[28] Intensive Syriac literature began with St. Ephrem in Edessa and with Aphrahat the "Persian Sage" in Babylonia, and continued until the 13th century, the time of the last prolific and encyclopedic writer Gregorius Bar-Hebraeus (AD1225–AD1286)—the 14th century saw a few original authors. After this period, copying of manuscripts continued in the Near East to the 20th century and in the Monastery of the Syrians at least to the end of the 15th century. Thus, the work of building the library spanned several centuries since Moses started it at the beginning of the 10th century. Amazingly, this intensive work was not hampered by such crucial historical events as the fall of the Abbasids at the hands of the Mongols in the 13th century and the fall of Byzantium at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in the middle of the 15th century.

Third, the role of Moses of Nisibis in establishing the Syriac library was not limited to his collection and purchasing of manuscripts. The Monastery of the Syrians and other places in Egypt also became centres of copying and repairing manuscripts. One repaired codex dated to AD775–AD776 (Vatican Library codex Vat. Syr. 162) mentions the following:

> Pray for the wretched Elisha, of the monastery of Zuqnin, who copied this leaf, that he may find mercy, like the thief on the right hand, amen and amen.
> May the mercy of the great God and our saviour Jesus Christ be upon the priest Mōr Joshua the Stylite, of the monastery of Zuqnin, who wrote this book of records dealing with evil times that are past, and of the calamities and troubles which that tyrant had caused among men.

The Elisha in question inserted a missing folio in the Chronicle of Joshua of Zuqnin his handwriting is

25 See McVey, 1989: 61–218.

26 See Brock: 1990.

27 Wright, 1871: 413.

28 On the history of Syriac literature see Duval, 1900; Baumstark, 1922; Chabot, 1935; Barsoum, 2005; Brock,1997; Abūnā, 1986.

different from the script of Chronicle. We know from other sources (e.g. British Library MS 5021)[29] that Elisha was a copyist of manuscripts in addition to being a repairer of codices. He copied one manuscript in AD 902–903, at the time when Moses of Nisibis was undertaking the important task of building the Library of the Monastery of the Syrians. Apparently, the task of copying manuscripts began in AD 887–888, (see the list above) and continued until the end of the 15th century, according to the same list. A library, as a functioning institution, collects books, increases its acquisitions, and services its collection, aspects that were all attested in the library of the Monstsey of the Syrians for at lest seven centuries.

Fourth, the library contained a variety of Syriac sources, a fact which reflects the intellectual interest of Moses of Nisibis and his staff over the centuries. The earliest manuscripts were not liturgical as one would expect on account of their practical need, although lectionaries and choral services were attested later on in the list. There were several biblical books, including incomplete copies of the Pentateuch. These were not used in the liturgy since there were lectionaries specifically created for cyclical feasts and commemorations. Theological treatises and commentaries seem to have been intentionally selected on account of such famous authors as Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzia. Vitae of holy men and martyrs, homilies, and spiritual letters were meant for the edification of the monastic community. The fact that there is a Melkite Office suggests that the library aimed at collecting any Syriac book for the sake of acquisition and referencing. Of great interest are the hymns of Ephrem and Jacob of Sarug, both outstanding poets and theologians and key figures in Syriac Orthodox Christianity. The manuscript containing Jacob's *memrē* was produced just 44 years after his death! One gets the impression that Moses of Nisibis looked for very old manuscripts, and it seems that he was antiquarian in mind.

We have noted that that the list above is not comprehensive, and indeed it misses the earliest universal chronicle brought to Egypt by Moses of Nisibis.

A GEM IN THE LIBRARY OF THE MONASTERY OF THE SYRIANS

During the 18th century, the Vatican Library acquired from the Monastery of the Syrians in Egypt one manuscript dated to AD775–AD776 (Codex Zuqninensis, Vat. Syr. 162); it proved to be the first universal chronicle ever written in Syriac. Since the manuscript was mutilated at its beginning and end, the last missing folios, some seven leaves, were uncovered by the British, who acquired them for the British Library (formerly British Museum, Add. 14.665 folios 2 to 7).[30]

The Chronicle, now called of Zuqnin, covers the history of humanity from the creation of the world until the time of writing, in AD775–AD776. he preface of the Chronicle states that it was written in S(eleucid) 1087 (AD775–AD776) "in which (year) Mahdi son of 'Abd-Allah is ruling over Syria, Egypt, Armenia, Azarbayjan, all of Persia, Send, Kho[rasan], as well as over the Arabs, and over the Greeks Leo son of Constantine, and over the Romans Pepin." It was addressed to the "spiritual fathers (of the writer), George, chorepiscopus of Amida, the abbot Euthalius, Lazarus the Visitor, the honorable Anastasius, and the rest of

29 Hatch, 1946: 164 and Plate CXIII.

30 On the whole Chronicle see Witakowski, 1987. On Part III of the Chronicle see Witakowski, 1996. On Parts III and IV see Harrak, 1999. On the seven folios housed at the British Library see Harrak, 2003: 297-328.

the monastic community."[31]

It seems that Moses fetched the manuscript from the Zuqnin Monastery, and in any case its attribution to Zuqnin is confirmed by the colophon added by "Elisha of Zuqnin" when he repaired it in Egypt (see above). What makes this manuscript truly unique is the fact that it is the original manuscript as penned by the 8th century chronicler himself. I have discussed this issue at length elsewhere,[32] but it suffices to say that this is the sole copy of the Chronicle of Zuqnin, that the sole copy is a palimpsest made of half a dozen old or discarded Greek Bible manuscripts, and that the chronicler left his imprints in many places in his work. For example, he left blank spaces (five times!), when required information was not available at the moment of writing. He had great interest in celestial phenomena as it is obvious in Part IV of his work: On six occasions when the text speaks of cosmic events pictures of portents appear as well, five of them in the margin—sometimes captions explaining his drawings appear. And finally, he jotted notes carelessly and lightly, so as to help him recall topics about which he wanted to write and which he indeed wrote. Given the fact that Syriac autographs are rather rare, Moses included in his library a gem of rare quality!

The chronicle of Zuqnin is a library in its own right, and one would wonder if Moses of Nisibis was aware of this multiplicity of Syriac sources in one volume! The work is conveniently divided into four parts reflecting more or less the major literary sources compiled by the author. Part I spans from the creation of the world to the reign of Constantine, and in it the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea in Syriac is a major source. Parts II goes from the time of Constantine to the time of Theodosius II, on the basis of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates Scholasticus translated into Syriac, and such other literary sources as the so-called *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*.[33] This source is the earliest local chronicle which deals with the effects of the Byzantine-Sassanian warfare on the Jazira region in the early 6th century. Part III, based among others on the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus, covers the reigns of Zeno, Anastasius, Justin I and Justinian. Part IV, essentially the personal contribution of the chronicler, deals with the reign of Justinian and continues to the year 775. The accounts dealing with the period between AD767 and 775 are particularly detailed and altogether form a unique source on the economic policies of the early Abbasids, namely the Caliph Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr, and on the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the Jazira in those years.

Whether or not the chronicler of Zuqnin was the first to write a universal chronicle (the other type is local chronicles), is not entirely sure. The earliest universal chronicle seems to be that of Jacob of Edessa (d.AD708), which includes a chronography and canons up to the year AD692—extended by someone elseto the year AD710.[34] While Jacob of Edessa adopted the structure of the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea, the Chronicle of Zuqnin does not contain a canon, and although it is universal, its latter part (part 4) is essentially local, concentrating on the economy of the Jazira under the early Abbasids. Nonetheless, Joshua the Chronicler produced a unique chronicle, not only in terms of a literary genre but also in terms of content, which includes independent sources that survived only in his work. Thanks to Moses of Nisibis and the library of the

31 Harrak, 2010 (forthcoming).

32 Harrak, 1999: 1–24.

33 Trombley-Watt: 2000.

34 This chronicle is fragmentary, though some gaps can be filled with quotations made from it by Elias of Nisibis (d.1046) and Michael the Syrian (d.1199).

Monastery of the Syrians, this work has reached us almost completely intact. Had it remained in the Monastery of Zuqnin, it would have been perished along with the monastery of which no material trace ever survived.

THE LIBRARY OF THE MONASTERY OF THE SYRIANS AFTER THE 15TH CENTURY

The last securely dated manuscript owned by the Monastery of the Syrians dates to AD1483-1484 and it is the book of Services for feasts days (see the list above). During the 18th century nothing suggests that the Syrian Orthodox had anything to do with the monastery now in Coptic hands. Nonetheless, the Syriac library seems to have survived almost completely, given the great number of manuscripts that were later transferred to European libraries.

When Europe learned about the treasure of manuscripts that was kept in the monastery of the Syrians, several missions were dispatched to purchase the manuscripts, and this explains why these are now mostly in the Vatican Library and in the British Library. The Vatican envoy, the Maronite bishop Assemani (author of the famous Bibliotheca Orientalis),[35] looked for complete manuscripts to purchase, neglecting fallen folios that may have been part of the manuscripts he acquired. The British envoy purchased what his Vatican counterpart left in the monastery, including fallen leaves. This explains why the voluminous Chronicle of Zuqnin is now housed in the Vatican Library, while its last fallen leaves are in the British library. We know that the fallen folios and the codex belong to each other. The Chronicler ended his chronicle with a bitter note on massive conversions to Islam in northern Syria. To boost the morale of his readers, he discussed in the folios now in the British Library the story of a military commander from Harran named Cyrus, who was accused of shifting to Islam and later defecting to his Christian faith, a claim Cyrus denied. Although he was able to flee from the authorities, he was determined to defend his Christian faith before the Abbasid governor of Harran at the cost of his life. Thematically, the fallen folios in London and the rest of the manuscript in the Vatican are interconnected.

CONCLUSION

The transfer of the Syriac Library of the monastery of the Syrians to Europe during the 18th century opened the door to European students and scholars to study Syriac, and thus the academic discipline of Syriac studies was born in the West. While the library in its active history benefited generations of monks and abbots within Egypt, in its later history it has benefited ecclesiastics, students, researchers, and scholars worldwide. God bless the memory of Moses of Nisibis and of his Coptic hosts for an amazing adventure in preserving a great part of the Syriac heritage, nurturing the fields of literature, edification, and education!

35 Assemanus, 1719–1728.

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The Reuse of the Temple of Isis at Aswan as a Church in Late Antiquity[1]

INTRODUCTION

Modern visitors of the temple island of Philae are often struck by the clear transformation the temple of Isis went through in Christian times. In the pronaos of the temple, on one of the pillars an ankh-sign has been replaced by a cross, large crosses mark the doors and inscriptions in Greek commemorate the dedication of a church of St Stephen in this part of the temple by Bishop Theodore of Philae (ca. 525 –after 577 CE). Against the eastern wall of the pronaos, the altar of the church still stands in situ, with a cross hewn out on its front side and a niche above it, where Christian priests would have performed their liturgical duties (fig. 1).[2]

It is well known that (parts of) several of the most famous Ancient Egyptian temples were turned into churches: in addition to the Isis temple at Philae, one only has to mention the Festival Hall of Thutmosis III at Karnak or the second forecourt of the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, on the Theban West Bank. These cases of what are called 'temple conversions', have often been combined with Christian literary sources dating to Late Antiquity (4th to 7th centuries) that speak of the violent destruction of temples, most famously that of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 392, and (sometimes) of their transformation into churches. Together, these sources have given some scholars the impression that the destruction of temples and their conversion into churches was a common phenomenon in Late Antique Egypt.[3] Recent scholarship, however, has shown that the fate of the temples was much more complex than a monolithic transformation 'from temple to church'. On the basis of a wealth of archaeological material from Egypt and elsewhere, it has become clear that temple destructions were in fact extremely rare, that more often practical considerations were at stake when reusing temples, and that reuse as a church was just one of many options and certainly not the rule.[4] Moreover, in those cases where temples were turned into churches, this usually happened at a later date, say from the second half of the fifth century onwards, when the building had stood empty for a considerable time.[5]

1 I would like to thank Ramez Boutros for the kind invitation to speak on the first Annual Coptic Studies Symposium at Toronto on March 29, 2008, as well as the audience for a lively discussion afterwards.

2 For the reuse of the temple of Isis at Philae as a church, Dijkstra, 2008: 306–315.

3 E.g. Frankfurter, 1998: 265.

4 The main syntheses for Egypt are Grossmann, 1995; 2002b: 43–48; 2008, though focusing predominantly on the reuse of temples as churches.

5 As appears from my study of the reuse of thirteen temples in the Aswan region, Dijkstra, 2008: 85–122 (Syene and Elephantine) and 306–324 (Philae), for Egypt in general, Dijkstra, forthcoming.

It is in this context of 'reusing the architectural legacy of the past' that we shall have a closer look at a less well-known case of the reuse of a temple as a church, that of Isis at Aswan.[6] This temple of Isis is much smaller than its famous counterpart on Philae Island, just 4 km to the south, yet it has also been completely preserved. The temple has been one of the main areas of investigation since the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research Cairo started the first systematic excavations in Aswan in 2000.[7] In the first four seasons the houses around the temple have been meticulously excavated, covering the 1st to 11th centuries CE.[8] Since 2001, I have been directing a project within the temple itself, the Isis Temple Graffiti Project. This project aims at publishing all the graffiti from the temple's walls, both textual and figurative.[9] The project soon revealed that the location of the graffiti also has much to say about the architectural reuse of the temple after the Graeco-Roman period, especially its reuse as a church in Late Antiquity. Therefore a separate project was initiated within the temple in which the architectural features of the building were studied in order to reconstruct how the temple was reused, in particular to establish a ground plan of the church.[10]

In his characteristic meticulous way, Peter Grossmann has reconstructed the ground plan of the church in the nearby temple of Isis at Philae. In reconstructing the church of St Stephen, he not only took into account the more visible features mentioned above – altars, niches, inscriptions and crosses – but also looked carefully at what the other traces in the floor and on the walls can add to how the former temple space was reused.[11] We shall do the same in this article about the temple of Isis at Aswan. After some introductory words about the temple of Isis and what has been done in the past on its reuse as a church in Late Antiquity, we shall discuss four groups of material (graffiti, pavement, altars and niches) in order to reconstruct the ground plan of this church.

THE TEMPLE OF ISIS AT ASWAN

The temple of Isis was built in the reigns of Ptolemy III (246–221 BCE) and his successor Ptolemy IV (221-204), hence dates to the second half of the third century BCE. It has remained unfinished, as appears from two features of the building. First, unlike the western (front) and southern exterior walls the northern and eastern walls have not been smoothed and thus remained unfinished. Second, only the most conspicuous places on the temple walls, that is, the main doors (the two doors in the front wall and the door to the main sanctuary, B, C and E in figure 2, which is a key plan to the temple) and the eastern wall of the main sanctuary (F) were decorated with hieroglyphic reliefs. As we have seen, the temple was in use during the

6 The phrase is the title of an important article on the subject by Ward-Perkins, 1999.

7 Thus far two preliminary reports have appeared covering the first four seasons: Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2004; 2006.

8 For the houses see Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2004: 127–134 and Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: 238–251.

9 I am currently holding a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which enables me to prepare the final publication of the about 350 graffiti from the temple. Publication is foreseen in the series 'Beiträge zur ägyptischen Bauforschung und Altertumskunde' (Von Zabern, Mainz). For a preliminary report see Dijkstra, 2009.

10 Since this project was completed in 2003, we shall concentrate on its results here, but not without briefly discussing the graffiti. The results of the project have been published in Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: 228–238, to which the reader is kindly referred for further details. For a summary see also Dijkstra, 2008: 99–106.

11 Grossmann, 1984.

Graeco-Roman period, and was then turned into a church in Late Antiquity. Somewhere in the medieval period, the building was finally abandoned and buried under a pile of rubble as the city limits moved further north. Having been buried for centuries, the temple was only rediscovered in 1871 when the city expanded southward again and a railway line was built cutting through the ancient ruins.[12]

In subsequent years Egyptologists Auguste Mariette and Jacques de Morgan (and his team) did some work on the hieroglyphic reliefs, but the temple remained partly buried in rubble and the Baedeker edition of 1898 even calls the temple 'hardly worth seeing'.[13] In 1903/1904 Howard Carter improved the accessibility to the temple by cleaning the inside and building a retaining wall in front of it to keep back the rubble.[14] The first systematic investigation of the temple, however, only appeared about a century after its discovery. In 1978, the Italian Egyptologist Edda Bresciani and her team completely laid bare the temple, made an authoritative ground plan (on which figure 1 is based), and published the hieroglyphic reliefs from the temple and the decorated blocks dumped in the temple from the surrounding area. In addition, they published three demotic and two Greek inscriptions from the front wall (fig. 2, no. A), eight Coptic inscriptions from the inside of the main entrance (B) and forty demotic and hieroglyphic texts from the interior, mainly painted on the walls of the pillared hall (D). They also noted some figurative graffiti in these same areas.[15]

Although the reliefs and blocks were obviously their main point of interest, the Coptic inscriptions, some Christian figurative graffiti (boats, a rosette and crosses), the hacked away reliefs, 'certain adaptations in the pavement' and the wall niches in the pillared hall already gave the Italian team the impression that the temple had been reused as a church. This was confirmed by two wall paintings they found on the southern wall of the northern pillar (P I) and the northern wall of the southern pillar (P II). Enclosed by a red frame and around 1m above ground, the northern pillar showed Mary with three figures on either side of her and the southern pillar three bearded figures with an angel in white, blue, red and black paint. They had already largely vanished in the 1970s and are now gone, but fortunately some infrared pictures were taken that resulted in a date on style of the paintings to the 6th century. Because all Christian traces they found came from the pillared hall, they assumed that the church had been built in this room and that the altar of the church had stood before the entrance to the main sanctuary (E), which had apparently been closed off.[16] On the basis of the map provided by the Italian team, however, Grossmann has suggested that the altar of the church would have been located in the main sanctuary (F) and thus that the door to the sanctuary (E) was not blocked, which would make it into the only temple from Egypt that uses its main sanctuary, or *naos*, as part of the ground plan of the church.[17]

The project carried out in the temple in 2002–2003 was the first systematic exploration of all the material from the temple in order to test both hypotheses and come to a definitive ground plan of the church.

12 Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2004: 120–121.
13 Mariette and Maspero, 1889: 6 (pl. 22–26); De Morgan, 1894: 47–57; Baedeker, 1898: 331–332.
14 Carter, 1905: 129.
15 Bresciani and Pernigotti, 1978. For the inscriptions see pp. 121–152, for the figurative graffiti pp. 34-39.
16 Bresciani and Pernigotti, 1978: 38–41 (quote on p. 39), with pl. XXVII and XXVIII.
17 Grossmann, 1995: 194.

THE GRAFFITI

To turn to the first group of material, the graffiti can be divided into roughly three periods: Graeco-Roman, 'Christian' and modern, with the 'Christian period' comprising both Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, when as we shall see this site still attracted Christians. As a rule, the Graeco-Roman graffiti are found on the third and fourth rows of blocks of the temple wall, that is, at a height that could best be reached by a person who was standing in front of the wall. On the outside, front wall (A) and the southern side wall (M), the graffiti consist of various animals, like birds and horses, and only a few texts in both demotic and Greek writing can be found here. It is the other way round in the interior, where several textual graffiti dating to the Graeco-Roman period can be found but figurative graffiti are rare. Among these textual graffiti, which are often not inscribed but painted on the walls (*dipinti*), are a few texts that carry a date. The last of these probably dates to the reign of the Emperor Commodus (184 CE).[18] This does not necessarily mean that the temple fell out of use by the second century CE; on the other hand, it is likely that the temple cult had ended by the fourth century, as seems to have been the case in the rest of the region (with the exception of Philae), and Egypt as a whole.[19]

Christian graffiti like boats, crosses and men in praying position (*orantes*) are usually found higher up the exterior walls. This general chronological division exists on both the front and side walls (A and M). On the southern side wall, the graffiti are concentrated in the western, upper corner of the wall and most of them are positioned on the highest blocks of the temple. In other words, the floor level on the southern side of the temple must have been considerably higher at the time the graffiti were incised. The higher floor level seems to correspond to the rise in the floor levels that can be observed in the excavated houses to the south of the temple. These houses crossed the retaining wall of the temple of Isis around the 9th/10th century or slightly later and from this date onwards houses could have been built on the former sacred ground of the temple.[20] It is therefore also from this time onwards that the graffiti must date. By contrast, on the façade (A) a handful of Christian graffiti have been found on the lower stones. This means that the floor level in front of the main entrance was maintained into Christian times. Other Christian graffiti from the façade which were found higher up the wall suggest that the level rose here, too, later on.

The remaining graffiti on the inside must also belong to a time when the Ancient Egyptian cult had ceased to exist. This is certain for the boats in the pillared hall (D), some of which contain crosses and orantes, and also for the large rosette incised in the western wall of the same hall.[21] Other Christian graffiti found there are crosses and eight Coptic graffiti. The latter, inscribed in the wall of the main entrance (B), mostly start with a cross and seem to contain four names of Christian visitors written crudely in pairs (Kosma, Senoute, Menas and Papnouthis).[22] The crosses near the side entrance (C) suggest that laymen probably entered the church from this side and that the main entrance was closed or used for special occasions only. As the wall paintings and graffiti indicate, there thus seems no doubt that the pillared hall served as the main room of the church in Christian times. This is also indicated by the hewn-out reliefs on both sides of the entrance to the sanctuary

18 Bresciani and Pernigotti, 1978: 139 (no. 36).
19 Dijkstra, 2008: 120–121; Dijkstra, forthcoming.
20 Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: 227–228.
21 Bresciani and Pernigotti, 1978: 35.
22 Dijkstra, 2008: 98 (n. 60), with a correction of one of the names published in Bresciani and Pernigotti, 1978: 146.

(E), which probably contained frescoes.

In the rooms on either side of the sanctuary (H and J) no Christian graffiti have been left on the walls. However, the main sanctuary (F) contains large *dipinti* painted primitively with brown paint high up the walls. These *dipinti* consist mainly of boats, but a hand with a palm branch and a singular palm branch also belong to this group. As there does not seem to be a connection between the Christian graffiti of the pillared hall and the *dipinti* of the sanctuary, the large *dipinti* seem to belong to a later period. In view of their high position on the walls, the floor level of the building seems to have been considerably higher when they were painted, just as was observed on the outside walls (A and M).

A higher floor level could also explain the provisional entrances, which do not seem to be modern and were made in the upper rows of blocks of the façade on both sides of the main entrance. Inside the temple, near the southern entry incised high upon the southern wall of the pillared hall (D), a Coptic inscription of one Markos was found (unpublished). Apparently, the entrance to the temple, either through the main or side entrance (B or C), had become blocked at one time in the past, which made the provisional entrances necessary.

Although the entrances were created at about the same height as the graffiti on the southern outside wall, it is nonetheless likely that the original entrance to the temple, and thus the original floor level in front of it, was maintained when the houses encroached on the temple in the 9th/10th century or later. This appears from the graffiti found on the lower rows of blocks of the facade, which are similar to the ones high on the southern side wall. There was an open court in front of the temple with large mud brick walls, which prevented the building of houses.[23] Therefore, only later did the inner rooms of the temple and the forecourt in front of the temple became filled up with rubble, as can also be deduced from the position of the Christian graffiti higher up the front wall sloping downwards towards the main entrance, until the additional entrances were necessary. The *dipinti* in the sanctuary and the graffito of Markos suggest that at that time Christians still visited the building, although it cannot be said whether the former temple still served as a church at this time.

THE PAVEMENT

In addition to the graffiti, the architectural features of the interior of the building, especially its pavement, give an impression of the reuse of the temple as a church in Late Antiquity. What was the ground plan of the church? Such a reconstruction is made particularly difficult by the intensive reuse of the building through the ages and the gradual filling of the interior with rubble. These factors have caused several disturbances in the original pavement, which at certain places has even disappeared entirely. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn from the features left behind, which have been indicated on the ground plan of the temple (fig. 3).

Most traces seem to belong to the period in which the temple was reused as a church. As the graffiti already suggest, the most probable location of the main altar of the church would have been in the pillared hall (D).

23 Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: 222.

Behind the door to the former sanctuary (E), two postholes of about equal size can be found in a horizontal line that may have served to block the doorway (nos. 3-4). This construction could have been supported by a hole in the middle behind the two postholes (no. 5). Traces on the walls on the inside of the doorway (E) show that the structure may have been several meters high and would have hidden the former sanctuary from sight. The structure probably consisted of a rounded apse, as in churches at Abu Mina and nearby Biga where similar small apses were constructed, but we cannot be certain and a rectangular shape is also possible.[24] The main altar would then have stood in front of the apse, that is, in front of the door to the former sanctuary (E). As the church did not contain a seat for the bishop (*synthronon*), this church was certainly not a cathedral church, and in view of its size, more probably a small chapel.[25]

The area where the main altar stood was called the *presbyterium*, which was only accessible to clergy. The *presbyterium* was closed off by screens (*cancelli*) which would have left small rectangular marks (*stipites*) in the pavement.[26] Unfortunately, there are no *stipites* visible in the pavement today. Instead, a large, rectangular posthole in the pavement between both pillars may be noted (no. 6). On the same line was found a ground slab that was heavily worn, as if people frequently came through here. It is also possible that a heavy object stood on this spot (no. 7). Perhaps these are the remains of a large screen wall between the pillars, which had an entrance in the middle for the clergy, as was usual in such screen walls.

The sanctuary (F) and at least its southern side room (J), which was directly connected to the sanctuary through an inner doorway (K), probably remained in function for clerical purposes. They could have been used, for example, as changing rooms for clergy or as storage rooms for liturgical instruments, book rolls and church administration.[27] In the sanctuary and both side rooms (H, F and J), several crosses have been incised in the ground slabs. As they seem to be concentrated near the position where the altars would have stood when the building still functioned as a temple, it may well be that they were incised there to purify the rooms on the occasion of the dedication of the church in Late Antiquity.[28]

THE ALTARS

Which of the four altars standing in the temple today was the main altar of the church? Importantly, three of them contain the cartouches of Ptolemy X. It is likely that these altars were once bark stands (that is, stands for processional boats or barks) that stood in the sanctuary and side rooms (H, F and J). Probably in Christian times, those in the side rooms were moved to their present positions to delineate the northern part of the temple. Moreover, because of the entry from the south-west, it seems that the ground plan of the

24 Grossmann, 2002b: 116–118. For the parallels see Grossmann, 2002a (Biga); Grossmann 2002b: 334, with fig. 28 (Abu Mina).

