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The Myths on the Coptic Textile

From the ⅴrd century AD up till the ⅴth century AD.

For the Purpose of fulfilling the Master Degree

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Note on the Transliteration

I have tried wherever possible to follow the system of transliteration of Arabic Characters used in both the Encyclopedia of Islam. However certain discrepancies in transliteration inevitably appear.

Consonants:

ء	'	ز	z	ق	q
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	š	ل	l
ث	t	ص	s	م	m
ج	ğ	ض	d	ن	n
ح	h	ط	t	ه	h
خ	h	ظ	z	و	w
د	d	ع	'	ی	y
ذ	d	غ	g		
ر	r	ف	f		

Short vowels are transcribed as follows: *fatha-a*, *damma-u*, *kasra-i*.

Long vowels are transcribed as follows: *ā* - أ, *ū* - و, *ī* - ی

The two diphthongs appear as aw& ay. The definite article in compound names is always given as “al”.

List of Abbreviations

- AASOR: Annual of the American School of Oriental Research, Cambridge
- AJA: American Journal of Archaeology, Archaeol. Inst. Of Amer. New York
- ASAE: Annals du Services des Antiquities de l' Egypte, Le Caire,
- BAAE: Bulletin de l'Association des Amis des églises et de l'Art Copte, Le Caire
- BACPSI: Bulletin of Ain-Shams University (Center of Papyrological Studies and Inscription)
- BIA: Bulletin d' Information Archéologique. Inst. Franc. D'archéol Orient, Le Caire
- BSAA: Bulletin de la Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie, Alexandrie
- BSAC: Bulletin de la Société Archeologie Copte, Le Caire
- EAO: Egyptian Antiquities Organization (now Supreme Council of Antiquities SCA)
- JEA: Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, (Egyptian Exploration Society EES), London
- JEastCS: Journal of Eastern Christian Studies

JCoPtS: Journal of Coptic Studies, Intern. Assoc. for Coptic Stud.

JRA: Journal of Roman Archaeology

JRS: Journal of Roman Studies, London

Introduction

Before the coming of Christianity to Egypt, it was actually full of number of different cults and beliefs^١, and though the date of entrance of Christianity is not quite certain, that the history did not tell us the name of the one who holds the message of Christianity in Egypt^٢, but as some historians suggest it's beginning by the coming of Saint Mark^٣ to Alexandria in the year

^١Marwa, Mostafā, Qābīl, The Symbolic Relation between Human and Animal Figures with their Significance in Coptic Art, Theses M.A. Faculty of Arts, 'Ain Šams University, Cairo, ٢٠٠٢, p. ٢

^٢Ra'ūf, Habīb, Dalīl al-Mathaf al-Qibtī, Cairo, ١٩٦٦, p. L

^٣Saint Mark: to all the Christian around the world this name means a lot, enclose a number of achievements, a trademark in Christian history especially in Egypt. Saint Mark was born in Cyrene. He was of a god fearing and wealthy Jewish family. He had two names; one is "Mark", which means the hammer, and the other is "John", which means god is kind. He is the writer of the gospels in Egypt, one of the ١٢ apostles of Jesus, the messenger chosen by Jesus to spread his new faith and religion in Egypt, the first patriarch of Alexandria and the first martyr known in Christian History. Marzūq, Muhammad 'Abd al-'Azīz, History of Textile Industry in Alexanderia ٣٣١ BC ١٥١٧ AD, Alexandria, ١٩٥٥; p. ٤٦; R. Habīb, Dalīl al-Mathaf al-Qibtī, p. L; Mostafā 'Abd-Allah Šīhah, Dirasat fi-l-'Imārah wa-l-Funūn al-Qibtīyah , Cairo, ١٩٨٨, p. ١٣; Wayne, Scott. Egypt & the Sudan, Australia, ١٩٩٠, p. ٢٩; Richardson, Dan. Egypt the Rough Guide, London, ١٩٩١, p. ١٢٤; Griggs, C. W. Early Egyptian Christianity, Leiden, ١٩٩٣, p. ٢٠; Kamil, Jill. Coptic Egypt, Cairo, ١٩٩٩, p. XV; Cannuyer, Christian. Coptic Egypt, Christian of the Nile, New York, ٢٠٠١, p. ١٦; M. M. Qābīl, Symbolic Relation, p. ٢٣; Muhammad, Hammād, al-Funūn wa-l-Turuz al-Qibtīyah , Cairo, (No date), p. ٦

As each human has his own way in expressing his feeling, and this way forming his personality and character, the same thing are the periods and eras, which had its arts, which reflect its character and aspects.

In Egypt the coming of Christianity made no violent break with the past^١, and the gradual conversion of Egypt into Christianity gave this religion the dominant cultural position in the country.

During this religion's ascendancy a new art began to appear.

