

CONTEMPORARY COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

An Evaluative Model for Traditionalist Church Designs

Prepared by

Sherif Raouf Morgan

A Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
In
Architectural Engineering

**FACULTY OF ENGINEERING, CAIRO UNIVERSITY
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Under The Supervision of

Prof. Dr. Sami Sabri Shaker

Professor of Urban Design
Faculty of Engineering
Cairo University

Prof. Dr. Aly Hatem Gabr

Professor of Architecture
Faculty of Engineering
Cairo University

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Approved by the Examining Committee:

Prof. Dr. Sami Sabri Shaker	Main Advisor
Prof. Dr. Aly Hatem Gabr	Member
Prof. Dr. Naela Farid Toulan	Internal Examiner
Prof. Dr. Mohamed Samir Seif El Yazl Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University	External Examiner

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING, CAIRO UNIVERSITY
GIZA – EGYPT
2016

Engineer's Name: SHERIF RAOUF AMIN MORGAN
Date of Birth: 05 /06 / 1982
Nationality: Egyptian
E-mail: morgan_sherif@yahoo.com
Phone: 02-25608191
Address: NewCairo, 5th settlement, street 39 villa84
Registration Date: 01 / 10 / 2012
Awarding Date: / / 2016
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy
Department: Architectural Engineering



Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Sami Sabri Shaker
Prof. Dr. Aly Hatem Gabr

Examiners: Prof. Dr. Mohamed Samir Seif El Yazl (External Examiner)
Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University
Prof. Dr. Naela Farid Toulani (Internal Examiner)
Prof. Dr. Sami Sabri Shaker (Thesis Main Advisor)
Prof. Dr. Aly Hatem Gabr (Member)

Title of Thesis: CONTEMPORARY COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
ARCHITECTURE
An Evaluative model for Traditionalist Church Designs

Key Words: Coptic Orthodox; Church; Architecture; Contemporary;
Traditionalist

Summary: This thesis discusses Contemporary Coptic Orthodox Church architecture in relation to the current worldviews, being traditional, modernized, or traditionalist linking both together. Focus is made on the Coptic Culture within Egypt's multi-cultural layers. Progress of Coptic Church architecture is discussed through time, together with the different traditional typologies of historical churches. Further investigation to understand Coptic Church architecture is made through understanding the main Church design fundamentals and the different approaches to understand traditional historical churches. An evaluative model is designed to apply on contemporary case studies to understand how far or near a case study may be from traditional Coptic culture. Finally, results are discussed together with the conclusions and prospects for future research based on the findings of this thesis are suggested.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

Chapter one is the introduction to the research problem. Together with a philosophical debate regarding whether we shape our identity, or does our identity shape us and turns our architecture into a static traditional type. Research limitations are then mentioned to focus on the areas of study. The research aim and objectives are stated together with the hypothesis and specific questions. The research methodology and structure are designed to obtain answers for the research questions and ensure quality of the procedure, accordingly, its validity and objectivity.

Chapter two reviews the traditional versus modern worlds and the status quo of the Egyptian society. Literature takes place to understand what are traditional and modern worlds and the differences between them. Special focus is made on the Egyptian society enlightenment and modernity. The reflection of the schism between both worldviews on art, architecture, and urbanism is reviewed. Thus enables one to understand the traditional Egyptian value system and importance of symbolism. Finally concluding with the need of the traditionalist approach as a way of linking traditional and modern civilizations.

Chapter three discusses the roots of Coptic culture within Egypt's multi-cultural society. How the emergence of Coptic culture took place within Ancient Egyptian, Greeks, and Jews. Moreover the impact of the multi-cultures on Coptic art and architecture. Finally, realizing that Coptic art and architecture formulated its own identity.

Chapter four tracks the development of Coptic Church architecture through time. The common morphological designs are discussed together with literature regarding the various classifications of typologies of historical Coptic churches. Moreover, factors affecting church architecture are discussed, which are social, political, natural, and cultural aspects. Finally, the chapter discusses the scale of changed factors, its results, and the emergence of new functions and needs thus possible new typologies. However all the previous does not truly explain the real importance of church designs which leads us to the following chapter.

Chapter five attempts to understand traditional Coptic Church architecture through keynote writers in Islamic architecture and International Christian architecture then borrowed and utilized on Coptic architecture. First part is done by adopting Richard Kieckhefer analysis of church architecture¹. He classifies the fundamentals to understand Church architecture into spatial dynamics, centering focus, aesthetic impact, and symbolic resonance. After which a cross reading between the different fundamentals takes place. Then the second part discusses the approaches to understand Coptic traditional architecture, which are historical, esoteric, normative, and regional approaches and are thoroughly explained.

Chapter six is the part where the theoretical evaluative model is designed. The chapter discusses the form morphological designs together with the traditional typologies. In addition how to relate both to contemporary case studies. Interrelation between approaches to understand Coptic Church architecture, their design fundamentals and the factors affecting

¹ Keickhefer (2004)