

# DEISIS IN THE PAINTINGS OF CHRISTIAN EGYPT: A DEPICTION OF THE INTERCESSORY SUPPLICATION

By

**Manal Mahmoud ʿAbd ʿEl –Hamid**

Associate Professor, Faculty of Tourism, Alexandria University

## ABSTRACT

The concept of intercession is deeply embedded in Eastern Orthodoxy through the reciting of the Intercession Prayer, addressing the Christ, as the main intercessor, and other holy figures, including the Virgin, the saints, the martyrs and even angels, to intercede on behalf of the faithful and deliver their prayers to God. Deisis is one of the intercession themes that is widely illustrated in murals and icons of Christian Egypt. It is represented in different compositions, but mainly consists of three main figures: the Christ Pantocrator flanked by the two main intercessors, the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. Many other elements and figures were then added, emphasizing the divinity of the Christ and the intercession practice. This study aims to highlight the unique place of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist in Orthodox liturgy and their important role as intercessors for the salvation of mankind through the different depictions of the Deisis in Christian Egypt.

**KEYWORDS:** Deisis, Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, Intercession and Salvation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Deisis theme is widely represented in Christian Egypt on a range of materials, but especially paintings. The word Deisis is derived from the Greek word *δέησις* meaning supplication or prayer. It is mainly represented in an artistic context in scenes of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist on either side of the Christ Pantocrator in different postures.<sup>1 2</sup>

Basically, it is the illustration of the Commemoration or Intercession Prayer of the Eastern liturgy in which the names of the Christ, the Virgin, John the Baptist, and a number of other holy figures are being commemorated and supplicated to establish durable connections with these holy figures, who can be intercessors or intermediaries for humanity salvation.<sup>3</sup> In other words, Deisis represents the offering of supplications of all people before Christ by the Virgin and John the Baptist, sometimes in connection with other saints, and sometimes without.<sup>4</sup>

In the Old Testament, many statements refer to the intercession to God on behalf of others: *«Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people»*<sup>5</sup>.

In the New Testament we read: *«Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak»*<sup>6</sup>.

The Christ is depicted either standing or enthroned, flanked by Mary Theotokos<sup>7</sup> to the right and John the Forerunner to the left.<sup>8</sup> They are both considered as the supreme eschatological intercessors for humanity salvation due to their advantaged role as the first eyewitnesses to Christ's divinity or First Coming; hence, the Virgin becomes the intercessor for the Blessed while John the Baptist is the intercessor for Sinners<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 13- 28; Carr 1991: 599- 600.

<sup>2</sup> Christ Pantocrator means the «Ruler» or «Preserver of all», is a representation of the bearded Christ, with hair neatly parted, sits on a throne often absent, his right hand raised in blessing, left hand holding the gospel, expression blessing. MCDOWELL 2011: 432.

<sup>3</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 14; KANTOROWICZ 1942: 70.

<sup>4</sup> CORMACK 2018 :84; BECKWITH 1988: 193.

<sup>5</sup> *Num.* 21: 7- 9

<sup>6</sup> *Col.* 4: 2- 5

<sup>7</sup> **Mary Theotokos** Θεοτόκος, a Greek term meaning «God-bearer» or the «Mother of the Lord» *Lk* 1:43, it is a title of the Virgin Mary used in Eastern Christianity and appeared in art with the enthroned Virgin carrying the Infant Christ, RONCAGLA 1991 :225.

<sup>8</sup> KALAVREZOU 1990: 167.

<sup>9</sup> KANTOROWICZ 1942: 71; WALTER 1968: 312.

The Deisis appears usually in two forms: either as independent unit, or as the central theme of a larger and more complex composition. An example of the latter is the Last Judgment scene, of which the Deisis constitutes the center. Another is the so-called Great Deisis, which is a fuller and more complete rendering of the Commemoration or Intercession Prayer, including the Deisis group, angels, prophets and various categories of saints and symbols of the four evangelists, all imploring the aid of Christ. This Great Deisis has a central place in the row of icon panels above the Royal Doors of the Iconostasis, emphasizing the value and importance attributed to the practice of intercession.<sup>10</sup>