25 The cathedral church of Aswan is mentioned several times in the Patermouthis archive, a collection of family papers centred around Flavius Patermouthis, son of Menas, with papyri dating from 493 to 613. On the Patermouthis archive, see lastly Dijkstra, 2007; 2008: 65–78. On the references to the cathedral church in the papyri, see Dijkstra, 2008: 74. The baptistery and martyr's tomb that have recently been excavated in Area 6 at Aswan suggest that a large church, perhaps the cathedral church, was nearby. For the excavations of this area, see Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: 253–264. For the suggestion that this may be the site of the cathedral church, see Dijkstra, 2007: 195; 2008: 109–110.

26 Grossmann, 2002b: 122–125.

27 Grossmann, 2002b: 113–116.

28 For the ritual purification of temples with crosses, see Dijkstra, 2008: 312–314.

church was rather asymmetrical. The space of the former temple was limited and if the northern part of the pillared hall was closed off, perhaps visitors could pass the southern pillar (P II) on both its southern and western sides. If that were the case, the entrance to the southern side room (J) was probably blocked, for the rooms behind it (F and J) no doubt served clerical purposes. There would also have been a screen between the southern pillar (P II) and the eastern wall of the pillared hall (D), which was possibly made of mudbrick. However, due to the lack of traces to support these suggestions, they must remain inconclusive.

The third altar was left *in situ* in the sanctuary (F). It once stood upright but has now fallen over. This altar cannot have been used as the main altar of the church as suggested by Grossmann, however, for then the sanctuary must have been used as the altar room of the church or *presbyterium*. This is unlikely due to the deepness and darkness of the sanctuary, and due to the lack of adjustments to make this room serve as a *presbyterium* (there are, for example, no traces of decoration or of an apse on the eastern wall). It can, however, tentatively be suggested that the fourth altar, which is now standing against the southern wall of the pillared hall (D) was used as the main altar of the church. In 2002, this altar of red Aswan granite was cleaned and removed from the wall, thus demonstrating it was clearly not in situ (fig. 4).

A comparison with an altar block of similar size from the temple of Isis at Philae, which was used as the main altar of the church built in its *pronaos* in the 6th century (fig. 1), shows that the altar from Aswan could well have served the same purposes.[29] However, two features of the altar from Aswan are different. Firstly, its back has remained unfinished, as if it was intended to be put against a wall. Secondly, it contains a feature that the other altar does not have: a small ridge forming a circle on top of the altar (fig. 5). The two rectangular holes in the ridge do not seem to have been intended, for example, as attachments for a statue, but rather supported some construction, although it cannot be said what kind of construction. It is also not clear when the holes and the ridge were made, but this moment seems to have coincided with the decision to leave the back unfinished. Thus, there are two possibilities: either the altar was finished, except for the back, and used for an unknown purpose, after which it was reused unaltered in the church, or the altar was intended for use in the church from the start and the altar was finished for this very purpose. As the mouldings of the altar are distinctively Roman in style, it seems that the first option is preferable. In either case, however, the altar would have stood in front of the structure which closed off the sanctuary, either directly against it or, more probably, in front of it.

THE NICHES

The last category of evidence from the interior we shall discuss are the niches. There are two types of niches: both are rectangular in shape but some are bordered by cuttings for a wooden frame to which flaps locking the niches might have been attached. As temples usually did not contain wall niches, most of them seem to belong to the Christian period. Although the simple, rectangular niches, such as the one in the southern side room (J), may belong to the original temple interior, the ones with the frames undoubtedly belonged to the interior of the church: four on the south wall of the pillared hall (D), one in the east and westwalls of the same room and one in the sanctuary (F). These niches were used for utilitarian purposes, like storing the liturgical vessels and books.[30] As one of the niches is found in the sanctuary (F), this supports

29 Griffith, 1930: 127–128.
30 Grossmann, 2002b: 109–110, 184–186.

the suggestion made above that this room served the clergy in a practical way. At a later time, all niches were enlarged and some other, simpler niches were added for domestic purposes. Usage of the former sacred space as houses or perhaps stables also appears from holes in the walls which would have been intended for ropes to tether animals. Other holes could have served as a division of the space into smaller units by means of wooden screens.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the temple of Isis at Aswan was turned into a modest church or chapel in Late Antiquity, possibly in the sixth century (phase I). The main altar of the church stood in the pillared hall, thus confirming Bresciani's hypothesis. This situation conforms to other temples-turned-churches in Egypt and Nubia, and has parallels in nearby Philae (temple of Isis) and Kalabsha (temple of Mandulis), where churches were built in the *pronaos* rather than in the *naos*.[31] The small space of the pillared hall with wall paintings on both pillars and on both sides of the entrance to the former sanctuary, as well as the crosses which were incised, all point towards the main altar that was situated in front of the door to the closed-off sanctuary. The northern part of the temple was delineated by two altars, which originally may have stood in the two side rooms (H and J), while the main altar was separated from the laymen by a screen wall between the two pillars. The sanctuary and at least the southern side room, which were connected with an inner doorway, served as storage and changing rooms for the clergy, who also had at their disposal a series of niches added to the interior of the former temple (see figure 2, with a tentative reconstruction of the church's ground plan).

The analysis of the graffiti and architectural features also provided evidence about the later stages of the temple's reuse. From the ninth/tenth century onwards, the houses to the south of the temple started to encroach upon the building (phase II). Consequently, the floor level directly south of the temple rose considerably, as can be concluded from the Christian graffiti found there. Yet, the division of space in front of the temple was probably maintained longer and the floor level remained the same. However, even here the floor level rose at a later time. As can be seen from the position of the graffiti, the court in front of the temple and the inner rooms of the temple itself became filled with rubble and the main doors to the temple were blocked (phase III). This probably means that the building did not function as a church any more, although we cannot be certain, because Christian people still visited the building and made the provisional entrances in the façade. Perhaps the church was gradually abandoned in this phase while the people living around it remained Christian. In the last phase, the building was used for profane purposes as stables or houses (phase IV).

Whatever the last occupation of the former sacred space may have looked like, by the time of its rediscovery in 1871 the temple had been completely covered with rubble, and it would still be more than a century before a serious attempt was made to reconstruct aspects of the building's architectural history. This article has shown the potential of studying together all the graffiti and architectural features of a temple for such a reconstruction.

31 Grossmann, 2002b: 47–48.

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Figure 1. The altar block in the church of St Stephen, Philae.
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Figure 2. Key map to the temple of Isis at Aswan with a tentative reconstruction of (parts of) the Late Antique church (Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: fig. 7).

Figure 3. Map of the pavement of the temple of Isis at Aswan
(Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: fig. 3).

Figure 4. Removal of the altar from the wall by workmen in 2002.
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Figure 5. Drawing of the top of the altar (Von Pilgrim *et al.*, 2006: fig. 8).

Ramez Boutros

The Christian Remains inside the Temple of Dendara[1]

INTRODUCTION

The history of Christianity in Tentyris (Dendara) of Upper Egypt needs to be written. Throughout the twentieth century the only interest in archaeological evidence of Christianity in this site was limited to the building of the Basilica (fig. 1) discovered, by accident, at the end of the nineteenth century.[2] In contrast, there are more informative literary sources, in a fragmentary state, to testify to the role of this locality in the history of Christianity. The name of Dendara appears in correspondence addressed to, or written by Saint Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria before the middle of the fourth century.[3] Dendara is an Episcopal see that from that early date continued to assume this function throughout the Middle Ages until it's complete desertion towards the last decades of the fourteenth century.[4] For unknown reasons, documentary sources related to this site are relatively scarce;[5] hence it is difficult at this stage to firmly establish theories about the pattern of the religious activity that existed inside the *temenos* after the end of the Egyptian Cults (3rd/4th century) and even during the later periods (4th/14th century).[6] However, I will attempt to propose a few aspects of this activity by examining a number of sources. We cannot prove that the ancient quarters of the town of Dendara, occupied the entire space inside the *temenos* during this period. This fact cannot be established before archaeological investigations of the area are carried out. In the nineteen nineties, an archaeological

1 After this paper was presented at the First Annual Symposium of Coptic Studies in March 2008 at the University of Toronto, it was offered a second time in November 2008 to the members of the Archaeological Institute of America, Ottawa Society. I am most grateful to Professor Jitse Dijkstra, President of the Society, for his invitation and for all his valuable comments and suggestions in approaching this topic.

2 *Comité de Conservation*, 1900:75; see also Munier, 1940: 162.

3 Munier, 1943: 2. The name of Pachymēs, bishop of Tentyris, appears in AD325 in a correspondence sent by Meletius, bishop of Lycopolis to Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria. This correspondence contained a list of all the Egyptian bishops who adhered to Meletius's position regarding the opposition to the ease with which lapsed Christians re-entered the Church.

4 The reader will find in Timm, 1984:543–548, a presentation of the literary sources mentioning Dendara as an Episcopal See. In AD325 Tentyris was the See of the Meletian Bishop Pachymès: Munier,1943:2. Among those sources there is the correspondence of Athanasius sent to the Christians of Tentyris in the Easter Address.

5 It is quite possible that written material, ostracas and papyri, were extracted during the Temple's unearthing operation and are still unidentified.

6 Jarry, 1969:240–241; two Coptic ostracas found outside the Temple of Hathor. A Greek papyrus kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo dated from 527–565AD (Papyri Cairo Maspero, III: 67298) contains a contract of emphyteusis, between a certain Senouthes, clarissimus, and the "church of Tentyra".

team from the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo (IFAO) carried out a new survey of all the area enclosed in the mud-brick wall and all the outer surroundings. A new archaeological map was traced. Studies of ceramics collected from the ground surface and from the excavation areas inside and outside the *temenos* were also carried out.[7] All these works have undeniably added new archaeological evidence towards the comprehension of the type of occupation of the site during the Byzantine and Islamic periods.[8] Two spots, of particular interest for the history of Christianity, emerge in this archaeological map: a group of houses remaining on the western mud-brick wall, and a "Coptic cemetery" located south east of the temple enclosure outside the *temenos*.[9] These are potential future projects for archaeologists that will, undoubtedly add to the understanding of the site for the periods mentioned above and for which our knowledge is still limited.

In the coming pages I would like to present, yet another type of archaeological evidence that might add, a new witness to the Christianization of the site: the Christian graffiti engraved on the walls of different monuments inside the Temple of Dendara. Surprisingly, these marks escaped the curiosity of previous colleagues and scholars who worked in Dendara.[10] I would also like to present some notes on the graffiti found in the ancient Egyptian Temples of Thebes, which were converted into churches or were occupied by monastic settlements. It will be beneficial for the study of Christianity in Dendara to analyze how this phenomenon of graffiti is reproduced in similar religious and architectural contexts.

THE GRAFFITI

The graffiti of Dendara are mainly engraved on outer facades of the buildings, thus normal sunlight, sometimes at different times of the day, was adequate to be able to read them and make their facsimiles. Their total number comes to nearly eighty drawing, except some few travellers' names from the nineteenth century and other modern incisions that I did not take into account. Most of the graffiti depict crosses, boats, human and animal figures, and floral and geometrical ornaments. Some of these shapes are accompanied with Coptic inscriptions or Christian monograms, while a few others represent short Arabic texts. I had the opportunity to prepare a catalogue of this material, during my field missions to study the basilica.[11]

CROSSES

The cross is the most frequent sign among the graffiti of Dendara. Only three crosses were found inside the basilica. While most of the others are engraved on the northern wall of the southern portico of the Roman *mammisi* located immediately north of the basilica. A few crosses can be found in different parts of the temple. Those engraved inside the basilica have more archaic features. One of them, probably executed with sculpting tools reflects technique similar to the stone carvings of the basilica (fig. 2). Some crosses are engraved alone or accompanied with Coptic texts, or Greek abbreviations, such as the name of Jesus Christ

7 Marchand, 2007: 369–376.

8 Zignani and Laisney, 2001: 415–447.

9 Marchand, 2007: 369–376.

10 We have to bear in mind that the monuments inside the sacred space of the temple were submerged in a huge layer of debris at least until the end of the nineteenth century when the cleaning of the Egyptian Temples was carried out.

11 A complete catalogue of the graffiti will be included in the publication of "The architectural study of the Basilica of Dendara." The French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo assigned the publication of this project to the author of this article.

and "Victory" (IC XC - NIKA). In some cases a cross will appear as votive when it is engraved beside doors for protective reasons. Few crosses are drawn beside and on the frame of the door leading to the south portico of the Roman *mammisi*. This interpretation of crosses as protective signs near doors and windows has also been noticed in the hermitages of Esna.[12]

A composition of three crosses could evoke Golgotha. The one in the middle is larger and is ornamented with lamps.[13] One of the beautiful crosses is drawn on the Eastern Façade of the Hypostyle Hall of Hathor's Temple. This cross is represented in a tree shape and can be theologically linked to the lyrics of a hymn to the cross: "Peace to the Cross, tree of Paradise, its perfumed branches give life to everyone."[14] The level of this cross is quite high and might have been engraved in a period when the level of the debris in the eastern perambulatory of the Temple of Hathor was covering the original pavement.

BOATS

The most elaborated graffiti of boats are found on the external facade of the eastern wall of the sacred lake located west to the Temple of Hathor. Two of those boats measure approximately 80cm long. Two other small boats are engraved on the northern and southern portico of the Roman *mammisi* and on the northern façade of the Isis Temple. The one drawn on the southern portico of the Roman *mammisi* has a lotus flower end, and resembles more closely to ancient Egyptian boats.

Boat graffiti can be found in various contexts, however it must be noted that the interpretation in Christian art has been limited to the following: the ship is a symbol of the Christian church and symbolizes also the Christian community. In the monastic site of Bawit, a boat graffito was found with the following inscription beside it: "Father Cyriakos, father of the monastery." This Abbot was considered in this case the chief sailor of that monastic community represented by the ship.[15]

The boat can be a symbol of life, or life after death, as it appears on Coptic funerary tombstones.[16] In his study of the Christian graffiti in the temple of Abydos, Piankoff gathered religious texts offering different interpretations of the boat as a Christian symbol.[17] An interesting interpretation may be found when he quotes a passage from the Arabic Life of Saint Pachomius stating that the deceased are conveyed on boats to the "Land of Rest":

> "In accordance with the greatness of the dead who have pleased God, the Saints and the Just go to meet them on boats or mounted on spiritual horses."

12 Sauneron, 1972, I: 64.

13 For elaborated designs of crosses decorated with lamps, see: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1989: 76; Sauneron, 1972, I: 72, Figures 39 and 40.

14 Miquel .,1993: 137; Figure 67. For the "Cross Tree of Life", see also De Fenoyl,1960: 67–68.

15 Clédat, 1906, chapelle xxvi:139, Figure 61; see also chapel n°11, page 22, figures 11, 28, 45.

16 Attala, 1989, tombstone n°8574:45. This steleconserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo depicts two rows of ornaments: the upper row contains a cross, flanked by two ankh signs; on the lower row is a boat, where mast and sails depict Christ's monogram "IX". The same stele is in Crum, 1902, stele n°8574, plate xxx, 12, note 1.

17 Piankoff, 1958–1960: 137–177; Figures 2 and 6.

Other boat drawings in red ink can still be seen on the western wall of the entrance to the Southern Chapel of Amon-Re in of the Temple of Hatchepsut in Dayr El Bahari. This Temple was occupied by a monastic community between the fifth and the ninth century, under the name of Monastery of Phoibamon.[18]

In the monastic site of Kellia on the western side of the Delta, many boats graffiti were sketched on the walls of the hermitages. There, the boats appear beside paintings of processional crosses, which was the most popular motif represented in Kellia. It is quite possible that pilgrims added these sketches, as the monastic site of Kellia was frequently visited by them.[19] In Esna two graffiti of boats were found together on the eastern wall of the hermitage n° 1. This graffiti can be compared to the one found on the northern wall of the southern portico of the Roman mammisi.[20] In pilgrimage sites, graffiti are like an ex-voto left to testify the pilgrims' appreciation for the favours they have received. Boat graffiti evoke the memory of the trip and are engraved in proximity of the sacred building or inside the sanctuaries.[21] Some sanctuaries of Coptic saints, or *Mausolea* of Muslim *'Awliyā'* located on the Nile bank, or close to it, were renowned as protective shrines from Navigation difficulties. Sailors would visit them, leave an ex-voto, or simply draw a ship on the wall and depart assured.[22] In Dendara several Osirian Feasts involving the processional boat took place inside the temple and particularly in the sacred lake and in the chapel of the sacred boat.[23]

HUMAN FIGURES

The majority of human figures found in Dendara's graffiti represent *orantes,* the praying posture, with the exception of one figure engraved on the nothern wall of the southern portico of the Roman *mammisi*. This figure represents a person holding a staff in his right hand surmounted by a cross, while he seems to carry a circular object (crown?) in his left hand. This graffito is engraved almost two meters above the pavement level. Although very primitive in its outlines, it remains particularly interesting as it represents a different gesture from the usual *orantes* we find in Dendara. The majority of *orantes* are small in size (10-15 cm), except for the one described above and another one engraved on the Eastern external wall of the sacred lake. All figures are depicted frontally.

The representation of *orantes* is quite frequent in the monastic and anchoritic context. In the hermitages of the Western desert of Esna (sixth century), two *orantes* are drawn on the wall beside a monk's bed built with mud brick.[24] Another similar *orans*, found in the Ramesseum by Guy Lecuyot, is elevating a staff in his

18 Godlewski, 1986: 106, n°50, length 86cm; width 76cm. Godlewski gives more references with comparative examples. Quibell, 1909:13, Figure 3, room n°782; Griffith, 1927:3-4, plates: LXIII, LXVI; Fakhry, 1951, Figures 44, 69, 93, 94.

19 Miquel, 1993: 168-173; figures 81,82, 83 and 84.

20 Sauneron, 1972,I: 78; the Eastern wall of the oratory of the hermitage n° 1, Figure 50.

21 Maraval, 1985: 232-233.

22 The walls of the central sanctuary inside the Church of Apa Hur Sawada, located opposite Al Minya, were covered by boat graffiti. Apa Hur (Abāhūr in Arabic) and his disciple Apa Fis (Abū Fīs, Būfīs in Arabic), both anchorites of the fifth century lived on this mountain. Apa Fis was known as Sailors protector. The mausoleum of Al Sheikh 'Uweis in Burumbul contains also ex-voto of boats, and Sheikh Abū Al Nūr, north of Al Minya was known for the same virtues.

23 Cauville , 1993: 79-172.

24 Sauneron, 1972, I: plate cxii.

right hand.[25] The *orans* posture is well known in early Christian funerary Art. A remarkable high relief in the *Malcove collection* depicts a child in the *orans* posture holding in both hands Christian signs.[26]

A well-known wall painting found in the Tomb of Theodosia in Antinoopolis is another example of the funerary art with *orans*. Theodosia is depicted standing in between Saint Mary, a local saint, on her left, and saint Colluthus on her right, who appears in replacement of the psychopompe angel that was supposed to accompany the dead on his eternal trip to the other world.[27] This function was attributed to saints, and Colluthus as local saint of Antinoopolis was quite popular in the early fifth century. Palladius in his *Lausiac History* mentions the story of a Virgin of Antinoopolis and Colluthus the Martyr and how she prayed in his Martyrium and asked his help on her eternal journey.[28]

A particular *orans* of Dendara deserves a closer look (fig. 3). It is the one engraved on the eastern wall of the sacred lake, south of the two graffiti of boats. This *orans* has a posture comparable to those of the hermits, wearing a simple tunic tightened at the waist, which looks like two opposed quadrangular shapes. One of the Pierpont Morgan Library Coptic leaves coming from Dayr al Ḥāmūlī in al Fayyum, depicts Apa Papnoute, the anchorite of Tentyris, saluting Saint Pteleme. Apa Papnoute is depicted in a similar feature, wearing a tight girdle around his waist.[29] It is quite possible that this graffito evokes the memory of an anchorite (or anchorites) who dwelled inside the temenos or in a place close to the temple.

ANIMAL FIGURES

The animal figures represent a wide variety: horses, lions and other quadrupeds.[30] The most elaborated is the graffito of a lion engraved on the northern wall of the southern portico of the Roman *mammisi*. The size of this lion is relatively big, compared to other animal graffiti engraved on the walls of the temple[31] (L. 45cm; W. 35,5cm;)(fig. 4). In the hermitages of Esna there is a large number of birds, mainly doves and peacocks depicted in an affronted posture of both sides of a vase or a chalice.[32] A hyena and a gazelle were found in hermitage n°3. In addition to their possible symbolic meaning, they evoke the animals that anchorites meet in the neighbouring environment. [33] The animal's graffiti in Kellia are more diversified and can be very elaborated in their execution.[34]

25 Lecuyot, 2000: 131, Figure 6.
26 Campbell, 1997: 97-98.
27 Capuani, 1999: 249, Figure 99.
28 Palladius, 1964: 141.
29 Depuydt, 1993: "Pteleme Saluting Papnoute", plate 18.
30 Animal graffiti are particularly numerous in Dendara compared to the other sites of comparison in this article.
31 The lion appears quite frequently in Coptic wooden and stone carvings, especially in hunting scenes; see Gabra and Eaton-Krauss,2007: 180, lion attacking an antelope, inventory n° 10519. The lion depicted on the Roman 's wall is part of a bigger composition containing multiple crosses and inscriptions.
32 Sauneron, 1972, I: 73; plate xxvii, Figure 44.
33 Sauneron, 1972, I: 79, Figures 51 and 52; hyena and a gazelle (or a goat).
34 Miquel, 1993: 166-67: Figures 79 and 80 (lions); 170: Figure 82 (monster?); 174-75: Figure 85 (hare); Figure 86 (gazelle).

FLORAL AND GEOMETRICAL ORNAMENTS

The floral motives depicted in different parts of the temple represents stylised leaves. Branch of pomegranate tree chiselled on the wall of the *mammisi* of Nectanebo, between the Egyptian inscriptions, copies floral ornaments that can be found inside the basilica.[35] The pomegranate has various interpretations in Christian art.[36] The following interpretation suggested by Sheila Campbell is interesting: "the marvellous fruit brought back from paradise by holy men (anchorites) who, through their faith, were translated physically to paradise and from which they returned with pieces of fruit of exceptional size and properties."[37] One of the Kellia niches painted with a shell shape has, instead of the usual cross, a pomegranate in its centre.[38]
Some geometrical ornaments with straight lines and triangles constitute very simple patterns, like the plaited cross[39], also very common in Coptic art. One of these motifs is incised in relief on one of the sphinxes at the entrance of the Roman *mammisi*, two other plaited crosses are carved on a long block, coming from the construction of the basilica, now deposited on it's western side.

COPTIC INSCRIPTIONS

A Coptic inscription incised on the western wall of the basilica's northern entrance mentions a group of names among them a certain Gennadios, presbyter.[40] We do not know if he was a local priest or simply a visitor. On the northern wall of the southern portico of the Roman *mammisi* monograms and short inscriptions carry the name of the deacon Theodorus.

ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS

Two Arabic inscriptions can be seen on the embrasures of the main northern door of the temple mud brick enclosure. One can be translated as follow: "By God they brought the Conquest when they travelled in the desert". The other inscription recalls the visit of a certain Mufaḍal who came to Dendara. He implores God to accord his pardon to all the Muslims and praises the Prophet Muḥammad. This inscription is written in Kufic script.

NOTES ON TECHNICAL ASPECT

The majority of the graffiti fall into three different types of execution: 1) graffiti created with repeated notches and this type consist of small dimples created on the stone surface by using a harder stone or perhaps

35 The pomegranate is quite common in Coptic stone and woodcarvings.

36 Ferguson, 1961: 37. In Christian symbolism, the pomegranate as a rule alludes to the Church because of the inner unity of countless seeds in one and the same fruit. In pagan mythology, it was an attribute of Proserpina and symbolized her periodical return to earth in the spring. From this pagan symbolism of the return of spring and rejuvenation of the earth was derived the second symbolism of the pomegranate in Christian art, that of hope in immortality and of resurrection. The pomegranate, because of its many seeds, was also a symbol of fertility.

37 Campbell, 1997: 98.

38 Clédat, 1999: 225, Figures 224-225, the pomegranate is carved on a frieze alternating with another fruit (lemon?).

39 Gabra and Eaton-Krauss, 2007: 63, cornice block with a shell and looped cross, inventory n° 5970.

40 Gennadios (Γενναδιος) is an Ancient Greek name, which was possibly derived from Greek γενναδας (gennadas) "noble, generous". This name is attested in the *onomastica* of Upper Egypt, see: Till, 1962: 89.

a metal tool. The shape of the graffito is rendered by grooves in size 5 to 10mm wide and 1 to 5mm deep. In some cases blows by these tools can go outside of the design lines and disturb the reading of the drawing. 2) Graffiti created by incision. This category is less frequently represented than the previous method. 3) The chisel cut techniques, is fairly rare in Dendara, and appears only in two cases inside the basilica nave. It is quite possible that these graffiti are the work of a professional stone carver who used his tools to create them during the decoration of the basilica architectural stones.