This is the art of the Copts, the name given by the Arabs to the Egyptians who embraced Christianity^٢.

So when we talk about the Coptic Art, we mean the Art of Christian Egyptian. But if we aim at specification, we can not call the art of the era before the ٥th century, Pure Coptic Art, because in this era it was almost Greco-Roman Art not Christian one^٣.

Islāmī, Cairo, ١٩٩٨, vol. ١, p. ١١٤; Kamil, J. Coptic Egypt, p. ٤٠; R'fat, 'Abd al-Hamīd, al-Fikr al-Misrī fī-l-'Asr al-Masīhī, Cairo, ٢٠٠١, p. ٢٠٠; S. Salīm, Tārīh Misr, p. ١٢٥; Cannuyer, C. Coptic Egypt, pp. ٦١, ٦٣; M. M. Qābīl, The Symbolic Relation, pp. ٤٩, ٥٠; Ahmad, 'Abd-al-Rāziq, Tārīh Misr wa Atāruhā al-Islāmīyah, Cairo, (No date), pp. ٢١, ٤٥:٤٦. In Egypt the Coptic period lasted from the IInd century AD to the middle of the VIIth the century AD. It's s justified by the beginning of the formation of the Coptic Language which is the last stage of the Egyptian tongue traced up to the hieroglyphs or written hieratic or demotic. Late Egyptian and Coptic Art An Introduction to the Collections in the Brooklyn Museum, ١٩٧٤, p. ٧; M. M. Qābīl, Symbolic Relation, p. ٥٥

^١ Kybalova, Ludmila, Coptic Textile, London, ٢٠٠٠, p. ١٣

^٢ Late Egyptian and Coptic Art, p. ١٠; M. M. Qābīl, The Symbolic Relation, p. ٨

^٣ R. Habīb, Dalīl al-Mathaf al-Qibtī, p. ٧

When the Arab conquest of Egypt came in (٢١٨/ ٦٤١-٦٤٢ AD), it came at a moment when the Coptic Art was beginning to assume a definite style of its own that it was more dynamic, more abstract in composition and Form^١. Since this conquest, the word “Qbt” or “Coptic” refers to the Christian people, not the whole city^٢, and it still serves to designate the Christian minority in Egypt till nowadays^٣.

Many rulers had their influence on the arts of the states they ruled and as long as, they lasted in their rules; many kinds of arts appear. In another word: the high officials of the state, usually tried to imitate those rulers; the thing that produces a kind of art not the royal one but another one looks like it. Then if we come to the citizens, who naturally tried to imitate those high officials, or the high people, we will find another kind of art, belongs to those citizens, or as we call it folk art^٤. This new folk art did not

^٤-Kybalova, L. Coptic Textile, p.١٤

^١The word Copt derived from the Greek Aigyptios (Egyptian) via Coptic Kyptaïos, and Arabic Qibtī. Aigyptios in turn derived from Hwt-KA-Ptah (house of the spirit of god Ptah), one of the names of Memphis, the first capital of ancient Egypt. Another opinion by Jaīlān ‘Abās says that there is no separate period called “Coptic Period”, and the term was derived from the word “Iygpi” when the word Aigyptios was termed by the Greeks over the Nile and thus over the whole of Egypt. While Naville says it came from the hieroglyphic word “Agpi” means primeval ocean where the land emerged and life began. R. Habīb, *Dalīl al-Mathaf al-Qibtī*, p.K; Ġamāl al-Tuny, *al-Zahrafah al-Qibtīyah*, Bern, ١٩٨٤, p.I; A. Diyāb, *Tārīh al-Aqbāt*, p.١٣,١٤; Ni‘māt, *Ismā‘īl, Funūn al-Šarq al-Awsat*, Cairo, ١٩٩١, p.٩٧; Kamil, J. *Coptic Egypt*, p. XV; R. ‘Abd al-Hamīd, *al-Fikr al-Misrī*, p.١٢; Cannuyer, C. *Coptic Egypt*, p.١١; M. M. Qābīl, *Symbolic Relation*, pp.٧:٨,٥٤; M. Hammād, *al-Funūn wa-l-Turuz*, p.١.

^٢Thompson, Deborah, *Coptic Textile in the Brooklyn Museum*, New York, ١٩٧١, p.١

^٣Folkism was not a character found in previous arts. Coptic Art was the only one in the east to be folk. So it is in every sense a popular one, it’s probably unique in that it wasn’t developed in an urban center but in rural districts. Su‘ād, Māhir. & Hišmat, *Masīhah, Mansūġāt al-Mathaf al-Qibtī*, Cairo, ١٩٥٧, p.٥٦; Salīm, Nagīb, *al-Aqbāt ‘Abr al-Tārīh*, Cairo, ٢٠٠١, p.٣٠; M. M. Qābīl, *The Symbolic Relation*, p.٥٦