



AIN SHAMS UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING
Department of Architectural Engineering

The Visual Message in Coptic Architecture

A Semiotic Investigation on the Intended and Perceived
Meanings of Coptic Orthodox Church Architecture

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of PhD

By

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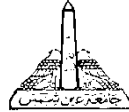
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Title: **The Visual Message in Coptic Architecture**
A Semiotic Investigation on the Intended and Perceived Meanings of
Coptic Orthodox Church Architecture
Degree: **Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture**

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Author's Declaration

This dissertation is submitted to the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering at Ain Shams University in Cairo, Egypt, on April 2018 in partial fulfillment for the PhD degree in Architecture of the requirements for the degree of:

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The work included in this dissertation was accomplished by the author in the department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Ain Shams University during the period from 2013 until 2018.

No part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree or qualification in other university or institute.

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Dedication

To my beloved father, mentor and tutor;

Who is the reflection of success in my life.

To my beloved, kind, and loving mother;

Who raised her praying hands for me all the way.

To my treasured husband, Bahir;

Whom I greatly thank for his

Understanding and sincere assistance.

To my sweetheart adorable children,

*Who endured my long absence to complete this work and continuously
prayed for me.*

*To all my family, friends, colleagues, and clergy members for the sincere
support they provided me.*

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Acknowledgement

To My Lord I raise my praise and prayers to thank Him for His incessant guidance, care, and support.

His strength and grace in my life lifted me.

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Thank you Lord.

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Abstract

Studies in Coptic architecture are relatively rare, and are mainly concerned with the physical rather than spiritual aspects of the style. This dissertation marks an absence of a true reading for the intangible aspects of the Coptic Orthodox Church architecture, and the hidden meanings in this heritage. The study will be concerned with uncovering meanings and deepening understanding of this Egyptian architecture.

The basics and principles of Christianity as a religion and Orthodoxy as a denomination are considered the most influential convention that affects and shapes the Coptic Orthodox worship house. They represent one of the main sources for the rich inventory of the different signs and symbols assimilating meaning in its art and architecture. Hence, fundamentals of Christianity are reviewed in the literature, and observation of heritage Coptic Churches is undergone, to group the existing symbols employed in this architecture.

Semiotics as an interpretive science is studied, as it is chosen to be utilized as a discovery tool for the different layers of meaning comprising the sign system of the building and to decipher these meanings. This study provides a theoretical ground for the adopted framework of analysis that is employed in the applied part of the study.

The different existing attempts of semiotic analysis of architecture are presented with special focus on the most appropriate framework that will be used, in addition to addressing the gaps that were identified in it to result in an amended analytical semiotic framework that is more practical for application on the architectural discipline.

The applied part of the study commences by utilizing the amended framework in conducting the semiotic analysis on two case studies: an ancient Coptic church and a contemporary one, to interpret the meanings within their architecture, and hence determines that there is a message addressed to the users. This analysis besides uncovering different radiated meanings and deepening the understanding of this intangible part of the architecture, results also in developing an analytical tool for the semiotic analysis allowing of religious buildings.