OTHER CHRISTIAN REMAINS IN THE TEMPLE OF DENDARA

Similarly to other towns within the vicinity of an ancient Egyptian Temple, it is quite possible that Tentyris continued to survive in the same location during the Byzantine and Arab periods.[41] Unfortunately a huge amount of archaeological evidence has been eliminated and disappeared forever during the major excavations carried out during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.[42] In an old photographs taken to the site by Maxime du Camp around 1852 (fig. 5), one can see remains of houses on the roof of the temple of Hathor, and others occupying large surfaces between the monuments inside the *temenos*.[43] Today, few surviving houses can still be seen on the western mud brick enclosure of the Temple. Other houses have been unearthed on a lower level close to the southwest angle of the temple.[44] No chronological stratigraphy whatsoever has been established for the occupation of the space inside the *temenos*, especially for the period between the end of celebration of Egyptian feasts inside the temple and the attribution of the space of the *temenos* to the Christian cult.[45]

However, successive scholars utilized the study of pottery shards collected from the ground surface, which has been disturbed, to suggest a horizontal plan of occupation of the site, which expanded from the Old Kingdom to the Mamluk periods. The ruins of the basilica[46] were partially unearthed towards the end of the nineteenth century by peasants looking for *sebakh* (organic residues) that they used in fertilizing their agricultural lands. Father Michel Jullien, a Jesuit priest with passion for Coptic Monuments who visited the site at that time, gives an account of that discovery.[47] The basilica is undoubtedly built over the spot of an ancient monument(s), parts of which foundation(s) were explored during the excavation I conducted inside the nave.[48] This church has a basilica plan, composed of a central nave surrounded by aisles on three sides. It has two entrances leading to a narthex that opens with three doors on the congregational space. The suggested

41 This assumption cannot be firmly established before excavation of the houses on the western mud-brick wall and most of the zones between the monuments inside the *temenos*.

42 Mariette-bey, 1870: plate I. The map of the town shows ruins of walls inside the *temenos* and outside the mud-brick wall of the temple.

43 Frith, 1863, plate 16: Upper Egypt, Great Temple of Dendera, general view. This photograph is taken by Maxime du Camp in 1852.

44 The Inspectorate of Quena unearthed these houses in the nineteen nineties. The report may be consulted in the office of the Inspectorate of Quena.

45 Cauville and Gasse, 1988: 25, only one Coptic *ostracon* was found in that site.

46 The church was erected between two mammisis: to the north, the Roman mammisi constructed under Trajan (reign AD98–117), to the south the other mammisi first founded by Nectanebo I (reign BC380-362).

47 Munier, 1940: 162.

48 Marchand, 2007: 369-376, studied only the amphoras coming from that site.

dates for construction of this church are the end of the fifth and the second half of thesixth centuries.[49] It also seems it was not the only church inside the temenos. Father Jullien who arrived at the site shortly after hearing about the discovery of the basilica, states that he saw the remains of another church inside the large Hypostyle hall of Hathor's temple.[50] We should add the numerous architectural blocks, with ornaments and style easily identified as "Coptic" are scattered in different corners of the site. Their location rarely denotes the building from which they come from.[51] However many of them undoubtedly belong to the basilica. Other architectural elements, essentially columns and capitals (fig. 7) of different styles and material from this period are found scattered inside the temenos.[52] Other evidence is found in the remains of the Coptic cemetery located outside the temple wall on the South Eastern direction.[53] The date was determined on the basis of the pottery found on the surface.

OTHER ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TEMPLES IN THE THEBAN REGION WITH CHRISTIAN REMAINS

The study of the graffiti of Dendara should not be carried out without explaining its archaeological and historical contexts.[54] As I mentioned above the archaeological context in Dendara, cannot be fully interpreted, until the excavation of the urban remains of the town is carried out. Nevertheless comparing the site of Dendara with other similar locations in the region might provide us with a clearer picture about it's urban pattern.

Alexander Badawy differentiates between the urban pattern of metropoles, the larger towns and the category of Coptic towns.[55] The metropoles and larger towns were obviously products of Hellenistic and Roman urbanism, while the Coptic towns, which are settlements built inside the Egyptian temple enclosures,

49 The first plan sketched by Somers Clarke show only the northern wall of the basilica: Clarke, 1912: 140, plate XLI. Monneret de Villard has also drawn a plan after the church was completely uncovered: De Villard, 1925, 47–49; plan of the church, Figure 52. Peter Grossman suggests the second half of the sixth century, see Grossman, 1991vol. 3: 691-691; and the early sixth century in Grossman, 2002: 443.

50 Father Jullien witnessed seeing the remains of a church inside the large Hypostyle hall of Hathor's temple. If this church really existed, its traces, today, have been erased completely. The pavement of the Eastern part of the Roman mammisi has also the traces of triple sanctuary apses that have been interpreted by Peter Grossman as follow: "The stones required for vaulting (the sanctuary of the basilica) were cut in the neighboring Roman *mammisi* where today a drawing of the tri-conch is preserved on the floor": cf. De Villard, 1925: 49. This supposition can be easily accepted because of the similarity of the dimensions between the traces and the actual built apses of the basilica. However one can also argue that the northern wall of the southern portico of the Roman *mammisi* having the largest concentration of Christian graffiti can be an indication for the presence of another church inside the Roman *mammisi*, which now does not exist.

51 Some fragments of granite columns, with a size close to those of the basilica, are probably taken from that building. It can still be seen in the streets of the actual village of Dendara located on the Nile bank few kilometres north to the Temple.

52 One can see granite columns, east of the western mud-brick enclosure, with diameters slightly bigger than those of the basilica, but certainly with a Roman, or Coptic style of cutting.

53 Zignani and Laisney, 2001: 415-447.

54 Dijkstra, 2008. Jitse Dijkstra has created a model to study the conversion of a religious space from Paganism to Christianity, by combining a wide range of data.

55 Badawy, 1978.

and were inhabited by the Christian population, could hardly claim any foreign influence in the urban design. Dendara seems to fall into the same category and has probably followed the same pattern of development. Another good example that has been fully excavated and studied in depth is the town of Djimé in Medinet Habu; however the reasons for its abandonment remain unclear.

DJIMÉ INSIDE THE TEMPLE OF RAMSSES III AT MEDINET HABU

The mortuary temple of Ramsses III at Medinet Habu, western Thebes had a long and continuous urban occupation from the Ramessid period. The first settlers built houses by the end of the reign of Ramsses XI, when the temple was partly devastated. Houses were built outside the temple, then within the *temenos*. The debris from these settlements formed distinct occupational layers. Then the Coptic town of Djimé was built over the late Roman one, even spreading outside the enclosure walls about 2.5 or 4 metres above the Ramessid level, with blocks of narrow, tall multi-storied, contiguous houses abutting against one another back to back, with narrow streets (1.5-1.8m) branching off into still narrower alleys (0.95m), some ending in cul-de-sacs. Three churches were found in Djimé, two inside the *temenos* and one outside.

The most important of the three locations, is the great five-aisled basilica that once occupied the second temple court. This church probably belongs to the fifth century.[56] Another basilica, located in front of the fortified east gate of the enclosure Wall, was more modest and is clearly of later date (end of the 6th century). The third one is a small church located to the north outside the actual temple area of Madinat Habu. For unknown reasons, the settlement of Djimé was abandoned in the eighth or ninth century AD[57]. That date of abandonment corresponds to the one suggested by Godlewski for the Monastery of Phoibamon in Dayr El Bahari.

THE TEMPLE OF DAYR AL MEDINA IN WESTERN THEBES

A small monastic community occupied the temple of Hathor at Dayr Al Medina in western Thebes. As testified by several inscriptions, part of the temple was transformed into a church dedicated to Apa Isidorus, the martyr.[58] A small cemetery was found to the north of the temple containing eleven tombs. Several indices indicate that this monastery was flourishing at the same period as the Dayr Epiphanius, located in the Tomb of Daga few hundred meters to the north of the same mountain, around the seventh century and even lasted longer than the latter.[59] The Coptic inscriptions drew the attention of various scholars of the 19th and 20th century.[60] Heurtel, editor of a book on Coptic graffiti, suggests a chronology of these marks. The monks, or at least some of them, must have been weavers or tailors, which was also a very common profession among the anchorites of the western Thebes.[61] According to Bruyère, the temple and its surroundings, before the Christian period, were occupied by civic dwellers, as was the temple of Medinet Habu. He has also noted that the *temenos* was occupied with mud brick constructions, houses, kitchens and grain silos. He believes that

56 Grossmann, 2002: 455–457.

57 Grossman, 1991: 1496–1497.

58 Heurtel, 2004: 5.

59 Winlock and Crum,1926.

60 Heurtel, 2004: 1–2. Chantal Heurtel gives a brief history of the successive scholars who studied the Coptic graffiti of this temple.

61 On the facade of the ancient temple engraved instructions for the dimensions of various monastic garments see: Heurtel, 2004: .

the church of Saint Isidore existed since AD515-540. Heurtel argues that the first priest of this church did practice his ministry before AD630-640. In any case, and according to the graffiti, this church continued to function until the middle of the eighth century.[62]

THE RAMESSEUM[63]

Guy Lecuyot points out in his study of the Ramesseum in the Coptic period, the presence of numerous graffiti on the walls and columns of the temple. He has documented up to two hundred ninety seven graffiti easily attributed to this period. Most of these engravings are located in the Hypostyle hall (two hundred and fifty only in this space). The majority of the graffiti are crosses, numbering two hundred and six. He noted that the concentration of graffiti at the entrance to the sacred boat hall is an indication of the presence of a church.[64] Leucuyot concludes that in spite of the presence of all those Christian remains, one cannot confidently suggest any civic or roganized religious occupation of the Ramesseum.[65] He believes that the Hypostyle hall of that temple was converted to a small chapel or an oratory, rather than a church.

THE MONASTERY OF SAINT PHOIBAMON IN DAYR AL BAHARI

Coptic graffiti and drawings were found preserved on the walls of the temple of Hatshepsut in Dayr Al Bahari. All the monastic buildings were removed, without documentation in the second half of the nineteenth century, when A. Mariette and E. Naville, uncovered the temple of Hatshepsut.[66] Włodzimierz Godlewski had to consult archival descriptions from travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when he carried out his most valuable virtual reconstruction of that Monastery. Dayr Apa Phoibammon in Dayr Al Bahri was erected on the uppermost platform of the temple and over the northwestern part of the middle platform, which during the Coptic period was buried under debris and sand as high as the level of pavement of the upper portico. The office of Bishop Abraham (AD590-620), apparently the first abbot and founder of that monastery, was in that place. The date given to the founding of the monastery is the end of the sixth century. The monastery flourished during the seventh and first half of the eighth centuries. The last documents connected with this monastery belong to the end of the eighth century. At that time, which was during the revolt in Upper Egypt against Abbasid power, the monastery undoubtedly was deserted. Dayr Al Bahri was visited after its abandonment during the tenth and eleventh centuries, as it is attested by Coptic graffiti preserved inside the Hatshepsut chapel.[67] For the site the most important literary evidence comes from the wide variety of its documents.

KARNAK IN THE CHRISTIAN PERIOD

Jean Jacquet describing the Christian remains in Karnak temple has noted the following: "The domain of Amon then covered 30 hectares, of which eight were built over. It was in these abandoned and partly

62 Heurtel, 2004: 85.

63 Lecuyot, 2000: 121-134.

64 Lecuyot, 2000: 124.

65 It is quite difficult to accept this assumption especially with the high number of graffiti discovered.

66 Godlewski, 1986: 8-10, gives, among other references, an exhaustive bibliography of all archaeological intervention on the site.

67 Godlewski, 1986: 78.

ruined monuments that the Christian population established itself from the fourth century, remaining no doubt until the eighth, after which it gradually declined. We find this situation in all the other great Theban temples."[68] Jacquet adds that in addition to the archaeological investigations, Coptic documents found in Karnak (Apé) or in Djimé, allows us to conclude that there were at Karnak at least three churches and three monasteries.[69] He deplores the impact of the cleaning of the temples that has eliminated forever all the remains of the Christian and Arabic periods.[70]

EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERARY SOURCES ABOUT DENDARA — THE WRITINGS OF ATHANASIUS

Athanasius, the archbishop of Alexandria was in correspondence with the Bishops of Tentyris.[71] In the first quarter of the fourth century, Serapion, bishop of Tentyris, asked Athanasius to ordain Apa Pachomius superior of all the monks of the Diocese of Nikentwre.[72] In AD325 Tentyris was also the See of Pachymès, one of the Meletian bishops, who were known because of their opposition to Athanasius. It is worth noting that Athanasius kept an eye on Tentyris and had a special interest in destabilizing the presence of Meletians in that town.

COPTIC HAGIOGRAPHY

Coptic hagiography has preserved two main pieces about early Christianity in Dendara, namely the martyrdom of Apa Papnoute the anchorite, and the martyrdom of Saint Ptolemy son of Nestorius, one of the Tentyris's notables. Both natives of this town, and both lived in the same period. One hundred and forty six person were martyred with Papnoute, followed by 400 inhabitants of Tentyris, in a massive act against Christianization of the town.

THE MARTYRDOM OF PAPNOUTE

Saint Papnoute of Dendara (Coptic Calendar 20th Parmoute) was crucified on a palm tree together with 146 persons who were executed during the persecution of Diocletian, most probably between AD303-305. A fragment of Papnoute's Passion in Greek was discovered in Oxhyrynchos on a papyrus dating back to the 5th century. Another incomplete Coptic Bohairic version, based on a Greek fragment, is known too. A fragment in Coptic Sa'idic was found among the manuscripts of Dayr Al Bala'yzah, and dates back to the sixth or seventh centuries. The complete text was found in a manuscript of the tenth century reproduced in Constantinople by the Byzantine Church.[73]

All those literary pieces describe how Papnoute started his martyrdom path, the different cycles of his persecution and how and where he died. Papnoute was originally a hermit living in the desert behind the temple. The final scene of his martyrdom takes place in front of the temple Gate. The text describes Papnoute's

68 Jacquet, 1991: 1392.

69 Jacquet, 1991: 1392-1394.

70 Jacquet, 1991: 1392.

71 Camplani, 1989.

72 Nikentwre is one of the Coptic names of Tentyris. This information is mentioned in the Life of Saint Pachomius, the founder of cenobitic Monasticism in Tabennse.

73 Papaconstantinou, 2001: 165–166.

influence on the elite of the town, which helped them later on to convert to Christianity, thus leading to their martyrdom. The narrative of Papnoute combines two characteristics: 1) Papnoute setting up the way of anchoritism in that area by his settlement in the desert behind the temple; and, 2)the first Christian martyr of this town.[74] In both cases he is presented in the literature as a pioneer. There is no mention about Pachomian monasticism in Dendara in this text. The martyrdom of Papnoute is written soon after his death. His cult expanded widely later among the anchoritic groups in Dayr Al Bala'yzah, Hermonthis and Esna.[75]

THE MARTYRDOM OF PTOLEMY

Ptolemy the martyr was the son of Nestorius, an elite citizen of Dendara (Coptic calendar 11 Kiyahk). Hearing about Papnoute and his ascetic life, he went to meet him in the desert behind the Temple. Influenced by Papnoute's charisma, Ptolemy became Christian. Papnoute advised him to go to Antinoopolis to pronounce his faith in front of the imperial representative. He was executed in a place named Ṭūḫ Al Ḫayl in Middle Egypt.[76]

THE MARTYRDOM OF THE 400 PERSONS FROM THE TOWN OF DENDARA

A very short notice in the Arabic Synaxarium (Coptic calendar 15 Pashons) mentions the martyrdom of 400 person from Dendara: "On that day were martyred 400 persons of the town of Dendara, after enduring numerous tortures. That was at the end of the reign of Diocletian."[77] The last presence for Diocletian in Egypt was in September AD298. This date does not correspond to the period of his persecutions. Diocletian resigned on May 1st, 305AD.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN FEASTS CHRISTIANIZED IN DENDARA

One of the major Egyptian feasts celebrated at Dendara was the Kiyahk Mysteries. Yuhanna Youssef has pointed out that this feast was Christianized to commemorate the martyrdom of Saint Ptolemy of Dendara (Coptic Calendar 11 Kiyahk). His name is similar to Ptolemy XII, the founder of Hathor's temple.[78] The memory of this martyr, although found in numerous Coptic Sa'idic texts did not survive for long time after.

THE NAVIGATION FESTIVAL OF HET-HERT IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR (HATHUR) (THE NAVIGATION OF THE SACRED BOAT)

If we go back to the late Roman period, at the time that preceded the complete Christianization of the site, several Egyptian feasts were celebrated inside the Temple of Dendara. One of these feasts is that of the Het-Hert that consisted of rituals and processions between the Great Temple of Hathor and other monuments inside the *temenos*. The procession of the sacred boat started from inside the temple and went to the Chapel

74 In the immediate proximity behind the temple lies the necropolis of Dendara from the Old Kingdom that was excavated by Petrie. It is quite possible that Papnoute lived in one of the underground structures. I have seen structures further south with potsherds on the ground surface. Unfortunately with the rapid growth of agricultural development these remains must by now have been destroyed.

75 Papaconstantinou, 2001: 165–166.

76 Atiya, 1991: 1558.

77 Basset, 1922: 386.

78 Youssef, 1990: 147.

of the Boat, where certain rituals were carried out. The sacred boat was taken inside the sacred lake for the feast of the Het-Hert. The sacred lake, inside the Egyptian temples, symbolized the waters of the primordial ocean. This lake was used by ancient Egyptian priests in the purification of souls, and draws its water from the Nile. It was indeed a holy spot in the temple and the presence of numerous Christian graffiti on its walls indicates its use for a Christian ritual purpose.

THE THANKSGIVING FOR THE INUNDATION

Another procession takes place during the celebration of thanksgiving for the inundation. Hathor would give her approval in front of a symbol of the new Nile. The ceremony is given in the royal boat chapel beside the sacred lake on the 21st of Tubah (29th January), which corresponds also to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary according to Coptic Church tradition. The commemoration of Saint Mary by the Coptic Church is a feast that goes back to the fourth century. Around the fifth century or later in the sixth century, the 21st of Tubah only commemorated Mary's Dormition, whereas the Assumption of Mary was celebrated on the 16th of Misra (August 22nd), similarly to most Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Coptic Church still celebrates both feasts on these dates.

THE EPIPHANY 11TH OF TUBAH (OSIRIS FEAST)

The Epiphany is yet another popular feast celebrated by the Copts in the same month on the 11th of Tubah (19th January). This could be a memory of an ancient Egyptian legend, when people re-enacted the search of Isis in the waters of the Nile at the place where Seth killed her husband Osiris and scattered his limbs. In those days, Egyptians illuminated the Nile bank and plunged into its waters.[79]

On that day, the Christians believe that they are purified from sins by the holy water in a way equivalent to baptism. Under the early Muslim rule, this feast was celebrated with great pomp. The Muslim historian al-Masʿūdī gives a lively description of the occasion under Iḫšīd Muḥammad ibn Tubġ in the year AD941. The banks of the Nile were illuminated by endless torches, and the Egyptians, both Copts and Muslims, emerged in their best apparel. Many plunged into the Nile in the belief that its sanctified water would heal them from all illness. Some Coptic Churches still have a basin called Al Maġṭas (Epiphany tank) that was used for the same purpose.[80]

CONCLUSION

Several observations can help sketch an approach for the study of the Christianization of the Temple of Dendara. Early monasticism was established on the site in two ways: 1) individual anchorites represented in the person of Papnoute; 2) against the official Pachomian order established by the Church authority, represented by Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria, and would have taken place in the fourth century. The life and martyrdom of Apa Papnoute left a profound memory in the hagiography. The spreading of his cult in the region, probably known as early as the fifth century, is a strong witness to the importance of his memory. So far, none of the graffiti found inside the temple indicate any link with the cult of Papnoute or Ptolemy. However, the *orans* engraved on the eastern wall of the sacred lake and the one in the southern portico of the Roman mammisi, evoke memories of anchorites and martyrs in Dendara.

79 Basilios (Archbishop), 1991: 1103.

80 Grossmann, 1991, vol.3: 968.

The sites of the Theban region, brought here for comparison, show several elements in common, most importantly the date of their decline witnessed throughout the archaeological remains, towards the end of the eighth century. A major event affected the survival of Christian institutions and precipitated the decline and desertion of the Coptic towns. The political situation in Egypt throughout the eighth century and beginning of the ninth century was very unstable. If this event is the one suggested by Godlewski as being the suppression of the Coptic revolts in Upper Egypt in AD782, then Dendara would be no exception and would have been very well implicated in these actions.[81] This major political uprising in Upper Egypt was severely repressed by the new Abbassid sovereigns. The two Arabic graffiti found at the northern gate fit perfectly in this historical context. Although the pottery shards found on the ruins of the group houses remaining on the western mud-brick enclosure date to the 13th/14th century, only an excavation of that zone can determine the ultimate date of the site desertion.

Whenever there was a monastic community there was a source of income and an engagement in the local economy. Will we be fortunate enough to one day find the archive of a monastic settlement in Dendara? Only future excavations can answer that question. Nevertheless, we can suggest a type of occupation of Dendara after the fourth century, with a pre-existing civic population from the late Roman period that was succeeded by a settlement similar to the Coptic towns in Thebes. A dense urbanization inside the temple enclosure, with both, civic and possibly small monastic groups could very well have co-existed in the same proximity.[82]

81 Godlewski, 1986: 77.
82 Heurtel, 2004.

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Figure 1. The basilica of Dendara seen from the roof of the Roman *mammisi.*
© Ramez Boutros.

Figure 2. Graffito of cross on the western wall of the return aisle inside the basilica.
© Ramez Boutros.

Figure 3. Graffito of an *orans* engraved on the eastern wall of the sacred lake. © Ramez Boutros.

Figure 4. Graffito of a lion engraved on the northern wall of the southern portico of the Roman *mammisi*. © R. Boutros.

Figure 5. Temple of Dendera, general view taken by Maxime du Camp in 1852. Note the remains on the roof of the temple (Frith, 1863: plate 16.)

Figure 6. Map of the ruins of Dendara (Mariette-bey, 1870: plate I.)

Figure 7. Fragments of architectural elements found scattered inside the *temenos* of the temple of Dendara

Ian Begg

Excavating the Churches of Tebtunis

The site of Graeco-Roman Tebtunis lies in the desert just south of the cultivated fields of the Fayyum depression south west of Cairo. First excavated for one season in 1899 by the papyrologists Grenfell and Hunt for Mrs William Randolph Hearst, an Italian mission unearthed extensive remains of the Graeco-Roman sanctuary town during the 1930s, and the French Institute resumed digging at the site in 1988. This paper is a preliminary overview of the churches, especially a painted one cleared in 1933, for which recently discovered unlabeled photos in Padua and a notebook at Trent University in Canada will facilitate a detailed report. The site may be identified with Byzantine Theodosiopolis in the fifth century and Touton in the tenth century.

At the end of December 1899, "a week was devoted to clearing out an early Coptic church with interesting paintings and inscriptions on the walls, a process which owing to the cracked condition of the building was attended with some danger, but which was ultimately accomplished without accident." That is virtually all that Grenfell and Hunt tell us about this church. However, a small notebook, curiously labeled Crum Notebook 67, with Coptic inscriptions and several photos, was discovered at the Griffith Institute in Oxford a few years ago and, together with a few more photos at the Egypt Exploration Society in London, were published by the Coptologist C. C. Walters in the 1989 *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. To this can be added a few items now in the Hearst Museum at Berkeley labeled as having come from a Coptic tomb conceivably in the church: faience, wooden crosses, bead and shells, and silver earrings.

The wall paintings are of interest, though the structure of the building itself is unclear. The painting in the apse was unusual in portraying Athanasius between Saints Antony and Pakhome, instead of the Virgin Mary. On the west wall of a so-called "second room" with a central colonnade of Egyptian columns were two mounted saints symmetrically arranged on either side of the colonnade. St. Theodore *Stratelates* saves two children from a serpent and possibly St. George is trampling a human-headed serpent Mastema. Arabic calligraphy was decoratively painted on various parts of both saints. A Coptic inscription in the notebook dates the donation of the paintings to AD953, presumed by Walters to apply to most of the paintings. He considers the portrayal of the distinctively Egyptian *Punishment of Sinners* to be stylistically poorer and later by about a half century, and compares some decorative details to those at St. Anthony's monastery in the Red Sea Mountains of the Eastern Desert. It should be noted that there is no reference among the exiguous notes to any layers covering any of these paintings. Walters also believes that the paintings thematically belong to a monastic complex.

After three decades of papyrus looting, excavations at Tebtunis were resumed by an Italian mission led in 1930 by Carlo Anti of the University of Padua, and his field director was Gilbert Bagnani. After an extremely productive season uncovering the Graeco-Roman sanctuary in 1931, Bagnani recorded in his diary for Thursday 26 March that he started to dig a Coptic church, which he considered a delightful change from their usual routine. On Wednesday 4 April, however, he wrote: "We finished the two Coptic churches I was keen about and have got some very good capitals from one of them. There were a number of inscriptions of Arabic in one of them which made us think that at some time they had perhaps been turned into mosques, but we had Nallino down the other day to copy them and he said they were all Christian, and probably of about the 12th and 13th centuries."

In a 1932 summary of architecture and brick sizes, the Director of the dig Carlo Anti of the University of Padua referred to "older walls of the Coptic church V-VI cent AD" with bricks 12 cm. by 24 cm., and by 7cm., and "more recent walls of the same church IX-X cent AD" with bricks 11cm. by 22cm., and by 5 cm.

Professor Peter Grossmann of the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo has recently published plans made by the excavation architect Fausto Franco of each of these two churches courtesy of Prof Luigi Polacco of the Archaeological Institute of the University of Padua. An unpublished manuscript and a few photos also survive in Padua. Grossmann states that his Church A was originally a public basilica before having been converted into a church. Apart from the plan, almost nothing further is known of Grossmann's Church B. In addition to this evidence in Padua, Bagnani had a series of aerial photos taken over the site in 1934 from about 4,000 feet and another series in 1936 from about 1400 feet. These are now in the Trent University Archives. The latter show an uncovered church in the north east sector of the site.

At the end of 1932, Carlo Anti became the Rector of the University of Padua and ceased active participation in the excavations at Tebtunis, leaving Gilbert Bagnani to direct the dig for the remaining four seasons. On Sunday March 12, 1933, as there had been a violent sandstorm, Bagnani had let the workers off for the day. "I therefore spent the day wandering about the Kom & espied some walls with traces of painting on them. So on Monday started digging them & they have proved to be a large Coptic Church with quite well preserved frescoes, which Stewart is copying." His diary indicates that he initially thought he was clearing a Coptic house. In a letter dated Thursday 23 March, he wrote: "I have been having a most strenuous week digging out this Coptic Church and convent which is really most interesting. The Church itself has been badly destroyed by the collapse of all one side." He was still clearing the church area on April 12.

Bagnani sent unlabeled photos and his report to Carlo Anti in Padua, and I am grateful to Prof Irene Favoretto for allowing me to purchase copies and publish these. The thirty page notebook at Trent University in Peterborough, Canada also contains sketches which however are not labeled. Together these sources illustrate and amplify what had been published in Bagnani's preliminary report in the *Bolletino D'Arte.*

Bagnani's initial sketch of the church gives the internal dimensions as 21.3 cm. by 11 cm. The walls were of black bricks on average 25 cm. by 12 cm., and by 7cm with little straw, lime or sand. The south wall with a shuttered window had collapsed on to a layer of circa 30cm. of accumulated sand, knocking over columns,

that is, in antiquity but after the church had been abandoned. The central part of the north wall collapsed northward soon after it was exposed; it had once had three windows later filled and painted. The nave floor was paved with small irregular limestone blocks at its east end and with *coccio pesto* (a lime mortar with crushed pottery or bricks) towards the west end which still preserved the imprints of mats before it had dried, even a red carpet along the north side. The north and south aisles were formed by two rows of six limestone columns, mostly monoliths though some were of drums, 0.35m. in diameter and approaching 3.5m. unit in height, a ratio of ten to one. They stood on square bases of varying heights. Examination of Bagnani's sketch and aerial photos suggests approximately two meters between columnar axes, and therefore a gap of about five meters from the west wall to the columns; this space is probably the area which Bagnani called the narthex where he discovered a few burials. Between the second set of columns was an arrangement of a limestone basin, interpreted by Bagnani as the font for the mandato and the epiphany. The bases of the four columns nearest the central sanctuary or presbyterium preserved traces of the *transenne* (stone screens). The floor level was slightly elevated under the last pair of columns in front of the central and southern chapels, as illustrated on Grossman's plan of his Church C. The columns had all been painted with a variety of geometric patterns, and had limestone capitals, mostly Ionic but some leafy, also subsequently plastered and painted.

Three brick arches with limestone wedges once separated the nave from the three rooms of the sanctuary at the east end. Of yellow bricks 26cm. by 14cm., and by 8 cm., these rooms were the best built of the entire church, and therefore, according to Bagnani, the oldest part. The archivaults were painted with red leaves. The central keystone was incised with a *crux ansata* on its façade. In the central chapel was a niche in the back wall and a triangular niche later filled in the left wall. Also in the north wall on a wooden beam were two small columns joined by an arch; inside were painted figures, probably saints. A similar structure may have once existed along the south side. The north wall collapsed during the excavation. In place of an altar was a late construction of three steps created from small columns with a stone bowl in the corner containing remnants of carbonized incense whose smoke and grease covered the stones and the walls here.

The once solid wall between the central and south chapels was replaced with a brick arch resting on limestone blocks, still standing when first exposed. The stone paving was replaced with *coccio pesto* preserving traces of concentric ellipses. In the northeast corner below a wooden lamp support was a basin carved out of the trunk of a column, which Grossman suggests may have been a baptismal font. The wall on the south had been reconstructed and subsequently reinforced with a brick pilaster. This chapel was divided from the nave by a low step for the iconostasis with two stone courses and one in the middle of baked bricks. Fragments of small columns *c.* 1.5m. high found near by belonged perhaps to the iconostasis. On the east wall fragments of a painted Coptic inscription in yellow ochre were beside the depiction of an abbot with raised arms blessing the onlookers. The left wall preserved a few traces of the image of a saint on foot. Centrally set into the floor in front of this chapel was a blue veined marble slab; although several similar slabs are in Egyptian museums, few have been found in situ. Shaped like sigma tables found in Greece, they may have served as oblation tables in Africa.

The north room was smaller and had a reconstructed entrance and closed doorways. Along the north of this a narrow little room was once painted with male heads with haloes; i.e., the north chapel was converted

into a functional or storage room, like a *diakonikon*. Outside the nave and at the level of the pavement of the church were found two trenches with skeletons. An external doorway here had three steps. Inside to the immediate left of this doorway were the traces in the floor and wall perhaps of a table, possibly used according to Bagnani for preparation after the prothesis had been converted into a chapel. The paintings on this wall were so faded that Bagnani suggested that they had been exposed to the sun for a long period. Beneath mounted saints like St. George and the dragon were enthroned apostles, like St. Peter and the cock, and further to the west possibly St. Paul with St. Tecla. Between these was the adoration of the Magi, wearing long Persian robes, perhaps escorted by St. Anna. Along the bottom ran a patterned frieze possibly of burning bushes.

The main entrance was toward the north of the west side. The threshold preceded by steps was raised several times with various reconstructions. The lintel block was originally the soffit from a classical structure, preserving a decoration of stars. The original door height of 1.85m. was reduced first to 1.67 m. and then to 1.45 m. The door post was at the south while many holes for the cross bars were in the north post; Bagnani believed that there were two doors, with the earlier one opening inward.

The most appealing aspect of this church is its wall paintings. The structure was rebuilt several times and there are several layers of paint mentioned in the notebook. All the paintings, including those on the columns, had finally been covered over with lime plaster which Bagnani removed with a pen knife. All the walls of the nave were covered with paintings, with the lower parts resembling hanging textiles. The figured zone was 1.4m. high. On the inside of the west wall to the north of the entrance, according to Bagnani, were the remnants of a grand figure of the Pantokrator and of numerous Madonnas. To the south of the entrance, was another panel of mounted saints "attired like Roman soldiers," including Samuel son of St. Stephen. Here again, Bagnani writes of "fragments of Madonnas, one of whom [was] seated on a grand throne and wrapped in a rich mantle."

The best known painting was on west end of the south wall, of Adam and Eve before and after the Fall from Paradise. This was originally sketched in yellow, and subsequently corrected though leaving the original still visible, such as the first Eve's horizontal right forearm. Bagnani recorded the Coptic inscription running above their heads. The dragon-like serpent is seen somewhat illogically after the temptation. Incidentally, Grenfell & Hunt's church also depicted mounted saints and Walters compared the Adam & Eve to the stylistically later Punishment of Sinners.

To the right a saddled and caparisoned horse is tethered by its reins to a tree; Bagnani interpreted the fragmentary crouching figure wearing a white tunic and purple mantle as God bending over Adam's rib to create Eve, and compared his attire to that of a noble Arab as an indication of Muslim influence on Coptic art. Most of the representational scene was rescued and is now on display in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, but Stewart's watercolors record the friezes above and below the representational scene. This painting was cleaned a year ago and Heather Badamo, a graduate student from Ann Arbor at American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE) in Cairo writing her thesis on mounted saints, researched the art historical aspects of the scene. I am hoping that Ms. Badamo will be able to pursue research on the Tebtunis church paintings.

Later, in December of 1933, Bagnani discovered in an antiquities dealer's shop in Cairo a fresco taken from this church and, presumably to prove its provenance, asked his mother in Rome to send him a large photo of a fresco "with traces of a figure holding a scroll and several balances about."

An *exonarthex*, called a *pronaos* by Bagnani, ran along the west side. Originally open at both the north and south ends, its west side consisted of four large pilasters corresponding to the corners of the church. The pillars were 0.97m. by 0.77m. and were linked by a wall only 0.80m. high. Subsequently the west wall was raised and two walls were built to connect this to the east wall, with a doorway in the northwest corner. A fragmentary block with a relief sculpture and the beginning of a hieroglyphic inscription had been incorporated into this doorframe. The plaster on the east wall had been blackened with smoke from torches and lamps. Two burials, one over the other, with a Coptic inscription on wood commemorating Viktor, belonged to the very last period of use of the *exonarthex*. Westward from the third pilaster to the south edge of the church rose an unexcavated tower.

Bagnani wrote that the church "was at a level somewhat lower than that of the surrounding buildings," and that would appear to be the case today. It is not impossible, however, that many reconstructions resulted in a raised ground level on this side. By contrast, on the north side no walls were recorded or seen in the photographs. While the north side was closer to the cultivation and farmers who would take the *sebakh* or bricks for fertilizer, the apparent absence of any connecting walls here would suggest that the adjoining structures were all along the west, south and east sides of the church. There is not the time today to present the detailed description of these houses recorded in the notebook, but merely to offer a brief overview from the photos of one house east of the church.

Today all that remains visible of the church are a few isolated walls. With the adjoining outbuildings, its layout was comparable to that of some monasteries in the Wadi Natrun, for example. Grossmann examined the archival evidence in Padua for the three churches excavated by the Italians in the 1930s, apparently unaware of the church discovered by Grenfell and Hunt, and assigned the construction of his three to the seventh century based on the typology of their plans. He believes them to be community churches but Walters believed his was monastic based on the themes of the frescoes. It will require more detailed analysis of the aerial and newly purchased satellite photos and notebook as well as further autopsy at the site for a proper publication of Coptic Tebtunis.

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D'un continent à l'autre, complémentarité de trois grandes collections d'art copte : Toronto (The Royal Ontario Museum), Le Caire (musée Copte), Paris (musée du Louvre)

Abstract

"From one Continent to another, three major collections of Coptic Art : Toronto (The Royal Ontario Museum), Cairo (Coptic Museum), Paris (musée du Louvre)"

Museums offer the opportunity for non-Egyptian people to discover and appreciate Coptic culture, and for scholars to gather data for their research. The objects are spread, from one continent to another, according to the history of the individual collections. For example, a textile may be divided between two or more institutions. An example may be illustrated with the "grape gathering putti", a beautiful hanging divided between the Royal Ontario Museum and the Louvre.

The ROM holds a splendid textile collection and beautiful bronzes. The catalogue, published by J. W. Hayes, once constituted a basic model for the author's metal objects catalogues of the Louvre and the Coptic Museum in Cairo. The latter is, of course, the major location for Coptic objects of different techniques. Most of the artefacts come from excavations of the 19th century. Other artefacts originally belonged to Coptic families or were transferred from Coptic monasteries. The Coptic Museum was completely renovated in 2006.

The Louvre Museum has a Coptic section in the Department of Egyptian Antiquities. It holds about 4,000 textiles and 400 metal objects, as well as wooden and limestone sculptures, ceramics, glass, bone carvings, leather objects as well as documents written on different type of supports. These artefacts are displayed in two galleries, including a reconstructed church with its architectural elements, taken from an early excavation of the Bawit Monastery, located in Middle Egypt.

Le Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) à Toronto, le musée Copte du Caire et le musée du Louvre à Paris sont trois vénérables institutions qui ont évolué au cours du XXe siècle et poursuivent leur mutation au XXIe siècle. Comme le ROM, le Louvre s'est agrandi et se signale à présent par une architecture contemporaine de verre. Le musée Copte du Caire, fondé en 1908 et considérablement développé en 1939, fut entièrement rénové à la suite d'un tremblement de terre qui avait fragilisé le bâtiment. Depuis 2006, il présente à nouveau les chefs d'œuvres de la plus grande collection copte au monde. Le ROM, mais aussi d'autres musées de

Toronto[1] conservent d'importants témoins de cette civilisation, qui, à cet égard, font de la ville une place d'exception dans tout le continent américain. Le Louvre possède une riche section copte[2] au sein de son département des antiquités égyptiennes, l'un des huit que compte ce musée. Les salles, refaites et inaugurées en 1997, présentent un vaste panorama de l'art copte, des origines aux premiers siècles de l'Islam, ainsi que l'église du monastère de Baouit, dont les sculptures furent partagées entre l'Égypte et la France après les fouilles de 1902.

L'histoire de ces musées illustre la dispersion des œuvres, restées en Égypte ou ayant traversé la mer Méditerranée et l'océan Atlantique, à la rencontre d'un public nombreux et diversifié. Les chercheurs sont amenés à étudier les collections éparpillées pour constituer des données, bases de leurs travaux. Le catalogage et, depuis quelques temps, la diffusion électronique[3] des photographies et des notices d'œuvres sont des instruments essentiels. A travers ces trois musées, l'art copte du premier millénaire est présenté dans une multitude d'approches et de techniques. Quelques exemples, choisis parmi les textiles et les objets en métal, suffiront à montrer comment les pièces peuvent être comparées et rapprochées pour une meilleure compréhension.

TEXTILES

Le Royal Ontario Museum de Toronto conserve depuis 1980 une très belle tapisserie copte représentant des Amours vendangeurs[4] (fig. 1 et 2, en haut à droite). Sur un lainage de couleur pourpre s'enlève un médaillon, niché dans l'angle d'un motif de bordure, qui contient de plus petits cercles. Le décor s'organise dans l'enroulement de ceps et de rinceaux de vigne, d'où s'échappent des grappes et des feuilles. Ce vignoble est animé par une troupe de petits personnages à l'allure enfantine, portant de courtes ailes bleues dans le dos et un collier de perles roses autour du cou. Ils sont nus, potelés et agités de mouvements en tous sens qui les montrent très affairés à la vendange. Ce sont des Amours ou *putti*, venus du cortège de la déesse Aphrodite. De l'univers romain de l'Antiquité tardive, ils sont tranquillement passés dans le monde copte où ils peuplent les scènes de vendange, de pêche et de chasse au bord du Nil, ou tout simplement les rinceaux végétaux, très appréciés sur les textiles, sur les boiseries et sur les frises sculptées dans la pierre[5].

Au centre du grand médaillon, un Amour levant le bras semble diriger le travail de trois d'entre eux, qui s'activent à transporter le raisin dans des corbeilles pendant que le quatrième les encourage au son d'une flûte de Pan. Il faut garder la cadence car les oiseaux picorent les grappes qui n'ont pas encore été coupées. Un *putto* en a attrapé un ; il est représenté à l'angle de la bordure. Ce cadre au beau fond rouge est limité par une ligne jaune. A l'extrémité conservée, une sorte de chaînette suspend un médaillon jaune, sans bordure,

1 University of Toronto, Malcove Collection; Textile Museum of Canada; St. Mark's Coptic Museum, Scarborough, Ontario. Je remercie Mesdames Sheila D. Campbell, Anu Lïvandi, Niamh O'Laoghaire, Heather Darling Pigat, Natalie Nagy et Hélène Moussa pour leur accueil lors mon passage à Toronto à l'occasion du symposium.

2 Environ 13.000 objets.

3 www.rom.on.ca; www.louvre.fr; www.copticmuseum.gov.eg et www.coptic-cairo.com.

4 Inventaire L 982.5. Je remercie la conservatrice, Madame Anu Lïvandi, pour m'avoir montré la pièce et autorisée à la reproduire ici.

5 Chacun des trois musées pourrait facilement illustrer le thème, décliné dans diverses techniques et matériaux.

contenant un bouquet de lotus roses vus de dessus. De petits médaillons sont tracés par l'entrelacement de deux tiges, d'où s'échappent feuilles et grappes. Le fond des médaillons est jaune lui aussi. Chacun abrite un *putto* et l'on y retrouve les types déjà signalés du porteur de corbeille et du joueur de flûte, tandis qu'un coupeur de cep, armé d'une faucille et tenant le sarment dans l'autre main, apparaît à trois reprises. Il est figuré deux fois les bras ouverts, faisant un geste vers la gauche et la troisième fois, le bras droit refermé vers le cep, dans un mouvement inverse.

Le musée du Louvre avait acheté, l'année précédente, un grand fragment d'une pièce comparable[6], probablement la même (fig. 1 et 2, en bas). Il présente deux médaillons, nichés dans les angles de motifs en équerre. Deux types s'ajoutent au répertoire: un joueur de flûte droite et un Amour au repos à l'air espiègle.

Les grands médaillons sont strictement identiques. Le tisserand a manifestement utilisé le même modèle, reporté par translation, pour exécuter les trois exemplaires qui nous sont parvenus. Les bandes en équerre contiennent quatre médaillons dans chaque branche, plus celui de l'angle qui leur est commun. De taille égale, chacune de ces branches se termine de la même manière que celle du ROM décrite plus haut. L'activité et la posture des *putti* dans la bordure conservée à Toronto se trouvent à l'identique sur la pièce parisienne. Mais des variantes viennent compliquer la manière. Si certaines figures, comme celle du coupeur de cep tourné vers la gauche, sont reproduites elles aussi par translation du modèle, d'autres sont inversées en symétrie, selon qu'elles appartiennent à la bordure de gauche ou à celle de droite (porteur de corbeille, *putto* tenant un oiseau). L'ordre des saynètes diffère d'une bande à l'autre et leur séquence paraît aléatoire. Une recherche de symétrie se manifeste dans les deux branches inférieures ; elle est moins rigoureuse dans les bandes verticales. Néanmoins le regard est attiré par l'ordonnancement général des motifs avant de s'attarder à décrypter la fantaisie des détails.

La disposition de la pièce originelle est assez simple à envisager : le fragment conservé au ROM se plaçait à droite dans le prolongement du motif de droite sur la pièce du Louvre. Une quatrième bande d'angle avec un médaillon complétait, à gauche, cet ensemble. Bien qu'incomplète, la partie conservée au Louvre a conservé une extrémité bordée d'une ligne jaune et d'une tresse arrêtant les fils de chaîne, ainsi qu'un reste de lisière à gauche. La distance du bord au motif et celle des motifs entre eux est connue. Grace à la disposition symétrique du décor, la largeur originelle est estimée à 165cm. Il est aisé de reconstituer virtuellement la largeur du tissu manquant ainsi que la distance du fragment canadien aux bords de la pièce (lisière à droite et arrêt de la chaîne perpendiculairement). En revanche, il n'est pas possible de déterminer la longueur initiale de l'ensemble mais elle ne devait pas raisonnablement dépasser les trois mètres. Plusieurs hypothèses sont possibles. La première suppose un intervalle constant entre les motifs aux lotus. L'ensemble du motif dessine alors un carré et la pièce, légèrement plus longue (sens chaîne) que large (sens trame), mesure environ 200 x 165cm (fig. 1). La deuxième hypothèse étire la distance entre les motifs. Une troisième proposition ajoute à la deuxième un motif central, par exemple un médaillon exécuté dans l'esprit des grands médaillons d'angle (fig. 2). Il pourrait être identique ou légèrement plus grand. Les trois hypothèses sont conformes à des exemples connus par d'autres tissus coptes et par des représentations mettant en scène de telles pièces.Il s'agissait soit de châles soit de tissus d'ameublement pouvant être disposés à l'horizontale (nappes) ou suspendus (rideaux,

6 Inventaire E 27205. Rutschowscaya, 1980-1 et 1980-2 ; Nantes, 2001 : 118-119, n° 82, restaurée par Claire Beugnot en 1997.

tentures). La direction des *putti*, tous placés dans le même sens, suggère une vision verticale de la pièce sans toutefois constituer une preuve formelle de sa destination.

Une seconde utilisation est indiquée par les traces croisées des bandelettes, encore visibles dans les parties unies, particulièrement sur le fragment du Louvre. La tenture a servi de linceul dans une sépulture. L'usage funéraire a permis sa conservation exceptionnelle, comme ce fut le cas pour la plupart des textiles coptes parvenus jusqu'à nous.

A l'origine, la pièce devait être somptueuse. La couleur du fond évoquait la lie du vin obtenu au pressoir. Elle imitait aussi la pourpre, une teinture rare et extrêmement coûteuse, et la couleur jaune simulait l'or. Ces deux matières étaient réservées aux tissus les plus précieux. Elles étaient souvent imitées par des teintures plus abordables. Les considérations stylistiques placent cette œuvre aux environs du V^{e} siècle. L'analyse au radiocarbone la situe dans la première moitié de ce siècle ou même dans le siècle précédent[7].

Le ROM conserve une pièce de textile copte exceptionnelle par ses dimensions (355 x 232cm) et par son état de conservation[8] (fig. 3, en bas). Il s'agit d'un rideau de lin décoré, à la partie supérieure, par une bande tissée en tapisserie de laine colorée et, sur toute la surface, par un semis de cavaliers et d'animaux divers, de teinte noire, qui se détache bien sur le fond écru. La disposition est claire et régulière. Tous les sujets galopent vers la droite et sont séparés par des arbres. Le mouvement rapide de la meute est temporisé par la statique des buissons. Le tissage est raffiné et les détails sont obtenus par la technique de la navette volante, un fil de lin très libre qui dessine les lignes intérieures sur les plages de tapisserie monochrome. Une pièce tout à fait semblable mais en moins bon état figurait parmi les collections byzantines du musée de Berlin. Veronika Gervers avait attiré l'attention sur cette paire hors du commun et livré une étude importante sur la pièce du ROM[9]. La bordure occupe toute la largeur du rideau. Dans un cadre festonné, la répétition d'un motif végétal stylisé et placé tête-bêche évoque un long rinceau. L'intérieur est compartimenté en vingt-et-un petits panneaux contenant des animaux face à face. Des quadrupèdes de différentes espèces (lions et lionnes, léopards, chiens) sont exécutés en tapisserie noire, tout comme les végétaux et le feston. Ils alternent avec des couples d'oiseaux qui, eux, sont multicolores et représentés de façon très stylisée. Cette conjonction de deux effets et deux manières différentes dans une même tapisserie invite à reconsidérer bien des préjugés prétendant classer les tissus coptes selon leur style.

Le musée du Louvre conserve une bande du même genre[10] (fig. 3, en haut). L'encadrement est de même nature, avec un traitement légèrement différent des feuilles et des tiges. La partie droite manque. Il reste l'extrémité gauche et onze compartiments. Ils sont occupés par des oiseaux colorés fortement stylisés, disposés face à face, à l'exception du premier à gauche qui est entouré par une couronne feuillue. Moins élégante que la bordure du ROM, cette bande procède néanmoins du même principe. La comparaison avec la pièce complète de Toronto permet de lui attribuer une origine semblable. La tapisserie, malheureusement découpée comme ce fut trop souvent le cas des tissus coptes, retrouve ainsi une famille et une proposition d'identité.

7 Réalisée par l'Institut Royal du patrimoine Artistique de Bruxelles (KIA-27168 : 1655 ± 30 BP). Après calibration, l'âge de la laine se situe entre 320 et 450 après Jésus-Christ avec 85,1% de probabilité, et entre 375 et 425 avec 54% de probabilité).

8 Inventaire 910.125.32 (Walter Massey Collection).

9 Gervers, 1977.

10 Inventaire AF 6063. L. 152cm ; H. 26cm. Du Bourguet, 1964: 233, E 121.

Des tuniques sont fort heureusement arrivées complètes dans chacun des trois musées, qui peuvent ainsi présenter au public l'élément principal du costume copte, porté par les hommes, par les femmes et par les enfants. Ce vêtement était fabriqué d'une seule pièce sur le métier à tisser. Le tisserand commençait par une manche et ne manquait pas d'y inclure les deux bandes décoratives caractéristiques. Il tissait alors le corps en un grand panneau ouvert simplement au milieu pour l'encolure et terminait par la seconde manche. Le devant et le dos de la tunique étaient ainsi confectionnés en même temps et symétriquement. Leur décor identique consistait en un plastron, deux bandes qui tombent verticalement devant et derrière le corps, des carrés d'épaule et d'autres tapisseries carrées ou rondes dans le bas. A partir de ce schéma de nombreuses variantes étaient autorisées quant au choix, à la disposition de détail, et aux motifs décoratifs tissés en tapisserie pour dessiner ces décors. Différents styles et modes distinguent la production de ces vêtements, depuis l'époque romaine jusqu'au règne des Fatimides, c'est-à-dire pendant un millénaire. Deux exemplaires appartenant à un même groupe décoratif[11] sont conservés de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique. La tunique du ROM[12] (fig. 4, en haut) et celle du Louvre[13] (fig. 4, en bas) sont en lin de couleur naturelle et présentent des décors en tapisserie de laine bleu foncé. La silhouette des motifs est remplie de cette couleur et tous les détails sont dessinés d'un fil de lin conduit par une navette volante, comme sur le rideau du ROM précédemment décrit. Une astuce de tissage introduit une nuance pour certains fonds, en alternant dans la trame les fils de lin et ceux de laine. Toujours avec la même couleur, le résultat obtenu est donc en demi-teinte. Ces fonds hachurés emplissent les compartiments où sont représentés des animaux. Ils alternent avec des personnages qui se détachent sur fond clair. Le sens de lecture des animaux n'est pas le même que celui des humains : les personnages sont placés verticalement, ce qui paraît naturel, alors que les animaux se dirigent vers le haut et non vers la droite ou vers la gauche. Ceci est dû à des contraintes techniques de tissage. Ces deux motifs principaux se répètent dans toutes les parties décorées, avec quelques variantes agréables à l'œil. Les parties les plus développées sont les plastrons, avec trois compartiments plus grands qu'ailleurs. L'exemplaire de Toronto en a fait l'entrecolonnement d'un portique où s'ébattent quatre danseurs, deux dans le compartiment central et un de part et d'autre, tandis que la tunique parisienne montre un danseur au centre entouré de deux animaux placés dans des cadres. Les bandes verticales, naissant à la bordure inférieure en un simple damier, sont ensuite segmentées en panneaux contenant alternativement un personnage, en buste (ROM) ou entier (Louvre), et un animal courant. La disposition des autres décors, carrés de bas, carrés d'épaules et bandes de poignets, sont strictement identiques sur les deux tuniques, seuls diffèrent le détail des encadrements ou des fonds. Un dernier détail se remarque sur les deux exemplaires : un repli du tissu, anciennement cousu au tiers de la hauteur. Il raccourcissait les vêtements d'une quinzaine de centimètres. Il a été défait et le tissu remis à plat. Cette opération eut lieu dans l'antiquité, avant ou au moment de la seconde utilisation des tuniques comme vêtements funéraires. En effet, la trace des bandelettes posées lors de l'ensevelissement est continue et non pas segmentée par le repli (détail bien visible sur la tunique du Louvre).Objets en métal

Le ROM, le Musée Copte et le Louvre possèdent tous les trois de magnifiques collections coptes d'objets en métal. Il n'est qu'à feuilleter leurs catalogues respectifs pour s'en convaincre. Parmi les luminaires, nous pouvons comparer les lampes en forme de colombe, suspendues au bout de chaînes[14] ou les lampes placées sur

11 La tunique inventaire 10605 du Musée Copte en fait partie.

12 Inventaire 910.1.11 (Walter Massey Collection).

13 Inventaire E 32284. Don de la Comtesse de Fels au musée Guimet, cédé au Louvre en 1948. H. 128cm ; largeur 131,5cm (il manque une manche). Nantes, 2001: 69, n° 39.

14 Hayes, 1984: 137, n° 213; Bénazeth, 1992: 139; Bénazeth, 2002: 169, n° 149.

des candélabres[15]. Les batteries de cuisine[16] et les objets de toilette[17] se prêtent tout autant aux comparaisons. Le matériel métallique est souvent mal documenté et de tels rapprochements peuvent apporter de précieux indices, sur les provenances, les contextes et les usages, la datation. Arrêtons-nous sur deux exemples, particulièrement éclairés par la confrontation du matériel conservé dans les trois institutions : la patère au manche en forme de poisson et le petit récipient tripode à couvercle.

La patère est une coupe munie d'un manche, utilisée au bain ou à la salle à manger pour puiser puis reverser l'eau des ablutions. Son manche est souvent prétexte à une décoration. Trois exemplaires sont traités en forme de poisson ou de dauphin fortement stylisé[18] (fig. 5). Contrairement à la forme circulaire de toutes les autres patères, ce groupe présente un bord polygonal. Il est carré et orné de trois perles disposées aux angles et au milieu des côtés (Musée Copte, Louvre) ou encore octogonal et présentant une perle à chaque angle (ROM). Le manche thériomorphe est soudé au milieu de l'un des côtés, comme si l'animal marin l'avait attrapé dans ses mandibules. Son corps est droit (ROM) ou enroulé (Musée Copte, Louvre). La boucle ainsi formée servait peut-être à la suspension de l'instrument car un anneau répondant à cette fonction est soudé à l'extrémité du manche droit de Toronto. Les queues sont traitées en palmettes décoratives. L'exemplaire du Caire ajoute deux petits, de part et d'autre de l'animal principal. Ils sont soudés à sa tête par leurs queues et au bord de la coupe par leurs bouches. En dépit de ces variantes, les trois objets forment un groupe particulier dans l'ensemble des patères coptes.

Les récipients arrondis munis de trois pieds et d'un col cylindrique semblent avoir été produits en Égypte, d'où proviennent de nombreux exemplaires (fig. 6). Celui du ROM[19], acquis comme venant du Fayoum, est en très bon état et présente une ornementation typique des petits objets en métal coptes, bien souvent effacée par l'usure et l'oxydation. Entre les lignes gravées au tour sur la panse et sur le col, sont piquetés des rinceaux dessinés en pointillés. L'exemplaire du Louvre fut trouvé au cours des fouilles à Médamoud en 1931-32. Il était en très mauvais état mais une récente restauration lui a redonné une lisibilité inespérée[20]. Dans la collection du Musée Copte, qui en compte une vingtaine, deux objets similaires se distinguent par la présence d'un couvercle[21].

Comme le décor précédemment décrit, les petits animaux disposés sur ces couvercles sont tout à fait caractéristiques du goût copte pour l'ornementation et de sa manière bien personnelle d'y souscrire. Les lionceaux et l'oiseau servent non seulement de boutons de préhension pour la manipulation du couvercle mais ils sont surtout là pour le décorer. Les deux exemplaires du Caire montrent en outre comment se présentaient tous les objets de cette sorte, qui sont maintenant dépourvus de fermeture.

15 Hayes, 1984 : 139-140, 151-152, n° 216/235; Bénazeth, 1992: 160; Bénazeth, 2002: 65, 141-142, n° 49/122, 121.

16 Exemple des louches: Hayes, 1984: 163-165, n° 255-261; Bénazeth, 1992: 73; Musée Copte du Caire, inventaire 1622, 7380, 7381, 9168.

17 Exemples de flacons posés sur de petits trépieds: Hayes, 1984: 123, n° 195; Bénazeth, 1992: 63; Bénazeth, 1994: 42-44.

18 ROM, inv. 910.165.585: Hayes, 1984: 124, n° 196; Louvre, inventaire E 11927: Bénazeth, 1992: 81; Musée Copte, inventaire 5213: Strzygowski, 1904: 279, n° 9103, plate XXX.

19 Inventaire 910.176.104: Hayes: 1984: 121, n° 191.

20 Inventaire E 15467: Bénazeth, 1992: 43. Restauré en 2008 par Agnès Conin. Le Mans, 2009: 90-91, n° 65.

21 Inventaire 5176: Strzygowski, 1904: 268, n° 9066, plate XXVIII, et inventaire 7546.

La dispersion des objets d'art et d'archéologie à travers le monde n'est pas particulière au domaine copte mais elle y trouve une démonstration. A la suite des fouilles de la première moitié du XX^{e} siècle, des œuvres coptes ont été partagées officiellement. D'autres ont circulé dans la clandestinité. Des marchands peu scrupuleux les ont parfois démembrées. Rassembler les exemples et leur documentation est une démarche préalable à l'étude, qui nécessite des recherches en tous lieux. A côté des collections particulières, souvent méconnues voire insoupçonnées, les musées conservent d'intéressantes séries, qui prennent toute leur dimension lorsqu'on les rapproche et les compare. Les exemples qu'il m'a été permis de présenter[22] illustrent l'intérêt d'une telle démarche. Rendue possible par la diffusion des catalogues, par les expositions et par l'accès aux œuvres elles-mêmes, elle encourage les professionnels des musées à persévérer dans une tâche difficile qui leur incombe : celle de publier les collections dont ils ont la charge.

22 Je remercie Monsieur Ramez Boutros pour m'avoir invitée au premier symposium annuel d'études coptes, qui s'est tenu à Toronto, le 29 mars 2008.

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Figure 1: Tapisserie aux Amours vendangeurs: ROM, L. 982.5 (en haut à droite) et Louvre, E 27205 (en bas). Première hypothèse de reconstitution. Montage Nathalie Couton-Perche. Photo X, documentation de la Section copte du Louvre, et photo Claire Beugnot.

Figure 2: Tapisserie aux Amours vendangeurs: ROM, L. 982.5 (en haut à droite) et Louvre, E 27205 (en bas). Troisième hypothèse de reconstitution. Montage Nathalie Couton-Perche. Photo X, documentation de la Section copte du Louvre, et photo Claire Beugnot.

Figure 3: Rideau du ROM, 910.125.32
(with permission of the Royal Ontario Museum © ROM)
et bande du Louvre, AF 6063 (photo D. Bénazeth).

Figure 4: Tuniques du ROM, 910.1.11 (with permission of the Royal Ontario Museum © ROM) et du Louvre, E 32284 (photo D. Pillet, d'après Nantes 2001).

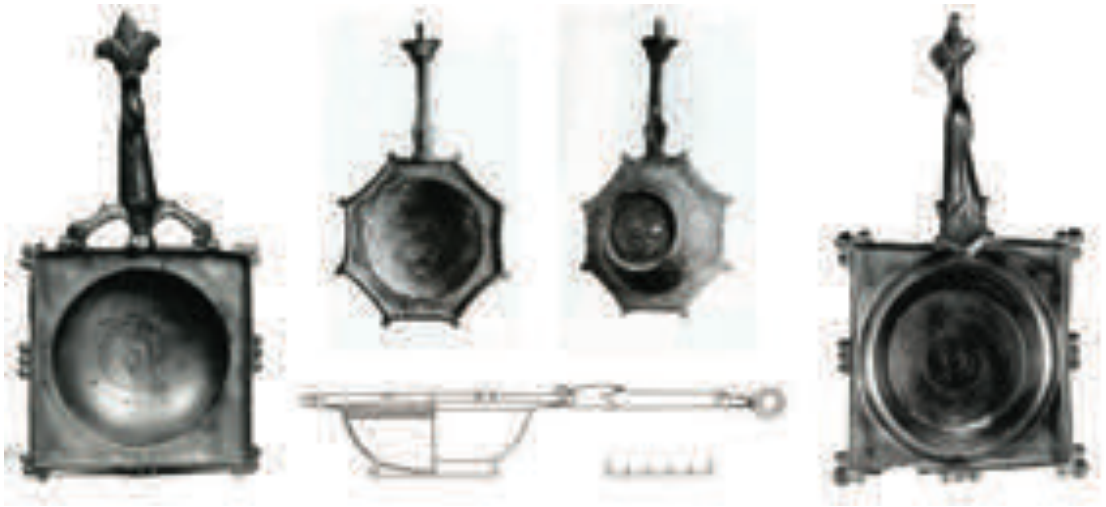

Figure 5: Patères dans les trois collections : à gauche, Musée Copte (photo J.-L. Bovot); au centre, ROM (d'après Hayes, 1984) ; à droite, Louvre (d'après Bénazeth, 1992).

Figure 6: Récipients tripodes dans les trois collections : à gauche, ROM (d'après Hayes, 1984), au centre, Louvre (photo Georges Poncet) ; à droite, Musée Copte (photos J.-L. Bovot)

Anu Lïvandi

Coptic Textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum

The Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles & Costume, on the top floor of the new Michael Lee-Chin Crystal designed by Daniel Libeskind, is opening to the public on April 5th, 2008. At long last, we will have a permanent gallery in which we can feature our Coptic textile collection, along with our Early Islamic tiraz and Pre-Columbian textiles from Peru. All three will be featured in the Oldest Surviving Textiles display cases on the north wall.

Numbering just under a thousand pieces, our collection of Coptic textiles is the largest in Canada. Very few have yet been published.[1] The majority come from burial contexts and consist of clothing worn by the deceased as well as furnishing fabrics used to wrap, cover or cushion the body. Most are decorated with tapestry motifs, panels or bands inserted in a tabby ground during the weaving process. Tapestry weaving (like embroidery) is a free technique in which wefts do not lie strictly at right angles to the warp but rather follow the contours of the design.[2] The ground is generally of undyed linen tabby, while the tapestry decoration is largely in coloured wool. These textiles were woven on simple looms, like the warp-weighted loom and two-beam vertical loom exhibited on the weaving platform in the gallery, opposite the Coptic textile case. With a very wide loom, it was possible to weave a tunic to the desired shape.[3] The finished piece could then be cut from the loom and made into a garment with minimal effort, simply by sewing the side seams.

The decoration of the Late Antique, Early Medieval tunic usually consists of longitudinal bands falling from the shoulders, both front and back, and on the sleeves. There are roundels or squares placed at shoulders and knees or hem. Fancier tunics can also have transverse bands at the neck and hem.[4] Although the type of ornament on a tunic is sometimes seen as an indication of date, it appears that ornamental schemes varied a good deal from an early period, probably according to the taste and purse of the wearer and the intended use of the garment. The rich could afford to pay for more elaborate decoration, and anyone might have a plainer tunic for everyday wear and a fancier one for festive occasions.

The oldest Coptic textile shown in the gallery (fig. 1) is the fragment of a Late Antique wall hanging depicting part of a column decorated with two vertical rows of closed lotus blossoms framed

1 A notable exception is the article on our 6th century curtain with hunting motifs (Gervers, 1977). Another rare piece, a 12th - 13th century shirt embroidered with Virgin and Child, angels, mounted saints and crosses, is illustrated with brief text in Gervers, 1978–1979: 22–23 and 30–31.

2 For more information about the tapestry technique, see Burnham, 1980 and Viallet, 1971.

3 See Burnham, 1973: 9–10.

4 For a diagram showing various schemes of tunic decoration, see Rustschowcaya, 1990: 151.

by a half-leaf border. The flower petals are carefully shaded from red to white in distinct zones of colour.[5] This fragment is similar to the decorative columns framing the figures of Dionysos and his followers in a remarkably well-preserved wall hanging in the Abegg collection.[6] Since the latter was discovered in controlled archaeological excavations, we can date this group to the 4th century.

The second piece (fig. 2) is a Late Antique tapestry square, perhaps from a tunic, dating from the 4th–5th century. It is decorated with a monochrome geometric and vegetal design exhibiting particularly fine artistry. An eight-pointed star within a roundel is set in a square. The star and the corners of the square are covered with delicate interlace ornament, and the outer border is decorated with a vine scroll. Similar compositions occur in floor mosaics throughout the Roman world, and continue in depictions of Early Byzantine clothing.[7]

The third example (fig. 3) is a Late Antique tapestry square from a curtain or covering of the same date. Its central roundel features a horseman hunting a rabbit. This is framed by a vine scroll that springs from a fluted urn in the centre of each side and forms corner roundels that enclose *putti* carrying baskets of fruit or birds. Hunting motifs[8] and inhabited plant scrolls[9] occur frequently in Late Antique art, and are associated with prosperity. This largely monochromatic tapestry square can be given an early date because of its classical motifs, and the naturalistic proportions and lively movement of its figures shown in three-quarter view.

Three fragments of a 4th - 5th century tapestry band (fig. 4), probably from the shoulder of a tunic, are decorated with a row of fish and aquatic plants on a dark blue ground representing water. Marine motifs,[10] especially Nilotic motifs such as lotus blossoms, were very popular in Late Antique art and were associated with fertility, rebirth and eternal life. A comparative example in the Louvre[11] shows the Birth of Aphrodite surrounded by Nilotic motifs such as lotus plants, fish and *putti* in boats.

A roundel with interlace ornament surrounding a cross (fig. 5) is difficult to date. Is its simplicity a matter of choice, perhaps befitting a Coptic church vestment?[12] Is the slight coarsening of execution due simply to the use of heavier wool (instead of linen) for the warp and eccentric weft producing the interlace? Or are these factors indicative of a later date, perhaps 7th century? Hopefully recent advances in carbon-14 dating

5 A 5th century shawl in the Louvre shows the tripartite shading of heart-shaped petals from red to pink to white that is a feature of so many Late Antique textile, see Rustschowcaya, 1990: 56. This ROM example has slightly more complex shading in the same colours.

6 Flury-Lemberg, 1988: 364–383.

7 Compare the tapestry motifs decorating tunics and shawls worn by Empress Theodora's retinue in a 6th century Byzantine wall mosaic in San Vitale, Ravenna, see Weitzmann, 1979: 77.

8 Compare the late 3rd century hunting mosaic from El Djem in Bardo National Museum, Tunis, see Bianchi-Bandinelli, 1971: pl. 230.

9 Compare ROM 910.125.32, an almost complete 6th century Early Byzantine curtain with both an equestrian hunt and inhabited vine scroll border, see Gervers, 1976.

10 Compare the 4th century floor mosaic in the basilica at Aquileia, near Venice, with a variety of marine motifs surrounding scenes from the story of Jonah and the whale, see Bianchi-Bandinelli, 1971: pl. 216.

11 Paris, musée du Louvre, département des antiquités égyptiennes, AF 5470 dating from the 6th century, see Rustschowcaya, 1990: 122.

12 Compare this to a late 6th or 7th century wall painting of Coptic saints from the monastery of St. Jeremias at Saqqara, now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo showing garments with cruciform motifs, see Wessel, 1965: 169.

and future scientific excavations will eventually help to answer these questions.[13]

The standing figure of a male saint (fig. 6) has been woven in supplementary weft-loop pile[14] rather than in tapestry weave. The figure is shown frontally, with curly hair and beard, his right hand raised in benediction. In the upper left corner, there is part of an inscription in Greek, the beginning of the word "ΑΠΑ" (Father). This may have been part of a 6th century hanging or curtain in a Coptic church or monastery.[15]

An Early Byzantine tapestry roundel (fig. 7) combines classical imagery with Persian motifs of the Sasanian period (226–651AD), which were popular in Byzantine drawloom-woven figured silks of the 6th –7th century. In this case, the tabby ground is done not in undyed linen but rather in red wool. The fragment is probably that of a 6th century shawl.

The Dionysiac figure in the central roundel is typically Late Antique.[16] The human head or mask within the smaller roundels is also a common Late Antique motif; the clothing worn by Stilicho in his ivory diptych of *c.* AD400,[17] for example, is covered with the design repeat of a human head in a medallion. Several Antinoe silks of the 6th –7th century, which some believe to be Sasanian and others Early Byzantine, are decorated with similar heads or masks.[18]

The pearl borders of the roundels and the double horse protomes, however, are typically Sasanian;[19] and the jewelled band with floating ribbons placed around the neck of animals and birds was a symbol of royal ownership. The famous Horse and Lion Tapestry,[20] a 6th century curtain in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, is decorated with staggered rows of Early Byzantine column capitals surmounted by similar double horse and lion protomes of Sasanian inspiration, and the border has horsemen in pearl roundels separated by lions. Another large 6th century tapestry hanging in the Abegg collection[21] is decorated with roundels containing Sasanian winged horses wearing jewelled collars with floating ribbons, and the border has helmeted heads and heart-shaped flowers on winged supports.

13 See De Moor, 1993 and 2007.

14 For more information on weft-loop weave, see Burnham, 1980: 182.

15 A contemporary 6th century painted icon from a monastery at Bawit (now Paris, musée du Louvre, département des antiquités égyptiennes, X 5178) depicts Abbot Menas with Christ in a similar figural style, see Weitzman, 1979: 552.

16 Compare the 4th century wall hanging with figures of Dionysos and his followers referred to previously, see Flury-Lemberg, 1988: 377.

17 Monza Cathedral Treasury.

18 One example has acanthus leaves forming roundels enclosing a human head or mask crowned with a pyramid of fruit, see Flury-Lemberg, 1988: 424-429. A second has human heads or masks with bird protomes, see Cernuschi, 2006: 174. A third has leafy masks and griffin protomes, see Von Falke, 1936:l. pl. 1.

19 In the famous 7th / 8th century Sasanian or post-Sasanian silk with winged horses in pearl roundels found in Antinoe, the winged horses wear similar pearl collars with fluttering ribbons and are in roundels with the same pearl border, see Martiniani-Reber, 1997: 52–53.

20 Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, 39.19: Kitzinger, 1946.

21 Flury-Lemberg, 1988: 406–408.

Another Early Byzantine tapestry fragment in the gallery (fig. 8) is part of the shoulder band of a tunic. A female saint wearing elaborate Byzantine court dress has a halo around her head and both arms raised in prayer.[22] Above and below are flowering plants, ducks and rabbits. The large-scale pattern of the saint's costume and the inaccurate depiction of elements of Byzantine court dress would indicate a date the Arab conquest, when Egypt was no longer part of the Byzantine Empire, probably the 7th or 8th century.

The last piece exhibited in the gallery (fig. 9) is another fragment of an Early Byzantine shoulder band. It has a design reflective of 7th century Byzantine draw loom-woven silks. Silk textiles were among the rarest and most costly possessions of the period, which explains why their designs were frequently imitated in other materials and techniques. The pattern consists of two roundels, one containing an eight-pointed star, the other heart-shaped flowers and leaves within a pearl border. A slightly earlier Antinoe silk of the 6th – 7th century has a similar pattern repeat but on a slightly smaller scale.[23]

Although almost two-thirds of the ROM's collection of Coptic textiles was purchased in Egypt between 1906 and 1910 by the ROM's founding director, the archaeologist Charles Trick Currelly, the next curator to concentrate in this area was Veronika Gervers. She acquired a major collection from Michel Abemayor, who had come from Cairo to establish a dealership in New York City. The largest purchase from Abemayor was funded by Albert and Federico Friedberg in 1978 in her memory, as she had collected and studied the pieces immediately before her death. She was also instrumental in acquiring the Charles Wilkinson collection, the purchase of which was again funded by the Friedbergs in 1980.

22 Compare 6th century wall mosaic in S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna with a procession of female saints in similar costume but with a smaller-scale pattern repeat, see Beckwith, 1970: pl. 88.

23 Martiniani-Reber, 1986: 39.

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Figure 1. The Walter Massey Collection: courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.
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Helene Moussa

"Women in the Life of Christ": Narrative Icons by Marguerite Nakhla in St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church, Zamalek [1]

INTRODUCTION

Marguerite Nakhla was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1908 and passed away in 1977 in her home in Alexandria. Born the same year as the founding of the Coptic Museum in Cairo by Simaika Morcos Pasha, her grandfather's cousin from her mother's side, she was surrounded by a family of devoted Christians whose faith was rooted in the Coptic tradition. She grew up in the 1920s social environment when the Modern Egyptian Art Movement and the National Movement coincided. Her artistic career straddled three generations of artists who expressed their works by drawing on Egyptian history with neo-pharaonism as a common ground and, most importantly, by drawing on Egyptian "folk" culture.[2]

In 1934, she graduated with honours from the School of Fine Arts in Cairo. Between 1934 and 1939, she received a scholarship to study at the Ecole National Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris under the academic direction of renowned Professor Sabatté; she also received a scholarship to study at the Ecole Spéciale de Dessin between 1936 and1938.[3]

In 1940 Nakhla was one of the first teachers at the Women's Higher Institute of Art Education in Cairo. Among her students are the well-known artists Dr. Bedour Latif, Dr. Sophie Habib, and Mrs. Sophie Wissa Wassef — all accomplished artists in their own right. Nakhla is said to have painted several hundred canvases. In fact, her 1946 Exhibition in Alexandria catalogue listed eighty-one of her canvases and most of her exhibition catalogues list over fifty works and often as many sketches.[4] It is no wonder that *Le Journal d'Égypte*

1 This paper is an abridged version of chapter 4, with the same title and selections from other chapters by the author in Marcos, Moussa and Ramzy. 2009. *Marguerite Nakhla: Legacy to Modern Egyptian Art.* Scarborough: St. Mark's Coptic Museum. Ms Nakhla's particular "Coptic folkloric" style of painting discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will not be discussed in this paper.

2 For an overview of the history of Modern Egyptian Art, see chapter 1, Marcos, Moussa and Ramzy, 2009.

3 See Marguerite Nakhla's biography: "Appendix I: Biography at a Glance," in Marcos, Moussa, and Ramzy, 2009: 114-117.

4 Marcos, Moussa, and Ramzy, 2009 reproduces over eighty of her works

emphatically stated, "She was one [of Egypt's] best known and remarkable painters ... from 1937 to 1975."[5]

As early as 1931 she received a silver medal for a pharaonic composition shown at the Cairo Industrial Exhibition, and the following year a gold medal from the Association des Amateurs des Art, Alexandria, for a decorative panel. Nakhla not only exhibited her works in Egypt (Cairo, Alexandria, Ismailia, and Port Said) but also in France where she received a first prize for the biblical scene of *La Pêche miraculeuse/The Miracle of the Great Catch* now in St. Mark's Coptic Museum. She is also said to have had her works exhibited in Lebanon, Italy, and the United States. The variety of styles she intentionally used and the range of themes in her works (e.g., religion, everyday life in Egypt and Europe, portraits, still life, and even animals and pets) added to her unique qualities as an artist and increased the appeal of her work to a wider range of art lovers.

In 1975, Badr el-din Abou Ghazi, then minister of culture, introduced each of the ten women artists selected for the exhibition "Women Painters of the Past 50 years," one of the celebrations commemorating the United Nation's Decade for Women launched that same year. The exhibition was held under the auspices of the First Lady of Egypt, Jehan Sadat. In his introductions, Ghazi said that "Marguerite Nakhla is *the* leading artist. She has given us works expressive of her simplicity, honesty and ability to reproduce life in parks, in the baths and in the markets."[6] At the time of her death in 1977, the *Courrier des Arts* in Alexandria ran this headline, which in the end could be interpreted as a "prophetic" statement: "Marguerite Nahkla, the distinguished artist ... leaves a profound legacy to Egyptian painting."[7] As recently as 2008, the Ministry of Culture produced a calendar, each month featuring one of the twelve modern (pioneer) Egyptian painters and sculptors. Marguerite Nakhla is featured in the month of September. She is one of three women featured in this calendar. In 2008 as well,Wagdi Habashy, art editor for the newspaper *Watani* wrote in his article titled "Lighting a Candle in Memory of Marguerite Nakhla" that Nakhla's paintings rank among the "giants" of twentieth century modern Egyptian art.[8]

The building of St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church on El Maraashly Street in Zamalek was finished in1960. The church was built by the renowned architect Ramses Wissa Wassef and the icons were completed between 1958 and 1959 by two of Egypt's twentieth-century pioneers of modern art, Ragheb Ayaad and Marguerite Nakhla. The frescoes above the altars were executed by Ayaad's Italian wife, Emma Kally Ayaad, an artist in her own right. Ramses Wissa Wassef also designed and supervised the creation of the stained glass windows. Marguerite Nakhla's iconographic contribution to St. Mary's Church is a unique narrative of twelve oil paintings that she entitled *Les femmes dans la vie du Christ/Women in the Life of Christ*. These appear across the west wall. Each painting is 60 x 80cm, individually framed, with each frame being linked to the next. Six paintings are on either side of the tall, magnificently carved wooden door at the main entrance of the church.

5 P.A., 1975.
6 Arab Socialist Union, Women Organizations and Egyptian Peace Council, 1975.
7 *Le Courrier des Arts*, 28 Octobre 1977. Translation by the author.
8 Habashy, August 10, 2008. Translation by Ibrahim el-Beheri.

"WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST"

While there are renditions of the life of St. Mary, such as the eighteenth-century icons by Yūḥannā al-Armanī and Ibrāhīm al-Nāsiḫ in the Muʿallaqa Church in Old Cairo, and nineteenth-century icons by Anasṭāsī al-Rūmī in St. Mary's Church, Maadi, and wall paintings on the life of Christ in a number of monasteries and the life of St. Mark in St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, I have yet to see a narrative on women in the life of Christ. As we shall see, her narrative icons are unique because of the theme she has selected.

There is a chronology to the themes of Nakhla's narrative painting, starting with the *The Presentation of Three-Year-Old St. Mary in the Temple* and ending with the *Apparition of Christ to the Women*. The narrative includes "events" in the life of Christ as well as the teachings and miracles of Christ. Each scene represents the biblical and/or Coptic traditional sources she "documents." As one studies the sources that these icons document, one cannot but help "read" the underlying messages of "faithfulness" to tradition, the love and compassion of God, and God's faithfulness to those who trust in Him. Nakhla was deeply moved by *La Grandeur de la Foi / The Grandeur of Faith* after her visits to the Holy Land and to Lourdes (France).[9] Everyone I interviewed stressed that they experienced her as a deeply spiritual and modest woman. Her canvases, whether they depict a "secular" or a "religious" theme, were said to reflect "the best of her soul."[10] Nakhla also described her approach to her art as follows: "I look for the anecdote and I always try to provide a bit of background information about the painting I create ... I try to provoke a thought... an idea."[11] The challenge is therefore: what is she provoking us to "see," "think," and "understand" why she called this narrative of twelve scenes titled "Women in the Life of Christ"? Each scene or "snapshot" she is depicting will be discussed by using the biblical source and/or the Coptic *Synexarion* as reference points.[12] The narrative begins on the right side of the west wall with the presentation or entrance of three-year-old St. Mary in the Temple (figure 1).

Figure 1. *Women in the Life of Christ* (1959)
View of six icons on the north-west side. Oil wood - each icon 60 x 80cm
Marguerite Nakhla
St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church, Zamalek. ©*Photo: Ayman Badieʿ.*

9 Soton,1954. Translation by the author.
10 Moustapha, 1975: 5. Translation by the author.
11 Diab, 1956. Translation by the author.
12 Biblical texts are taken from *The Holy Bible New King James Version*. 1982. Thomas Nelson Bibles: USA. The *Synexarion* references are taken from *Coptic Synexarium*. St. George and St. Rueis Coptic Orthodox Church, North York, Ontario.

THE ENTRANCE OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE (COPTIC *SYNEXARIUM*: 3 KYAK/12 DECEMBER)

The "moment" of St. Mary entering the Temple as depicted (fig. 1, first icon) is related in the Coptic *Synexarion* and commemorated in the Coptic Orthodox Church on 3 Kyak/12 December. The scene depicts the fulfilment of the vow that the parents of St. Mary, Hanna and Joachim, made to God should they be blessed with a child: to consecrate their first child to God (the Temple). The icon depicts Hanna and Joachim each holding one of three-year-old St. Mary's hands. She is wearing a simple white tunic as a symbol of purity and innocence. Two elders from the Temple "receive" her with open hands.

In the background are six women also dressed in white tunics: two are holding tapers, two are holding olive branches, and two are holding censers for burning incense. The six women are not mentioned in the Coptic *Synexarion* and to see a depiction of women holding censers is unusual because censers are considered consecrated instruments that are used for liturgical and ceremonial purposes in the Coptic Church and that only sub-deacons and, of course, officiating clergy are authorized to hold. Icons depicting the presentation of St. Mary to the Temple in other Orthodox traditions usually have all the virgins holding tapers and following St. Mary and her parents into the Temple.[13] Karel Innemée and Youhanna Nessim Youssef's article "Virgins with Censers: A Tenth-Century Painting of the Dormition in Deir al-Surian"[14] provides an explanation for how it came to be that Nakhla painted her icon with this depiction forty-three years before the tenth-century painting that closely resembles her icon was even discovered. Innemée and Youssef's research reveals that it was a common practice for virgins to hold censers in the Late Antiquity period (*c.* AD300–600). Furthermore, the censer was not consecrated until the sixteenth century.[15] Their source is a doxology, which they quote in their article and which refers to a lost homily written in Coptic and attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem (AD431).[16] This doxology refers to six virgins named Mary who accompany three-year-old St. Mary into the Temple. Five of them hold censers and the sixth Mary, who was from Mount Saint Olives, alsoholds what could be an olive branch.[17]

13 There are examples of icons from other Orthodox traditions that depict the Presentation of St. Mary to the Temple accompanied by virgins. For example: de la Croix, Mère Agnès-Mariam. 2006. *Icônes arabes mystère d'Orient*. Éditions Grégoriennes. On page 67 there is a Greek Orthodox icon dated as 1718 in the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Notre Dame, Aleppo, Syria, and on page 175 there is an icon shown from a private collection located in Naji Skaff, Lebanon, and dated as 1850. A contemporary Russian Orthodox icon is found in the work by Quenot, Michel. 2004. *Les icones des 12 grande Fêtes*. St. Maurice, Switzerland. Éditions Saint-Augustin: 40. The virgins in all three icons hold tapers and are not dressed in white.

14 Innemée and Youssef. 2007: 69–83. This wall painting was discovered in 2002 by a team of conservators who have been working since 1995 to uncover the mural paintings of the Church of the Holy Virgin in Deir al-Surian. Leiden University and the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo were responsible for this project; Karel Innemé was the director.

15 Innemée and Youssef: 79–84.

16 Innemé and Youssef's research also reveals that a homily on the Dormition of the Virgin Mary attributed to Theodosius of Alexandria and dated AD 566–567 also names the virgins with censers. Innemé and Youssef conclude that the painter of the tenth-century wall painting depicting the six women with censors paralleled the accompaniment to the entrance of St. Mary in the House of God on earth (the Temple) and in the case of the painting of the Virgin's Dormition, they accompanied her to the House of God in Heaven: 72–73, 84.

17 The names of the six Mary's are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of John, Mary of Cleopas, Mary from Mount Saint Olives, Mary the sister of Lazarus, and Mary of Justus. A seventh Mary was the daughter of Joachim and Hanna or the Virgin Mary.

As they enter the Temple, they are swinging their censers and singing "with glory and honour."[18] While we do not know the source of Nakhla's documentation or whether she was familiar with this doxology, she did however reinvent an early Coptic imagery, thus expressing once again her understanding of religious folkloric art.

Nakhla is likely to have used artistic license in this composition in depicting virgins on either side of St. Mary holding censers, olive branches, and tapers. The scene evokes a sense of glorification, reverence and joy: the censers symbolizing Praise, the olive branches symbolizing Peace, and the candles symbolizing Light.

The presentation of St. Mary in the Temple in Nakhla's icon suggests the following interpretations:

- God's response to childless Hanna and Joachim's prayers entreating God to give them a child. Both were totally trusting in God's will and devoted to God. They were willing to faithfully abide by their promise to consecrate their first child to God – the Temple.
- St. Mary's entrance and life in the Temple may be said to be the beginning or preparation of St. Mary's place in the Christian salvation story as "celebrated" in this icon.

THE ANNUNCIATION (LUKE 1:30–38, 46–55)

The Annunciation narrative is filled with themes of faithfulness and the Glory of God. In this icon (fig. 1, second icon) we see St. Mary, in a red garment traditionally worn by St. Mary and women saints covering the head and shoulders, holding a hand-held spindle with a basket of cotton yarn at her feet. Her body language and the expression on her face appear somewhat perplexed or troubled by Archangel Gabriel's "message." In the background is a door frame with a white dove on the steps as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The dove is standing ready to overshadow her if she accepts God's offer to be the Theotokos, the Mother of God.

In the Gospel of St. Luke we note that after the Archangel's greeting and announcement, the Virgin Mary's initial response was why me or how could it have happened to me when I have no husband? (v. 26–34) The Archangel then explains how she is to conceive a child and who he is to become (v. 30–37). St. Mary's response at this point is one of absolute acceptance of God's will ("let it be according to your will"). It is after she meets with Elizabeth, in the Magnificat (v. 46–55), that St. Mary praises the power and compassion of God, God's Salvation, and God's faithfulness to those who trust in Him (v. 46–55).

The feast of the Annunciation is commemorated in the Coptic Orthodox Church on the 29th day of Barambat/7 April. According to the Coptic *Synexarion*, the Annunciation is another *beginning*:

> This day then is the *first of all feasts*, for in it was the beginning of the salvation of the world, which was fulfilled by the Holy Resurrection of our Lord, saving Adam and his offspring from the hands of Satan."[19] (emphasis added)

18 Innemé and Youssef: 74–75. The authors also identify another Coptic tradition that refers to the same homily of St. Cyril; this tradition names the same virgins singing praises as they accompany the Virgin Mary into the Temple but with no mention of the censers: 76–77.

19 *Coptic Synexarium*: 347.

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH (LUKE 1:39–45)

In these passages of St. Luke's Gospel we are told that the Virgin Mary, immediately after hearing the Archangel's message, goes to see her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth who was not expecting her greets her with joy and is spirit filled. Nakhla depicts St. Mary and Elizabeth, who is six months pregnant warmly embracing one another — a posture that one might venture to say is typical of the region's culture. (fig. 1, third icon) Other traditions usually have St. Mary and Elizabeth standing at a distance from each other. While Nakhla would not have seen it, this posture was portrayed in the thirteenth-century wall painting narrative of *The Life of Christ* that was uncovered in 1989 in St. Mary's Church in the Baramous Monastery at Wadi el Natrun.[20] She may however have seen a similar posture in the eighteenth-century narrative icon of St. Mary's life written al-Nāsiḫ and Yūḥannā al-Armanī in the Muʿallaqa Church, Old Cairo.[21]

It is not hard to imagine the human and awesome joy these two women must have felt and shared at what God had bestowed upon them, so warmly depicted in the Nakhla icon. I also would like to suggest that in this biblical snapshot which Marguerite Nakhla is "documenting," we have two beginnings in the history of Christian salvation.

THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (LUKE 2:22–38)

In verse 24 of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, we read that the Virgin Mary and Joseph, as good faithful Jews, fulfilled the Jewish law that recognized circumcision as an initiation into Abraham's covenant with the Lord. Joseph also carries two doves as is stipulated in the Book of Leviticus 1:14–17 as symbolic offerings.

In Nakhla's icon (fig.1, fourth icon) Simeon, for whom it was revealed that he would not "see" death before he had seen the Lord (v. 26–32), is reaching out to hold the Christ Child. As we read in the biblical text, Simeon first thanks God for allowing him to depart in peace and then blesses the parents and, to St. Mary, he foretells the destiny of her child. In the background, Prophetess Hanna enters the scene (v. 36–38) and "begins to praise God and to speak about God's Child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." The circumcision was yet another "beginning" and also the first *step* that led to Christ's baptism.

JESUS AMONG THE TEACHERS IN THE TEMPLE (LUKE 2:41–52)

This biblical rendition is taken from the Gospel of St. Luke 2:41–52. St. Mary and St. Joseph as faithful Jews, had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover feast as they had every year. This particular year was a special occasion, since Jesus was twelve years old and, according to Jewish tradition, would be celebrating his *Bar Mitzvah*. According to Jewish tradition, a child has three teachers: the mother until the child is weaned, the father until puberty, and the Torah, with all of its *mitzvot* (laws), through his adult life. When St. Mary and St. Joseph returned to Galilee they realized that Jesus was not with them. They searched for him for three days. The painting depicts the moment when St. Mary and St. Joseph "find" Jesus in the Temple. Jesus responded to their concern by saying that he was going about his Father's business — the *Bar* means "adopted son," thus *Bar Mitzvah* means "adopted son of the 'law.'" It was not a rite of passage but the opportunity to pledge ones life to the study of God's Word with a view of obeying all that God says — which explains Jesus' response.

Nakhla's painting of this scene (fig. 1, fifth icon) also depicts the different responses the twelve-year-old Jesus received when He was in the Temple listening to and conversing with the elders. The expressions on the

20 See image in Marcos, Moussa, and Ramzy, 2009: 72.

21 See image of this icon in Atalla, 1988. *Coptic Icons*. Volume 1. Lehnert and Landrock, Cairo, Egypt: 73.

faces of the elders as they listened to this young man reflect wonder, awe, confusion, the desire to question His understanding, and perhaps astonishment at what they were hearing. As it is written in the Gospel of St. Luke:47, "And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

St. Mary and St. Joseph are standing behind the elders and Jesus with expressions of relief and concern at having found Jesus. They do not fully understanding what it is all about, though in verse 51 we read that St. Mary treasures what she has heard. And in verse 52 we also read that Jesus obediently returned with his parents and grew in wisdom and stature.

In this biblical narrative, Nakhla depicts another *beginning* or a turning point in the Christian salvation story.

THE WEDDING AT CANAAN (JOHN 2:1–11)

According to Jewish tradition, weddings would last a week! So, it is not surprising that at this wedding they ran out of wine (v. 6) We read in St. John's Gospel that there were six empty stone jars and each could hold twenty to thirty gallons of wine; accordingly, Nakhla's icon has the same number of jars (fig.1, sixth icon). The icon offers no image of the wedding feast but rather a "snapshot" of the moment when the Virgin Mary intercedes and asks Jesus to remedy the situation. She believes that Jesus can do something about it. As St. John Chrysostom reminds us in his Homily XXI on the Gospel of St. John, St. Luke's Gospel recounts that "she heard all the sayings concerning the Child, and kept them in her heart" (Luke 2:51).[22] She also asks the servants not to question but to follow His instructions (v. 5) and fill the jars with water — once more fulfilling an act of trust. As we read in the bible text, the water turned into wine after Jesus' blessing.

Similarly to the other icons in this narrative, this is another "first" as we read in this biblical narrative that the water turned to wine and that all those who saw it, including His disciples, believed in Him (v. 11). It was Christ's first miracle.

Figure 2. *Women in the Life of Christ* (1959)
View of six icons on the south-west side of the Church. Oil on wood – each icon 60 x 80cm
Marguerite Nakhla
St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church, Zamalek. ©*Photo: Ayman Badie*'.

22 Scaff, 1983: 74

JESUS AND THE WOMAN FROM SAMARIA (JOHN 4:7–30)

As with a number of other women in the New Testament (e.g., the widow of Naim and the daughter of Jairus), we are not given the name of the Samaritan woman who speaks to Jesus at the well (fig. 2 first icon). We are told she is a Samaritan and not only a woman but also one with questionable social relations. Samaritans at this time built their own temple in Samaria in opposition to Jerusalem and, at the time, there was a lot of tension between the two people. Thus, by speaking to a Samaritan and this particular woman, Jesus Christ was breaking three barriers in society.[23] He was very much aware that He was speaking to a Samaritan; he sits unpretentiously on the stone ledge of the well; and he is engaging a woman in a discussion.

The Samaritan woman symbolically brought an empty jar and an "empty self." Initially, she has trouble understanding how he could be speaking to her as a Jew from Jerusalem and wonders whether he is greater than Jacob. She had heard about the "living water" but had not understood its spiritual meaning. Seeing that she is willing to learn, Jesus allows her to ask questions and with masterly didactic skill guides her on to greater spiritual clarity.

In this biblical narrative, Jesus also uses water as a metaphor for the need to confess, and He uses Divine mercy in the living water of Grace, which washes away sins and cleanses souls. The Samaritan woman ends up asking Him to give her the water of Life so that she may not (spiritually) thirst (John 2:15). At this point, she totally believes in the power of the Messiah who would be a "person" and not a "concept," and who is to come and who is to be a teacher. The Samaritan woman's sins were "washed" away because she believed.

St. John Chrysostom points out that "she exhibited the actions of an Apostle, preaching the gospel to all, and calling them to Jesus and drawing a whole city not just one or two people."[24] Though we do not know how she fared later, we read in the Gospel of St. John 4:39–42 that the Samaritan woman went out to serve in what we call today "mission" work to the Samaritans even before the disciples — another first.

THE WIDOW'S SON (LUKE 7:11–17)

This biblical narrative is Jesus Christ's first miracle of the raising of the dead. Later, such miracles are of the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41–56; Matt. 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43) and the raising of Lazarus (John 10:40–11:44). Similarly to when Jesus met the woman from Samaria, we do not know the widow's name. We are only told that Jesus saw the funeral procession as He approached the gate of the city of Nain. (Luke 7:12)

23 Other biblical references to Samaritans in Jesus Christ's ministry include: (1) On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus sent messengers ahead of Him to a Samaritan village to prepare for His visit (Luke 9:52). Although He was not made welcome in the village (Luke 9.53), it is clear He intended to visit a Samaritan village, which is in contrast to when He forbade the disciples to enter any Samaritan village in Matthew:10:5. (2) The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) Jesus gave a Samaritan as an example. (3): When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Saducees they asked Him which commandment of the law is greatest Matthew 22:34–40 and Mark 12:28–34. His response was "You shall love the Lord, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (4) Cleansing of the ten lepers: The one who turned back and thanked and praised Jesus was a Samaritan (Luke 17:11–19).

24 Scaff,1983. Homily XXXII: 112. St. John Chrysostom repeats this affirmation once more in Homily XXXIV. Scaff, 1983: "... she of her own accord, without a command of any, leaves her waterpot, and winged with joy performs the office of the Evangelist. And calls not one or two, as did Andrew and Philip, but having aroused a whole city and people, so she brought them to Him": 118.

The difference with other events/moments in Nakhla's twelve narrative icons (fig. 2 second icon) is that the Gospel of St. Luke gives no indication of the widow's faith. She also does not ask God for anything. The focus, however, is that Jesus had compassion on her because she was a widow and this was her only son. We read in verse 13 of the Gospel of St. Luke that when Jesus Christ saw her, He had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." He knew that in this culture, widows were especially vulnerable: she did not inherit her husband's estate, it passed on to her son, or if there were no children it went to the nearest male relative. The widow would be left penniless or, at best, totally dependent. The compassion due widows was not new, we read this command from God in Isaiah 1:17 and 23 and many other times in both the Old and New Testaments. By taking action rather than simply commanding with words, Jesus violated traditional custom by speaking to a woman on the street and touching a corpse. According to rabbinical law, anyone who touched a corpse would be ritually unclean and would have to go through a ritual of purification. He was therefore breaking barriers again to show God's compassion and faithful action towards the most vulnerable even if they do not ask for it. When necessary, societal barriers can and have to be broken to express this compassion.

THE HAEMORRHAGING WOMAN (MATTHEW 20–22; MARK 5:22–42; LUKE 8:43–48)

The Gospels of St. Matthew, Mark, and Luke recount that a woman who had been haemorrhaging for twelve years had given all the money she had to physicians to heal her only to see her condition grow worse. According to Judaic law (Lev. 15:23), whether it was during women's regular menstrual cycle or continuously such as this woman, women menstruating were perceived to be "unclean" and should not be seen in a "public" let alone be allowed to touch Christ's tunic. As we note in the biblical narrative and as shown in Nakhla's icon *The Haemorrhaging Woman* (fig. 2, third icon), she approaches Jesus from behind out of timidity, and having full faith in Jesus' healing power she touches the hem of His tunic believing that this would heal her. Note also the expressions of concern, if not of shock, on the faces of the men, as noted in verse 45 they included Peter the disciple and the "multitudes" that followed Him, surrounding Jesus as she reaches out with the tip of her fingers to touch the hem of His tunic!

The biblical texts note that Jesus Christ felt, at that moment, a certain power being taken away from Him: "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out of me" (e.g., Luke 8:46). The woman realized that she was "exposed" and, in a trembling voice, tells Him in all faith why she touched His tunic. As St. John Chrysostom states in Homily XXXI on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus not only heals her and puts an end to her fear by acknowledging her faith publicly to all who had gathered, but also He gives her another gift of life by saying "Go in peace" (Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48).[25]

This narrative is an example of Christ's healing ministry. To heal this woman, Jesus Christ once again breaks a societal barrier and responds to her faith by making her whole. In the same Homily, St. John Chrysostom also points out that this was the first woman who sought out Jesus in public.[26]

THE WOMAN WITH OINTMENT (MATHEW 26:6–13)

The biblical narrative of the "Woman with Ointment" (fig. 2, fourth icon) is related in the Gospel of St. Mathew 26:6–13 and the Gospel of St. Mark 14:3–9 (in Simon the leper's home), in the Gospel of

25 Scaff, 1983: 207.
26 Scaff, 1983: 206.

St. Luke 7:36–50 (in the home of Simon the Pharisee), and in the Gospel of St. John 12:1–8. The Gospel of St. Johndiffers from the three other gospel narratives by naming the woman as Mary of Bethany and by describing the event as taking place in the home of Mary and Martha on the occasion when they gathered to express gratitude for the raising of Lazarus. In the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Mark the "woman" pours expensive ointment on Christ's head. The Gospel of St. Luke in contrast relates that the woman washed Christ's feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed His feet, and anointed them with expensive ointment.

The important message in this biblical narrative, however, is that the women in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as well as Mary of Bethany in the Gospel of John were motivated by one thing only, their LOVE for Jesus Christ. In his Homily LXXX, St. John Chrysostom underlines that other people came for healing of the body but this woman came "to Him by way of honour and for the amendment of the soul," and that we have to receive people as imperfect as they may be upon first meeting them and "receive it, and encourage it, and advance it, and not seek all perfection at the beginning."[27]

Jesus Christ goes further to say that she did it for his burial and that she would be remembered for what she had done (Matt.26:2; Mark 14:8–9; John 12:7). She did something only love can do: she wept at his feet and used the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus, this ointment was often used to anoint the body for burial. She knew what she was doing. She dried His feet with her hair, thus humbling her "beauty" to God to express this love, or as St. John Chrysostom eloquently states, "Therefore that which is most honourable member of the whole body, this she paid at Christ's feet, even her own head."[28] Otherwise, one could ask why this woman approached Jesus and anointed him at the risk of ridicule and abuse by others, and indeed this was Simon's response as is visibly depicted in the icon. "She" had the capacity to love and, in turn, the ability to receive God's grace, forgiveness, and love. This is a narrative of absolute love and gratitude.

THE CRUCIFIXION (MATTHEW 27:32–56; MARK 15:21–41; LUKE 23: 26–49; JOHN 19: 16–27.)

The scene of the Crucifixion is described in the four gospels, which also describe the women who attended: Matthew 27:56 mentions Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James and Joses, and mother of Zebedees' sons; Mark 15:40 names Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James the Less and of Joses and Salome (the cousin of St. Mary); Luke 23:49 only mentions "the women"; John 19:25 names "His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."

While each of the Four Gospels note who was at the Crucifixion, Marguerite Nakhla's icon (fig. 2, fifth icon) only depicts St. Mary and presumably the disciple John standing at the cross. I would venture to say that Nahkla chose the Gospel of St. John 19:26 and 27 in creating this icon. In verse 26 we read: "When Jesus [therefore] saw his mother, and the disciple John, he said to His mother: 'Woman behold your son.'" In verse 27 we read that Jesus said to His disciple, "'Behold your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

Jesus did not want Mary to be alone as a widow and as a mother who had "lost" her son. Once again, Nakhla is depicting an expression of God's love and compassion towards the St. Mary and St. John the Disciple, two people who had never abandoned Jesus and who had never asked anything of Him.

27 Scaff, 1983. Homily LXXX: 481.
28 Scaff, 1983. Homily LXXX: 481.

THE APPARITION OF CHRIST TO THE WOMEN (MATTHEW 28:1–10; MARK 16:1–13; LUKE:24:1–10; JOHN 20:1–18)

Each of the Four Gospels describes how Jesus Christ appeared to the women after His Resurrection. The Gospel of St. Matthew 28:1 identifies Mary Magdalene and the *other* women. The Gospel of St. Mark 16:1 names Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome. The Gospel of St. Luke 24:10 names Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James, and the *other* women. The Gospel of St. John 20: names only Mary Magdalene.

While they vary slightly as to which of the women saw Christ first, the Four Gospels relate that Jesus appeared to the women first. Since Marguerite Nakhla has three women in her icon (fig. 2 sixth icon), I am assuming it is a snapshot of the Gospel of St. Mark she has chosen to depict. What is important, however, is that Jesus appeared first to the women, His faithful followers. The women were the first to witness the truth of the Resurrection and to report this back to the disciples.

NARRATIVES OF SPIRITUALITY AND FAITHFULNESS

The twelve icons in Nakhla's *Women in the Life of Christ* give us a snapshot of moments from biblical texts that are *firsts*, *beginnings*, *or turning points* in the Christian salvation story. Each narrative has interlocking themes and expressions of faith and faithfulness, which include

- a faithful commitment to live out God's will and law
- believing that God's love, compassion, and grace can be given even to the most vulnerable in society even if a social barrier has to be broken
- believing that God is faithful in responding to those who totally trust in the power of His love

While each icon and its biblical narrative has its own theme, the subtitle of "Women in the Life of Christ" could very well have been Marguerite Nakhla's own spiritual journey and realization of the *La Grandeur de la Foi /The Gandeur of Faith* after her pilgrimages to the Holy Land and to Lourdes.

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The Patriarch and His Project: Cultivating a Coptic Community in Nineteenth-Century Egypt

> We are only 217,000. The population of Egypt is 5,000,000. We ought not, therefore, to contribute more than one-twentieth of the whole army. Sabbatier, the French Consul-General, offered to assist us, but it was on condition that I would order, as Patriarch, the Jesuits to be admitted into Abyssinia. Indeed, I fear the consequences of any interference, if it were known to be at my suggestion. If it were known that I complained, my people, and I myself, might be made to suffer.
>
> — Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Cyril IV to British Consul Bruce, 8 February 1856[1]

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch not only perceived himself as temporal representative of the Coptic Christian community of Egypt, but aimed to defend his prerogatives and, indeed, 'his people' against the encroachments of the Egyptian state.[2] To succeed in this effort would require action from without, negotiating with foreign consuls and government officials, as well as action from within, solidifying communal bonds through a distinctly Coptic program of 'reform.' Central to Coptic reform, as conceived by Cyril, was developing educational institutions through which he could fashion a modernCoptic subjectivity.[3]

The sort of education that Cyril had in mind was not that of Walter Ong's 'wise old man and wise old woman' who, as 'repeaters of the past,' possessed social influence in an oral culture.[4] The Coptic Patriarchgrasped the urgency of stepping beyond such intermediaries, to establish a relationship with the

1 William senior, 1992: 76.

2 Benjamin Braude has scrutinized the historiography of the Greek, Jewish, and Armenian communities under Ottoman rule, and concluded that *millet* structures (that is, structures of communal governance under the Ottomans) , as understood by Western scholars, emerged only in the nineteenth century and that historians of the Greek, Jewish, and Armenian communities retrospectively projected *millet* concepts to the time of Mehmed the Conqueror. See his "Foundation Myths of the *Millet* System," in Braude and lewis, 1982. His conclusion, on page 74 of volume I, that prior to the nineteenth century, the Ottomans possessed "no overall administrative system, structure, or set of institutions for dealing with non-Muslims," stands in stark contrast to the received wisdom of Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, that Mehmed consolidated the Christian and Jewish communities under the leadership of patriarchs and a chief rabbi respectively: Gibb and Bowen, 1957: 215-217. For the most recent scholarship on this question, see Masters, B. 2001.

3 For comparative purposes, consider Chakrabarty, 1997: 376–143.

4 Ong, 2002: 41.

individual, the 'Coptic subject.' Cyril's schools aimed at marginalizing the 'superstitious' practitioners of popular forms of faith, the faith of the common people. What the Patriarch urged, largely by means of 'modern' education, was an understanding of text in the place of a blind reverence for the dictates of men claiming holiness. The faith of Cyril was the faith of the textbook, a faith of inwardness, a faith concerned with individual examination of conscience, a faith authorized from above rather than below.

CYRIL'S RISE TO THE PATRIARCHAL SEAT

Cyril was the successor, in 1854, to Peter VII, who had held the Patriarchal seat since 1809.[5] Accounts of the life of the 'father of reform' abound, particularly in Arabic. According to legend, Dāwūd, as Cyril was known prior to his accession , was born in the village of al-Ṣawām'a al-Šarqiyya, near Aḫmīm, in 1816, of poor parents. Despite the fact that his father was illiterate, Dāwūd was sent to a Coptic *kuttāb*, wherein he commenced his study of Arabic, Coptic, the Bible, and Church doctrine. He is reputed to have mingled with Bedouin as a young man, and to have become proficient at riding among them.

In 1838, at age 22, he ventured to the Monastery of Saint Anthony in the Eastern Desert. At the monastery, he devoted himself to the study of grammar, literature, and history, as well as to the education of his peers. According to J. Heyworth-Dunne, "he soon made himself conspicuous on account of his intelligence, good judgment and studious habits."[6] Within two years, he was unanimously acclaimed abbot of the monastery, and proceeded to undertake such projects as a reading room and discussion circle for his fellow monks, and a *kuttāb* for the instruction of the Coptic youth of Būsh in Arabic and Coptic. Indeed, the monks themselves came to attend the school at Būsh, in the Beni Suef district. Dāwūd's efforts drew the attention of the Patriarch, who decided, in 1851, to dispatch the monk to Abyssinia, to mitigate tensions between Bishop Salama and the Abyssinian clergy.

A year after Dāwūd's departure, the ailing Patriarch recommended his envoy as his successor to the Patriarchal seat. According to Edith Butcher, upon Peter's death in 1852, a movement arose in support of Dāwūd: "Those who had been his fellow-students and knew his desire for a reform of the Church clamoured for his appointment."[7] However, a lengthy struggle with several bishops prevented a smooth succession. The Bishop of Aḫmīm had garnered much support among fellow bishops for his aspirations to the Patriarchal seat. His supporters ventured not only to claim they had the sanction of 'Abbās Pasha for the appointment, but spread rumors about Dāwūd, to the effect that he had not only interfered in the politics of Abyssinia, but married and fathered children during his mission there as well.

To resolve the dispute within the Church, an Armenian mediator was appointed. In 1853, 'Abbās agreed to the mediator's plan, that Dāwūd be appointed a bishop on a trial basis, to determine his suitability as a leader for the Church as a whole. Dāwūd immediately resolved to demolish several houses for the purpose of building a large, modern school for the education of Coptic youth, and collected roughly 44,000 piastres to that end. The audacity of the project apparently convinced Dāwūd's detractors, with the exceptions of the Bishops of Aḫmīm and Abū Tīğ, that he was the man for the job. Within two years of the death of Peter VII, Cyril had risen to the Patriarchal seat, and become the 110th Patriarch of Alexandria.

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5 For details of the 'legend,' refer to Butcher. 1897: 396-398; Heyworth-Dunne, 1940: 102; Seikaly, 1970: 248; and Shoucri, 1991: 677-678.

6 Heyworth-Dunne, 1940: 102.

7 Butcher, 1884: 397.

THE PATRIARCH'S PROJECT

Upon his rise, Cyril's principal concern was educating the Copts. The Patriarch was extremely sensitive to the critique of the existing village schools, *katātīb*, mounted by European travelers and missionaries in their journeys through Egypt. The conclusions of a deputation from the Malta Protestant College were typical:

> The instruction in the schools is conducted by ignorant teachers, and consists in a mechanical exercise of the memory, without any cultivation of the other mental faculties. The consequence is, that the people mostly repeat the Scriptures, without understanding them, and have only a superficial knowledge of other subjects.[8]

Indeed, there was a feature of the Coptic *kuttāb* that particularly troubled European visitors: Virtually all the *'arīfs*, the heads of the *katātīb*, were blind.[9] Cyril began his educational project by condemning deacons' and priests' lack of familiarity with the Coptic language — in particular, their 'blind' engagement in the Coptic incantations that pervaded church services, and their reliance upon Arabic commentary to comprehend the services.[10] 'Arīān Ǧirgis Muftāḥ, who assumed responsibility for the teaching of Coptic in the Patriarch's schools, insisted upon a grammatical, rule-based approach to the language, in contrast to the techniques of memorization imparted by *al-katātīb*. Indeed, the Patriarch created a committee for the purpose of developing a text for Coptic language instruction in all Coptic schools.

In 1855, Cyril founded 'modern' boys' schools in 'Abdīn and Mansūra, and a series of girls' schools, one adjacent to the Patriarchate, in Clot Bey, and one in 'Abdīn. According to al-Maṣrī, Cyril "realized that an uneducated girl would not become a good mother who could look after her children properly." He was of the view that, "as the mother is mentor to the children, she must be educated."[11] Apparently the parents of the girls complained to no less an authority than Sa'īd Pasha about Cyril's 'modern methods' of education, but Sa'īd stood behind the Patriarch, and ventured to endow the school with a tract of land. In her writings, al-Maṣrī emphasizes that Cyril's concern with fairness to women extended beyond education into the legal realm: When asked by a Catholic family to offer an opinion about shares of an inheritance, he insisted thatMost importantly, the Madrasat al-Aqbāt al-Kubrā , known variously as the Great Coptic School and the Coptic Patriarchal College, commenced instruction in 1855. Coptic historians laud the 'sound pedagogical approach' the School embraced, a phrase one can interpret as denoting a shift from recitation to the printed text.[12] Students received all the books and supplies they required at the Church's expense. The curricula of the School were under the strict supervision of the Patriarch, and he carefully monitored the progress of each class of students.[13] daughters receive their due.[14] According to 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ilāys Nuṣayr, the School's teachers were carefully selected, and remarkably well paid for the era. The English instructor, Muḥammad Badr Bey al-Ḥākīm, received twenty pounds in gold each month; Mustafa Rašwān served as French instructor,

8 *Journal of a Deputation Sent to the East by the Committee of the Malta Protestant College*, in 184. (1854): 23.

9 Jowett, 1982: 161.

10 al-Maṣrī, 1975: 314-315. Cyril reportedly complained that 'foreigners' had developed a greater grasp of Coptic than had most Copts.

11 al-Maṣrī, 1975: 320.

12 Seikaly, 1970: 249.

13 Shoucri, 1991: 678.

14 al-Maṣrī, 1961.

and Iskandar Ǧarwā, as principal.[15] Not only Copts and Muslims, but indeed, Syrians, Lebanese, Italians, and Frenchmen were all employed as teachers.

Īrīs Ḥabīb al-Maṣrī makes a point of noting that Cyril's aim "was not just to educate but to build character." Apparently, a number of well-heeled parents visited him with the complaint that one of their sons had suffered a beating at the hands of a teacher, with no regard paid to the boy's high social status. Al-Maṣrī claims that the Patriarch found the complaining parents so offensive that he refused to release their children from the School that day, until they had each paid five years' worth of tuition fees. Further, he admonished them in the following terms: "your children will be the men of the future, they will be the ones who build our country, and they should be raised properly." The parents withdrew with the commitment, "they are not our children, they are yours, and we give you permission to do what is right, according to your wisdom." [16] The Patriarch had personally supervised the construction of the School, adjacent to the Patriarchal residence, and the project as a whole cost 600,000 piastres. Cyril admitted students of all faiths, and frequently invited foreign travelers and residents, particularly educators, to visit the School, to examine his students.[17] Indeed, there was a reception area devoted specifically to welcoming such guests, and they were invited to record their comments in a register. Rūfīla claims that Cyril often remained in the classroom during students' lessons, and departed with the words, "I have gained with you today something I had not known before."[18]

KUTTĀB OR *KUFR*?

However impressive the School may have seemed to visitors, Coptic youth and their parents were extremely reluctant to give Cyril's institution a chance. Despite the fact that there were no fees imposed on those unable to pay, the Patriarch was hard-pressed to convince parents to withdraw their children from *katātīb*. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ilāys Nuṣayr speaks of a rumor campaign directed by the heads of *katātīb* against the School, heads fearful of the loss of income that could result from the transfer of students to a central school. They apparently suggested that the Great Coptic School was a source of *kufr*, or infidelity, and would lead to a corruption of belief. Nuṣayr recounts that the *kuttāb* heads ultimately came to an understanding with the Patriarch. Under that agreement, they would receive monthly salaries for their efforts in early education, after which their students would face examinations to distinguish those fit for the Great Coptic School.

Nevertheless, in the face of determined resistance from Coptic parents, Cyril realized empty references to the future benefits of modern education would not suffice to lure students to the School. To demonstrate the immediate benefits the School could offer pupils, he recruited a priest to develop a choir from among the School's student body. Choir members were provided with impressive vestments to wear during church services. According to Nuṣayr, the uniforms served to dampen parents' resistance to the School, while Coptic youth themselves reveled in the hymns. Despite his best efforts, Cyril would not, during his lifetime, manage to convince the mass of Copts that 'modern education' was in their interest. Particularly detrimental to Cyril's efforts in this regard was the long-standing association in people's minds between such 'modern education' and conscription. Mehmed Ali's educational projects had had the specific aim of preparing the inhabitants

15 Nuṣayr, 1961: 65-83.
16 Al-Maṣrī, 1975: 318-319.
17 Heyworth-Dunne, 1940: 103.
18 Rūfīla, 1897: 312.

of the Nile Valley for service in the military, and peasants were scarcely oblivious to this link, resisting the recruitment of their children for 'modern education' as fiercely as they resisted their seizure for the army or public works. Indeed, the state decision, in 1855, to make Copts subject to conscription, a decision that virtually coincided with the opening of the Great Coptic School — could not have helped Cyril's educational mission.

This problem of perception yielded a Great Coptic School patronized, largely, by the sons of the Coptic elite. Among the graduates of the schools Cyril founded were Faltaus Ibrahim Baghdadi, the architect of Egyptian personal status legislation; Mīḫā'īl 'Abd al-Sayyid, the founder of the newspaper *al-Waṭan*; Mīḫā'īl Šārūbīm and Barsūm Ǧirǧis Rūfīla, judges; and Boutros Ghali, prime minister. Cyril could not possibly have foreseen how the beneficiaries of Church largesse in the Great Coptic School would ultimately rise up against the institution to which they owed their education, ironically enough, all because of the modern Coptic subjectivity Cyril had imparted to them.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY COPTIC ELITE

Elite Coptic laymen of the late nineteenth century defended their wealth as 'citizens of Egypt,' but never intended to forsake their Coptic communal identity. In their view, the Egyptian and Coptic dimensions of their identity were scarcely irreconcilable. Quite to the contrary, they were mutually reinforcing, and the link served elite Copts well. Yet, a troubling question soon emerged: Who, among the Copts, in fact merited the 'modern sons of the Pharaohs' label? Elite Copts were plagued with ambivalence and apprehension about the Coptic masses. Coptic peasants, with their 'backward' and 'offensive' customs, were scarcely considered heirs to the illustrious Coptic heritage, of which elite Copts considered themselves proprietors. The 'lower orders' needed not the equality for which the elite was then striving, but 'enlightenment.'[19]

Enlightenment would emerge through the textualizing and moralizing processes developed in Cyril's educational institutions. The aim of such processes was to eliminate those local intermediaries to whom villagers and townspeople had long looked for guidance. Indeed, for the elite laymen of the Coptic community, the monks controlling the Coptic Orthodox Church represented a problem. In the laymen's view, due to the monks' mismanagement, "The revenues of Church property are squandered in the most reckless manner, whilst the churches are suffered to fall into decay, and secular priests are paid only beggarly salaries, or are entirely left to depend for their subsistence on the charity of their congregations."[20] The monks were mere 'superstitious' anachronisms. They still, for the most part, could not understand the sacred language of the Church, yet 'mindlessly' uttered prayers in that language.

In 1908, Murqus Fahmī launched a moral indictment of the Coptic community in the pages of the newspaper, *Miṣr*. Fahmī had graduated from the French Law School in 1892, and continued with his

19 There is a striking parallel between the maneuvering of the Coptic elite that I will describe here, and that of the Dutch elite as described by Rooden.1999. At page 102, van Rooden describes how Dutch historians of the nineteenth century propagated the notion, "All citizens are potentially equal, because they can be morally educated. Only a minority, however, is truly educated and civilized. This is the basis for a discursive distinction between the civilized elite and the rude common people."

20 Simaika, 1897: 738.

legalstudies in Aix-en-Provence. Upon his return to Egypt in 1895, he took up the practice of law, and ultimately became the moving force behind the idea of an Egyptian lawyers' syndicate. Indeed, he wrote the syndicate's inaugural charter in 1899. Further, he was heavily involved in the reform of personal status law within the Coptic community. In his columns for *Miṣr*, Fahmi claimed that, as a people, the Copts were not merely uneducated as to their legacy, but shamefully backward as to their morals. They refused women the education to which they were entitled, and thus harmed the Coptic home. Further, the Copts were concerned only with material advancement, rather than the spiritual advancement of their community.[21]

The attack Ramzī Tādrus launched upon his community was of still greater virulence. For Tādrus, the Copts were a selfish, filthy people. As Samir Seikaly recounts, the Coptic Committee for the Suppression of Evil Habits was, at the time, engaged in the effort to raise the moral condition of the community. The Committee sought to rid Copts of "offensive burial customs, premature and senile marriages, the exclusion and veiling of women, belief in amulets, and finally, excessive drinking, smoking and gambling."[22]

Fahmī and Tādrus concurred that if elite Coptic laymen — men who had purportedly served the state, cultivated the land, and constructed factories with industry, discipline, and order — were in control of the community, they could at last render the Church a 'functional' institution, and the Copts, a 'moral' people. As the 'modern sons of the pharaohs,' Egypt was their 'native' land, after all. In the eyes of their Western 'Christian brethren,' the Copts of Egypt constituted a human link, both to the erudition of the ancients and to the morality of the primitive Church. This 'imagined' narrative of cultural distinctiveness was vital for the elite Copts of the nineteenth century, with their disproportionate influence and wealth, for the narrative declared Copts the 'most Egyptian' of all Egyptians. Through the 'modern sons of the pharaohs' claim, Coptic landowners succeeded both in strengthening their communal identity and in legitimizing their control of vast estates. With the 'modern sons of the pharaoh' claim at hand, endorsed by the 'scientific' judgment of a host of archaeologists, how indeed could a Muslim question Coptic involvement in Egyptian public life?[23]

Hence, the elite Copts published Coptic newspapers, notably, *al-Waṭan*, developed by Great Coptic School graduate Mīḫā'īl 'Abd al-Sayyid in 1877.[24] They distributed Coptic journals, among them, the literary *al-Maǧalla al-Qibṭiyya*, the spiritual *al-Ḥaqq*, and the educational *al-Šams*.[25] They conferred at Coptic clubs, such as *Nādī Ramsīs*.[26] Most prominently, however, they sought to 'enlighten' the 'lower orders' of the Coptic community through the Tawfīq Society, founded at Cairo in 1891.

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21 *Miṣr*, 28 and 29 February 1908.

22 Seikaly, 1970: 266.

23 Seikaly, 1970: 269, recounts that Gaston Maspero, in an interview, "stated positively that the Copts, more than any other people, had retained their racial purity, and that the present Copts were themselves the descendants of the Pharaohs." Flinders Petrie ventured to claim "that the Copts, inheriting the characteristics of their ancestors, were the only ones capable of leading Egypt on the path of advancement."

24 Heyworth-Dunne, 1940: 104-105.

25 Seikaly, 1970: 267-268.

26 Seikaly, 1970: 268.

In the pages of their newspapers and journals, or cloistered in their clubs and 'benevolent' societies, elite Copts applauded the success they enjoyed and, just as the evangelicals had years prior, attributed that success to their ancestry. Ramzī Tādrus pointed to the Copts as "the remnant of a people for ever persecuted but never destroyed; pure descendants of the ancient Egyptians, similar to them racially and in genius and ability." As Seikaly recounts, Tadrus concluded that, given such 'genius and ability,' the Copts were destined to serve as "instruments of social change, the harbingers of a true civilization that would not completely dispose of the past, yet would accept European modernity."[27]

Elite Copts believed they had an equal right to the abundance of that land, and looked to the British to aid them in securing their 'inheritance.' At the 1911 Coptic Congress, Mīḫā'īl Fānūs captured the notion succinctly: "As regards man's personal well-being it is for everyone to struggle for his own advancement." He continued:

> once the principle of equality is established, no more importance will be attached to the mere acquisition of posts; the words Moslem and Copt will be forgotten. By equality we mean that people should live with each other in science and education, so that only qualified persons shall hold these posts. Thus we arouse in every man great activity and eagerness to improve his mind for the sake of his career.[28]

ELITE COLLABORATORS

Despite such exalted ambitions, elite Coptic laymen faced a significant obstacle in the quest to achieve such 'equality,' and lead their community to 'progress and advancement' , namely the hierarchy of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In ideological terms, whereas the landowners were convinced that Copts had to struggle for their 'rights of citizenship' and a position of prominence in Egyptian public life, the Church hierarchy sought to preserve the status quo of a 'separate,' 'protected' Coptic community. In practical terms, however, whereas the landowners were convinced that elite laymen were the members of the community most 'qualified' to represent the community and to administer Church affairs beyond the spiritual realm, that is, to control the endowments and the leadership of the Copts, the Church hierarchy sought to preserve the authority of the Patriarch, in both spiritual and temporal affairs.

In 1873, after seven years and seven months in the Patriarchal seat, Demetrius passed away. Upon his death, Bishop Murqus of Alexandria assumed responsibility for the Church hierarchy. In the midst of the confusion surrounding the selection of Demetrius's successor, elite Copts, who came together under the banner of a 'Reform Society,' saw an opportunity. Society members put together a report for Murqus explaining their dissatisfaction with the state of Coptic youth and the Coptic poor. Further, in a petition to Khedive Ismā'īl, Great Coptic School graduate Boutros Ghali requested permission to wrest control of the Church administration, personal status law, the endowments, Coptic schools, and poor relief, from the Church hierarchy, through the election of a *maǧlis al-millī*, or Coptic Community Council. Through a decree issued on 3 February 1874, the Khedive furnished his consent for Ghali's proposal.[29]

27 Seikaly, 1970: 269.
28 Fanous, 1911: 11.
29 Rūfīla, 1897: 329.

Patriarch Cyril V cooperated with the Council for a time. Within a year, the Church had founded both a school for girls and a theological college. However, as Cyril came to grasp the aspirations of the laymen, particularly as far as control of the endowments was concerned, the arrangement collapsed. The Patriarch began to absent himself from meetings of the *mağlis*. The Reform Society called upon the government to intervene, to force the Patriarch to respect *mağlis* decisions. Although the government exerted much pressure on the Church hierarchy, Cyril resisted that pressure, to the extent that the *mağlis* was virtually disbanded for a period of seven years. The educational projects initiated with the Council apparently withered.[30]

By 1883, however, the balance of forces in the dispute had shifted significantly. British troops trod upon Egyptian soil. As Seikaly notes in his doctoral dissertation, "The Copts were a tool to be utilized to further British aims in Egypt, they were a factor in a fluid political situation, and as a politician Cromer (British Agent in Egypt) had no hesitation to manipulate such a factor in order to insure that his policy would succeed."[31] Further, the Church of England had seized upon the opportunity occupation represented, and developed an Association for the Furtherance of Christianity in Egypt. The elite laymen were sufficiently emboldened by meetings with Association leaders to condemn the Patriarch in public. No doubt frustration was mounting within the community at large due to the administrative confusion *mağlis* dissolution had prompted: Legal issues surrounding inheritance and Church endowments were in limbo.

Led by Boutros Ghali, elite Copts petitioned the government in February for the restoration of the Council. A Khedival decree issued on 14 May required the Patriarch to seek Council approval for all his decisions beyond the spiritual realm. Elections to the Council were held, supervised by government officials, but the Patriarch refused to cooperate. Although Cyril had a representative at all Council meetings, he disregarded Council decisions and, within a year, the laymen had withdrawn.[32]

They were, however, scarcely prepared to admit defeat. The laymen developed societies independent of the Church, and cultivated support both within the government and among the British. By 1891, they thought themselves prepared for a further confrontation, and dispatched a delegation to the Patriarch, with the traditional demand for the restoration of the Council. According to Edith Butcher's account, "a great popular demonstration was arranged in Cairo, to which came delegates from all the chief Coptic communities of Egypt."[33] The response of the Patriarch was particularly virulent, and the delegation immediately sought the intervention of Khedive Tawfiq. When the laymen attempted to hold elections at the Patriarchate, Cyril called for police intervention to prevent voters from entering the building. The Patriarch proceeded to convene a synod under the chairmanship of his deputy, Bishop Yuannis of Alexandria. The synod declared the notion of the majlis contrary to the laws of the prophets, and both Bishop and Patriarch traveled to Alexandria to present the synod's declaration to the Khedive.[34]

30 Rūfīla, 1897: 329

31 Seikaly, 1967: 151. For British perceptions of the Copts at the time, refer to Amos, 1883; Butcher, 1884; and, Howard, 1884.

32 Seikaly, 1970: 253.

33 Butcher, 1897: 405.

34 Rūfīla, 1897: 340.

Boutros Ghali, away in Europe during these events, was briefed by the Khedive upon his return to Egypt. Tawfiq instructed Ghali to find a solution to the Council dilemma and, accordingly, he brought the disputing parties together in the majlis chamber. Although a tentative agreement with the Patriarch as to the powers of the Council seemed to emerge from the meeting, requests to convene the majlis went ignored for a year. At this point, the Patriarch took the initiative and contacted a number of Coptic notables for informal consultations — but the notables refused to meet, insisting upon a formal session of the Council. Communal infighting became particularly virulent, with the anti-clerical, reform-oriented Tawfiq Society squaring off against an 'Orthodox Society.'[35]

In July 1892, incensed by Patriarchal 'intransigence' and under British pressure, the Khedive ordered the restoration of the Council. As expected, the Patriarch refused to sanction elections to the Council. Elections were held, despite the Patriarch's opposition, under the supervision of Cairo's chief of police. In the face of insistent petitioning from the Patriarch to the effect that such elections were illegal and improper, the Khedive snubbed Cyril in a most public, embarrassing way, refusing to receive the Patriarch's official greetings on the occasion of 'Īd al-Adha. Indeed, the Khedive ventured to inform Boutros Ghali that the palace would accept no further communications from the Patriarch.[36]

Elite Copts resolved to call for government removal of all the temporal authority Cyril retained, submitting a report to the government illustrating the Patriarch's efforts to obstruct the Council. 'Abbās II acceded to the petition, and designated Athanasius, the Bishop of Sanabu, Patriarchal Vicar and President of the Council.[37] Athanasius was promptly excommunicated by the bishops, but the Khedive was prepared to enforce his decision by force. By September, the Council of Ministers had banished Cyril to the desert monastery of Nitria. Butcher recounts that four committees were put in place to administer Church affairs, "one to supervise schools, another to receive the Church funds and look after her property, a third to examine the condition of the churches, and a fourth to regulate the ecclesiastical courts."[38]

Throughout the confrontation, the elite laymen emphasized their commitment to render the Coptic Church a 'rational,' 'functional' institution. Edith Butcher, writing in 1897, congratulated the Coptic reformers for having rid the community of one particularly 'backward' custom: "At one time fifteen was considered a suitable age to marry a boy, and twelve for the girl. Already, however, public opinion, backed by the remonstrances of the Church, has improved in this respect, and now a man must be twenty and a girl sixteen before the Patriarch or Bishop will grant the license without which no priest can celebrate a marriage."[39]

Elite Copts were, however, racing not merely towards an abstract notion of 'progress' or 'modernity,' but towards affluence. Despite the rhetoric of Church 'modernization,' the confrontation was, in fact, about control, both of vast tracts of precious yet 'unexploited' *waqf* land, and of the leadership of the Coptic

35 Rūfīla, 1897: 344.
36 Rūfīla, 1897: 347.
37 Seikaly, 1970: 256.
38 Butcher, 1897: 408.
39 Butcher, 1897: 415.

community. The British found among the elite Copts willing collaborators, due not merely to a common commitment to 'modernization', to the values of industry, discipline, and order , but to common material and political aims. Indeed, with the modern, moral values of industry, discipline, and order, elite Copts possessed an enunciative capacity to defend the extraction of resources and the seizure of authority. As Ramzī Tādrus recounted, "Thanks to the freedom, the justice, and the rapid improvement the Nile Valley was experiencing under British rule, Coptic dignitaries and their families were able to develop their abilities for work and finance, and concentrate almost exclusively their zeal in accumulating fortunes in land, stocks and bonds, companies."[40]

MORALITY FOR THE MASSES

Perhaps the most powerful illustration of resistance to the 'moralization' of the community was the scene Cairenes witnessed in February 1893, upon the return to Cairo of the Copts' banished Patriarch. Throughout the period of banishment, Copts had forsaken church services, baptisms, and marriages. Church and community were in a state of utter chaos, and the elite laymen were forced to concede the measure of control they had secured. As Seikaly notes:

> the Patriarch, accompanied by a special government envoy, made a triumphal entry into Cairo. The thoroughfare leading from the main station to the Patriarchate was thronged with jubilant people of all denominations. Women and children perched on balconies cheered uninhibitedly, while in the streets below exultant Copts expressed their joy by slaughtering sheep. Wild with emotion, several Copts unharnessed the horses drawing Cyril's carriage and themselves dragged it to the Cathedral, where prayers of thanks were offered.[41]

For the moment, the 'superstitious' masses had triumphed, and defeated the forces of industry, discipline, and order. However, despite such episodes of resistance, Coptic landowners embraced the 'educational process' that evangelicals had brought to Egypt and that Cyril IV had perpetuated through the Great Coptic School. Elite Copts aimed, through the schools they developed, to cultivate the values they had learned under Cyril IV's tutelage, industry, discipline, and order, within Coptic youth. Ultimately, elite Egyptians, both Copts and Muslims, aimed by such means to render impoverished coreligionists industrious and disciplined laborers.

40 Behrens-Abouseif, 1982: 195.
41 Seikaly, 1970: 259.

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Tarātīl as Popular Music and the Transformation of a Coptic Folk Genre

DEFINING POPULAR MUSIC

In her article on Egyptian popular music, Virginia Danielson writes that there is not a single term in the Middle East analogous to the North American idea of 'popular music'.[1] Rather, folk musics, religious expression, dance, classical Arab arts, and Western inspired musics are all seen as interwoven genres, embracing, adopting, and borrowing from one another. Danielson continues that 'popular' musics are not simply genres that are widely disseminated through the use of technology, but those that emerge in the listeners' discourse on notions of authenticity (*'āṣīl* - أصيل), an indigenous heritage (*turāṯ* - تراث), a classical canon (*klāsīkī* - كلاسيكى), as well the role of innovation in relation to modernity (*mutaṭawir* - متطور).[2] In a particularly oral culture and one vested in the tradition of change, Egyptian 'popular music' is what is most widely talked about, remembered and revered by their audiences.

Beginning in the twentieth century, new technologies and mass media such as the television, the phonograph, public radio, and later, the cassette revolution in the 1970s greatly altered the Egyptian soundscape. Many musical expressions and sounds integral to day-to day living, including prayer, oral memories, and personal and collective discourses were reinterpreted from their intimate and private contexts to a more public and popular realm. The call to prayer, recitation of the Qur'ān, as well as Friday and Sunday services were not only mediated though loud speakers bursting into streets and courtyards, but many other genres such as folk songs, classical ensembles, and wedding festivals were now accompanied and recorded with new and electronic sounds. In this paper, I trace the transformation of taratīl, the most prevalent Coptic Christian folk genre into the popular music realm beginning the twentieth century. By borrowing and reinterpreting from other Egyptian genres, Western inspired sounds, and electronic mediation, taratīl have became one of the most widely disseminated, performed, and talked-about genres within the Orthodox Christian minority in Egypt. More so, by retaining their older forms, *tarātīl* continue to challenge notions of authenticity or *'āṣīl* and redefine a Coptic place within the broader national *turāṯ*. This study is based on ongoing ethnographic research conducted in Washington D.C., as well as Cairo, Egypt, and forms a part of my dissertation for my doctoral studies of ethnomusicology at the University of Toronto.

1 Danielson, 1987: 26.
2 Danielson, 1996: 301.

Tarātīl and the Discourse of Sentiment

As with many folk genres in Egypt, no one can exactly pinpoint the origins of *tarātīl*. One of the few scholars to write on Coptic music, Nabila Erian speculates that they may have been inspired as a response to American Protestant missionaries who began arriving in Cairo beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.[3] To counteract missionary encroachment, Copts began to mimic evangelical meetings and to reinterpret English translated hymns to fit a specifically Orthodox ethos. Other songs and idioms were also borrowed from rural, devotional and classical contexts. This includes genres such as the Ṣūfī *madḥ* that musically celebrated the Prophet Muḥammad, older Arab art music such as *muwwašaḥāt* (موشحات), or the popular folk poetry of *mawwāl* (موال) songs. All of these genres are characterized by highly figurative language and simple melodies that carry colloquial idioms, double puns, and hidden meanings. Such veiled metaphors not only facilitated the transition of these genres into a popular music realm, but also made them integral to what Lila Abu-Lughod identifies as the discourse of sentiment.

In her work with the ʻAwlād ʻAlī Bedouins in Egypt's Western Desert, Abu-Lughod analyzes the role of *ghinnāwas*, or short lyrical poetry, in articulating what would otherwise be taboo within a Bedouin honor code, namely sentiments of vulnerability, love, failure, and sadness.[4] While recounting Biblical stories and major tenets of the Coptic faith, *tartīl* voice similar sentiments of loss, separation, and melancholy, building on the metaphor of eternal homelessness instigated by Adam and Eve's initial expulsion from the Garden of Eden.[5] Such themes strongly resonate within the Coptic minority who daily contest their informal second-class status as Christian minorities within a Muslim majority nation and whose heritage is neglected within the larger national *turāṯ*. As Egyptian media is heavily censored, *tarātīl*'s hidden meanings not only voice a sense of longing for an afterlife with God, but more cogently convey political undertones such as the feeling of civil exclusion and the desire to fully belong to one's homeland.

Besides their evocative poetry, what initially facilitated such an intimate discourse around *tarātīl* are their original private performance settings. Traditionally, taratīl are usually sung during informal gatherings such as Bible studies, spiritual meetings, or Sunday school lessons, casual religious events, as well as dinner parties between family and friends. Performance venues ranged from church courtyards, Sunday school classrooms, to one's kitchen, home, and their cars. By the cassette revolution in the 1970s, *tarātīl*'s sound and performance contexts drastically changed. It is important to note that women were, and still are, the predominant performers and song leaders within these private contexts. Yet, with the advent of music technology and the genre's embrace of popular idioms, this role became shared, and at time, dominated by men.

Rather than conventional a cappella, solo, and call and responses singing styles, performance slowly began to incorporate church choirs and soloists performing with smaller ensembles. Piano and electronic instruments, such as the electronic keyboard (*al-ʾūrg* - الأورج), were also added. Besides the inclusion of faster and lighter rhythms, many *tarātīl* integrated simple western harmonization such as octaves, thirds, and fifth

3 Erian, 1986.

4 abu-Lughod, 1986.

5 It is interesting to note the resemblance found in Sufi metaphors of spiritual separation from the Beloved and the longing to return to this Divine Source. Additionally, much of this mystical symbolism resonates through *madḥ* and even throughout other Egyptian folk genre of *muwwašaḥāt* and *mawwāwīl*.

intervals. Despite all of these changes, taratīl retained their original texts, metaphors, and their old melodic contours. It was performance venues that reflected a larger change; kitchens became churches, living rooms became community centers, and private domains were exchanged for recording studios. What was initially a genre of personal and individual meditation became a public forum to musically express a political discourse and performance of resistive indigeneity.[6]

TECHNOLOGY AND THE RISE OF EGYPTIAN NATIONALISM

Though the phonograph and gramophone first arrived in Egypt as early as 1890, they did not have the same profound impact on Egyptian society as the launch of the Egyptian State Broadcasting radio in 1934. Rather, the onset of radio broadcasting led to the decline of major record companies, most of which were based overseas and owned by foreign companies.[7] Initially, the radio was a joint project of the British Macroni Wireless Telegraph Company and the Egyptian government, and reflected the lingering British presence after the country's nominal independence in 1922. By 1947 though, the radio was entirely transferred to Egyptian management and renamed the Egyptian Radio.[8] It was on these broadcasts that the sounds of 'Umm Kulṯūm, Sayyid Darwīš, and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb mingled with rural folk songs, Qur'ānic chant, and Western-influenced orchestral film music. While Coptic Christian music was not featured on state-run public radio, these broadcasts still played a pivotal role in the development of *tarātīl* as a popular folk genre by inspiring and associating particular sounds with Egyptian indigeneity and nationalism. With the dissemination of this music, a localized revival within the Coptic community openly borrowed from the broader national consciousness that eventually led to full Egyptian independence in 1952.

The advent of government-run radio reflected President Ǧamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir's socialist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism. As the first extended administration after independence (1956-1970), Nāṣir is especially noted for initiating a Pan-Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East as a deliberate turn away from Westernization and return to regional indigeneity. 'Umm Kulṯūm hybrid celebration of Egyptian colloquial culture, classical art, and the use of the Western influenced firqa, or large string orchestras, came to ideologically and politically symbolize Egypt's "continuity of tradition within a contemporary framework."[9] Such markers of nationalism were later translated into a rising Coptic renaissance, particularly through a similar hybrid performance of Coptic, Arab, and Western musical idioms as performed in *tarātīl*.

It was not until Muḥammad 'Ānwar al-Sādāt's presidency (1970-1981) and his invitation of private investments in Egypt that recordings finally made a comeback. The sudden growth of the private cassette industry paralleled the growth of the private sector and reflected the administration's interest in free market capitalism. Furthermore, President 'Ānwar al-Sādāt was eager to distance himself from 'Abd al-Nāṣir's socialist politics and to demonstrate Egypt's willingness to enter a global economy. El-Shawan

6 This term refers to "indigenous peoples" and debates over contested land, such as the First Nation peoples in Canada and Native Americans in the United States. In the case of Egyptian Copts, a similar discourse of indigeneity occurs, with beliefs that Copts, as direct descendents of their Ancient Egyptian predecessors, are the "true Egyptians." For additional information, see Brown and Sant, 1999, and Minde, 2008.

7 Racy, 1976.

8 El-Shawan, 1987: 34.

9 El-Shawan, 1984: 286.

argues that it was the rise of privately owned recording companies that dislodged the hegemony of the state-run radio[10] and allowed smaller musical niches, such as Coptic popular folk music to grow.

BORROWING TO RESIST: A CASE STUDY OF "QAMAR LUH LAYĀLĪ"

Known as *harakit Madāris al-'Aḥad*, the Sunday School movement was particularly instrumental in the renewed interest in Coptic music. In 1908, archdeacon and theologian, Ḥabīb Ǧirǧis (1876-1951) organized informal classes in St. Mary's Church of the Faǧālla district that emphasized Coptic religion, history, and hymnology. Drawing from traditional Coptic community schools known as *katātīb* (or, in the singular as *kuttāb*) as well as the missionary example of Sunday school classes, Ǧirǧis initiated what later became a full-blown Coptic renaissance. By 1918, the handful of children in St. Mary's Church in Faǧālla became a sprawling network of Sunday School classes that taught 42,000 children in major cities, as well as smaller villages throughout Egypt.[11]

The Sunday School Movement is distinctly rooted in the Egyptian middle class, with many lay congregation members volunteering their times as teachers or *ḫudām* (literally "spiritual servants"). It is important to note that major figures such as the current patriarch, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III emerged from these programs at Amba Antonious Church in the Šubrā district of Cairo. Inspired by the larger struggle for Egyptian independence, the Sunday School movement fostered a growing Coptic nationalism, and all religious markers became especially coded with these sentiments. Coptic hymns known as *alḥān* were fervently revived through the work of Rāġib Muftāḥ (1898-2001), while privately performed *taratīl 'adīma* became emblematic sites of resistance against British and American missionary encroachment. Like 'Umm Kulṯūm's performances that emphasized *'āṣīl* and sounds of authenticity, the Coptic community musically celebrated their indigenous roots and expressed this heritage drawing and borrowing from the broader Egyptian *turāṯ*. This is evident in the *tartīla* entitled, "*Yā man 'u'ṭītī afḍal 'aṭiya*" translated, "You Who was Given a Most Splendid Gift." Addressed to the Mother of God, it joins a long list of other folk infused songs that praise the saint. This one, however, is clearly based on Dāwūd Ḥūsnī's popular nineteenth century classical song, "*Qamar al-Layālī*" meaning "Moon of Many Nights."

As a composer and teacher for powerhouses 'Umm Kulṯūm and Asmahān, Dāwūd Ḥūsnī (1870-1937) was especially recognized as a beacon of Egyptian indigeneity, despite his own mixed heritage as an Egyptian Jew. He composed in an older style that drew on Arab classical music and the song genre of *muwašaḥāt*, *taqtūqah*, and *adwār*. These songs are not only laden with sophisticated poetry and elaborate language, but are also based on the Arabic melodic modes known as *maqām* (their Arabic plural is known as *maqāmāt*). They are accompanied by a small *takht* ensemble that usually include a *'ūd*, violin, *qānūn*, and *nāy* player. "*Qamar al-Layālī*" is composed in *maqām rāst*, considered to be the greatest of all *maqāms* and the one most frequently found in Egyptian folks music.[12] Incidentally, this is also a common scale for religious devotional music, making it easily translatable between genres.

10 El-Shawan, 1987: 34.
11 Hasan, 2003: 76.
12 Marcus, 2007: 23.

Qamar al-Layālī yetlaʿ lam yubālī
ʿala al-bustān yinawar fī hum lī layālī

Moon of many nights courageously comes out
and lights the gardens in which there is night.[13]

"*Qamar al-Layālī*"" follows the typical progression of a *maqām*, by presenting and repeating the initial tetrachord, or first four pitches of the mode to familiarize the listeners with the *maqām*'s important pitches. As the song unfolds, the *maqām* allows the performer a chance to illustrate their virtuosity by improvising on pitches borrowed from other modes. Many times, performers will also modulate, or shift between *maqāms*, to express or emphasize a particular passage or the phrasing of a poem. While it is rumored that Ḥūsnī wrote "*Qamar al-Layālī* " to mourn the death of his first wife, named Qamar, the song can be understood in a myriad of ways. As *qamar* is a colloquial term for a beautiful woman, perhaps it simply implies a secret courtship between taking place in a garden. Another interpretation, perhaps closer to Hūsnī's intention is to paint the distance between the garden and the shining beloved from above. These meanings are intentionally left open to the interpretation of the listening audience.

"*Yā man ʾuʿṭītī afḍal ʿaṭiya*" is not only composed in the same *maqām*, but opens with the very same melody as "*Qamar al-Layālī*." However, rather than progress though *maqām rāst* as a typical classical Arab piece, the melody is modified to *tarātīl*'s strophic form. This is not surprising, as taratīl are typically performed by non-specialists, with the exceptions of Lebanese singers such as Fayrūz and Māǧda Al-Rūmī who brought them to the concert hall beginning in the 1990s. Additionally, as a devotional genre, texts certainly take precedence over performance virtuosity, and improvisation, emphasizing meaning and spirituality over sound. Like "*Qamar al-Layālī,*" this tartīla also plays on hidden meanings. Though it first begins as exaltation to the well-known saint, it quickly shifts focus on the collective subject of the singer. By the second verse, the performer evokes God as refuge, victory, and one who makes amends. Yet the question to the audience remains open "victory over what, refuge from what or whom?" Again, such textual ambiguity only leaves room for interpretation, which in public contexts, is collectively understood, shared, and expresses what may be too taboo to say otherwise.

Yā man ʾuʿṭītī afḍal ʿaṭiya
Yā man baʿatlik yā Mariam ruḥu hidya
Bihi fariḥnā, bihi iṣṭalaḥna
Bihi intaṣarna, we kisibnā alʾaḍiya

You who gave you a most splendid gift
To whom [God] gave you, oh Mary, His Spirit as a gift
With Him, we are happy, with Him we have made amends
With Him, we have victory, with Him, we have won over the tribulation

13 I have transcribed and translated these texts from a field recording made in Washington D.C. on July 5, 2008.

Tarātīl and Ambiguous Propriety

In his book, *Making Music in the Arab World*; *The Culture and Artistry of Ṭarab*, Ali Jihad Racy outlines the earliest beliefs regarding the cosmological and emotive power of music on the human spirit:

> Throughout Islamic history, religious chanting, which is not considered 'music' as such, has evoked profound spiritual feelings within members of the religious community. Similarly, secular music has been recognized for its unmistakable transformative powers and at times feared and condemned for its sensuous connotations and its potential for generating emotional excesses and disagreeable behaviors.[14]

Racy captures an age-old debate concerning music's status within the cultural spectrum of what is considered profane and proper in a deeply religious part of the world. As musical sounds are considered to have 'transformative' powers, they are divided between secular or sacred genre. Expressions that facilitate worship are considered sacred and appropriate. According to more conservative perspectives, however, anything that distracts listeners from this purpose is considered secular and profane.[15] While secular popular musics are suspect for their explicit declarations of emotion, love, and desire, religious folk musics are harder to identify for their ambiguous language. Their sense of propriety is further blurred as these genres transition into a popular realm and assimilate idioms and sounds that are associated with the profane.

Racy continues to describe this nuanced debate on musical reception; an essential part of Arab music making is the notion of *ṭarab*, or the performers and music's affective ability to move audiences and induce a kind of musical ecstasy or "enchantment." [16] Scholars and fans alike recount 'Umm Kulṯūm's ability to elicit near hysteria and exuberance from her audience by simply lingering and repeating a particular phrase.[17] While *tarātīl* do not regularly provoke such a heightened emotion, their value is vested in their ability in negotiating intimate, emotional, and at times, political terrain couched in religious language. This is evident during one ethnographic moment I captured while working in Washington D.C. in the summer of 2008. I witnessed a Coptic demonstration in front of the White House and the Egyptian embassy where the popular *tartīla*, "*Kanīsatī il-Qibṭīya*" translated, "My Coptic Orthodox Church" was rallied as a political anthem against the sectarian strife that had recently taken place in Egypt.

On July 16, 2008, 200 people from St. Mark's Coptic Church in Arlington, Virginia loaded four buses and arrived to demonstrate in front of the White House. They were demonstrating against the recent violence that took place in the al-Minya district of Upper Egypt, where just two months prior, a number of Arab Bedouins attacked the Coptic Orthodox Monastery of Abū Fānā, and kidnapped and beat three monks. While there are contending accounts for why the violence broke out in the first place, the incident

14 Racy, 2003: 4.
15 During, 2002.
16 Racy, 2003: 6.
17 Danielson, 1997.

left one Muslim man dead, four Christians critically wounded, and sparked an international outcry. [18] Large demonstrations were organized in Egypt, France, Holland, Greece, Canada, Australia, and various cities throughout the U.S. highlighting the struggles and discrimination that Copts were facing in their homeland.

Many of the demonstrators were themselves newly arrived immigrants from Upper Egypt and spoke little or no English, yet they brandished signs reading, "We Belong to Egypt," "We Love Egypt" "Stop Killing Christians in Egypt" and "Copts Need Protection in Egypt." A few signs were even written in Arabic. About an hour later, another group joined them, this time Copts who, despite the rallies in their own city, had driven all the way down from New York City and New Jersey to have their voices heard in the U.S. Capitol. This group, perhaps another 200 people, cut through Lafayette Park holding wooden crosses high, carrying hand made banners, and waving Egyptian and American flags. Without much time, they joined the moving circle in front of the White House, and proceeded to chant slogans, mostly in English. Interestingly enough, whenever there was a brief lull of directions from behind the organizer's speakerphone, the crowd would fill the silence by singing the Coptic liturgical response, "Kyrie Eielson," meaning "Lord have mercy." The singing would go one for a minute or so before the crowd received their next set of directions and took up chanting slogans.

It was in front of the Egyptian embassy, the next and final stop of the rally, that matters became much more tense and reverted to singing and protesting in Arabic. As the protestors positioned themselves to begin, the speakerphone was not handed to the Coptic youth who had previously led the crowd in front of the White House, but rather, to two older men who clearly had a better facility over the Arabic language. Using clever rhymes and vernacular idioms, they directed their criticism to the inaction of the Egyptian government, more specifically, President Husnī Mubārak's administration for their delayed action in the face of the ensuing violence.

Towards the end of the rally, when voices behind the speakerphone ran hoarse, a man near the front took over the microphone and began to sing "*Kanīsatī il-Qibṭīya*" which originally outlines the beginning of Christianity in Egypt and the persecution that early believers experienced under Byzantine rule (AD312-641). When he could not remember the rest of the words, a woman from the crowd picked up where he left off and proceeded to guide the next two verses. Without the speakerphone, her voice rang clear, and the crowd followed her until she trailed off and there was a brief moment of silence. The crowd was spent after such an emotional outcry and the rally quickly ended with a passionate recitation of Lord's Prayer.

> My Coptic Church, the Church of God
> Old and Strong, I wish [her] life
> In the first century, in the age of Christ

18 The attack on Abu Fana Monastery took place on May 31, 2008. Local Muslims in the area claim that it was initially a land dispute between monks and their neighbors that set off the violence. Others point to the kidnapping and unsuccessful attempts to convert the monks to Islam and their subsequent beatings as purely sectarian. Nonetheless, the domestic and international reaction to the incident illustrates the heated religious tensions in the area and throughout the rest of Egypt. For more on this, please see, "Abu Fana in Focus" by Reema Leila in Al-Ahram Weekly Online (24–30 July 2008, Issue No. 907).

[the apostle] Mark came with the light and the true faith
And he went through the land calling for redemption
in the name of Jesus the redeemer, the who lifts the persecution

So the Copts believed in our Lord Jesus
And joy descended in every place
In a short time, they abolished idolatry
The cross and the flag of faith were raised
Satan quickly arose to fight the Son of God
And agitated the rulers, soldiers, and governors.They pointed arms at the sons of faith
"Deny your Christ, or you will be thrown into the fire"
Our honorable fathers, young and old
Did not waver in front of pain, hardship, and humiliation
Yet said, with victory, that there is no going back
"We do not have fear of fire because our Lord is Jesus"

Many were beaten, many were jailed, and many lived oppressed
Many were killed, many were burned, and many tasted torture
And the rest conquered over the pain
They stayed strong in the King of Peace
With their blood and their torture, they acquired the faith
And they kept for us the name of the merciful Lord.

Though the men behind the speakerphone had clearly veiled their criticism behind colloquial idioms and sayings, these song texts could not be any more obvious. This *tartīla* recounts the violent persecutions towards Copts under Byzantine rule, particularly after the theological split with the Byzantine Church at the Council of Chalcedon in AD451. Despite such violence, this period is noted as the golden era of Coptic history, characterized by a Coptic nationalism, spiritual fervor, and scholarly activity. While the protesters had chosen Coptic liturgical responses represent themselves in front of the White House, it was tartīla that became their voice in front of the Egyptian embassy. "*Kanīsatī il-Qibṭīya*" not only evoked the same nationalism and expressions of religiosity, but also became a form of direct political commentary on the recent violence and on-going social discrimination taking place in Egypt. It is interesting to note that Ḥabīb Ǧirǧis is credited with composing this *tartīla* in a growing climate of similar community consciousness during the Sunday School movement, and the tartīla became a church anthem against the feeling of political exclusion during Egypt's early post-independent years. Standing in front of the Egyptian embassy, these recently arrived immigrants continued to use *tarātīl* as a way to dialogue about their compromised status and to loudly voice their discontent.

CONCLUSION: TECHNOLOGY, CENSORSHIP, AND RESISTANCE

While Copts did not have and continue not to have access to publicly broadcasting their own heritage within Egypt, such censorship only fuelled the massive cassette circulation and musical experimentation when cassettes finally arrived in Egypt beginning in the mid 1970s. Furthermore, beginning 2005, religious satellite broadcasting channels such as *Aghaby* Television, soon followed by Coptic Orthodox Church

Channel (CTV) in 2007, have become another major venue for the wide dissemination and exchange of *tarātīl* within Egypt and abroad. In her book, *Excitable Speech; A Politics of the Performative*, Judith Butler articulates that censorship, whether self-imposed or enforced from above, has 'productive' power. It is both formative and constitutive:

> ...[C]ensorship is not primarily about speech... it is exercised in the service of other kinds of social aims, and that the restriction of speech is instrumental to the achievement of another, often unstated, social and state goal. One example of this includes a conception of censorship as a necessary part of the process of nation-building, where censorship can be exercised by marginalized groups who seek to achieve cultural control over their own representation and narrativization.[19]

Salwa El-Shawan clarifies that the cassette industry, with its easy production, loose copyright laws, and cheap distribution, dislodged the hegemony of the state-run radio.[20] By being privately owned, church communities could now produce their own recordings, broadcast their own soloists, choirs, and record their newly composed materials. Satellite channels have capitalized on this even further, bringing the songs to the television screen, adding religious imagery and subtitles of the texts, and using *tarātīl* as intermissions between their programming. With this, *tarātīl* have become a centerpiece of Coptic experience in Egypt and a part of their aural soundscape, continually blaring in church courtyards, bookstores, and music kiosks. Interestingly though, such public displays of *tarātīl* remain behind the tall walls of the church parameters and in private spaces such as people's cars and homes. Unlike the Call to Prayer, *tarātīl* are not openly aired into the PA systems that interweave through many neighborhoods in Cairo, though the Shobra district of Cairo, a predominately Christian neighborhood is an exception to this. Many storeowners, churches, and business loudly blare cassettes of taratīl into the street, with the sound clearly emanating throughout their neighborhoods.[21]

While not entirely voluntary, such censorship from public venues in Egypt has allowed Copts to facilitate alternative modes of expression and define what belongs to their community *turāṯ* or heritage. More so, it has also fostered musical experimentation in search of *āṣīl*, or authenticity in expressing their community identity. By developing a highly syncretic genre of Coptic, Egyptian folk, classical Arab, and Western infused sounds into a single genre, *tarātīl* have come to embody the popular notion of *mutaṭawira*, or being innovative in relations to a more globalized modernity. Today, there are multiple recordings of *tarātīl 'adīma* using modern technology and Western influenced idioms. "*Kanīsatī il-Qibṭīya*," can be heard ranging from Ibrāhīm Ayād's traditional non-accompanied rendition to others to other forms that experiment with electronic instruments such as the org or electronic keyboard and synthesized beat, as well as more indigenous instrumental accompaniment such as the 'ud, the reed ney flute, or the stringed zither called a *qanūn*. Additionally, these songs are easily uploaded onto the Internet and later downloaded into people's cell phones, laptop computers, and other portable devices, making *tarātīl* a highly mobile genre that accompanies many Copts where ever they go.

Such sonic hybridity and use of technology quietly redefines the meaning of "Copt" and "Egyptian" as these songs musically blur the lines between spaces and the traditional binaries between sacred and secular,

19 Butler, 1994: 132.

20 El-Shawan, 1987: 34.

21 This is also the case with villages that are predominately Christian such as Abū-Ḥinnis, a tiny community outside of the town of Mallawī in Upper Egypt that are known for openly broadcast the sounds of *tarātīl* and the liturgical genre of *alḥān* through their streets (Interview, 14 August, 2009).

private and public, folk and popular and, more importantly, Christian and Muslim. By expressing Coptic culture borrowing from a larger Egyptian fabric, these songs better reflect the experience of today's Egyptian Copts. Homi Bhabha describes hybridity as a camouflage, a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time-lag of signs and symbols, as the space between the rules of engagement.[22] Perhaps, just as *tarātīl*, and other hybrid popular genres in Egypt, reflect the cultural output that emerges between binaries, may new social possibilities and ideas of an inclusive nationhood and national *turāṯ* begin to appear.

22 Bhabha, 1994: 277.

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