## II. DEISIS COMPOSITION

This popular composition represents the unification between the three most important figures of the Christian hierarchy: Christ, the Virgin, and John the Baptist. Sometimes, in a developed form of the Deisis, in addition to the Christ, the Virgin and the Baptist, angels, apostles, prophets and other saints are also depicted<sup>11</sup>. The Christ Pantocrator «Ruler» or «Preserver of all» is represented either enthroned or standing, wearing a chiton and a himation, with the right hand raised in blessing and the left hand holding the Gospel. Scholars say that this composition also shows the Christ as ruler enthroned in his Kingdom between two interceding courtiers.<sup>12</sup>

The footstool of the Christ is almost a permanent feature in Deisis. Sometimes, additional footstools are provided for the Virgin and John, and in other examples, a plinth is used by the three figures and the footstool of the Christ is omitted.<sup>13</sup>

According to Coptic Liturgy, The Redemptive Intercession was the act of the Christ when crucified on the Holy Cross, through his blood. He becomes the main intermediary for salvation between God and man: «*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*»<sup>14</sup>. He is the only savior or redeemer of all human sins: «*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the God—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*»<sup>15</sup> From a theological aspect, the Christ is referred to as a «mediator» so he could intercede for humankind before God with the holes on his outstretched hands and the scars all over his body that continually plead for mercy.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 16; CARVELEY 2011: 187; ATANASSOVA 2011: 597.

<sup>11</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 13- 14.

<sup>12</sup> CARVELEY 2011: 187; WALTER 1980: 261- 269.

<sup>13</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Heb.* 9: 12

<sup>15</sup> *1 Jn.* 2: 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> [Http://thecatholictalks.com/artspeaks\\_post.asp-id=28](http://thecatholictalks.com/artspeaks_post.asp-id=28).

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After the Christ, there are many intercessors who please God by their deeds: they are acceptable to him, present in his Kingdom, and their voices are heard. They are addressed during the service in specific order; the Virgin, The Angels, Archangels, St. John the Baptist, Disciples, Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs and Saints. As for the two prominent intercessors, the Virgin and John the Baptist, they were chosen for their privileged role as the first eye-witnesses of Christ's divinity and consequently, enjoy a unique place in the Christian scheme of salvation. The Virgin is the chief instrument of the Incarnation, while John is the forerunner who, according to the liturgical Commentaries, is the ancestor of the Christ associated with the beginnings of the Liturgy.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, both of them are the most efficient intercessors for humanity and represent the New and the Old Covenant respectively.<sup>18</sup>

It is also important to mention that the Virgin and John the Baptist had one feature in common; in Greek and Oriental rites, they are the only human beings believed to dwell in the angelic world. Here, the Virgin ranks higher than the angels, as in the Eastern Orthodox service she is praised as: «*More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim*»<sup>19</sup>.

The Virgin Mary is always represented on the right side of Christ as she is the first intercessor to be invoked in the Commemoration or Intercession Prayer of the Liturgy. The right side is also the position of power and closeness. It cannot be overemphasized that, in the Davidic Kingdom, the throne of the queen was on the right side of the king. We can read of this in 1 *Kin.* when Solomon positions a throne for his mother, the queen mother, on his right. This is why whenever we see an image of Christ as king, Mary is always on his right<sup>20</sup>.

In the basic iconography of the Deisis, she is represented in three-quarter view, with her hands extended parallel in supplication and her glance directed sideways.<sup>21</sup> Traditionally, Mary's image is found above the sanctuary, where she presides over the consecration of the Eucharist as the Mother of the Christ and a symbol of the church. In this context, Mary is a shining example of the rewards of a life of humility and obedience to God, the greatest of all the saints, and an eschatological intercessor at the throne of the Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The Blessed Virgin Mary has an indubitable place of honor in Orthodox Christianity as the second member of the Holy Trinity. She is a powerful advocate for all

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<sup>17</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 14.

<sup>18</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 16.

<sup>19</sup> KANTOROWICZ 1942: 71; CARVELEY 2011: 597.

<sup>20</sup> GOLDSCHMIDT & WEITZMANN 1934: 69- 70.

<sup>21</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 18.

<sup>22</sup> CARVELEY 2011: 597.

humankind, revered as «*our all-holy immaculate, most blessed, and glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary*». In Scripture, her special status is foretold in the words of the Archangel Gabriel for whom she is «*blessed among women*» and «*full of grace*». <sup>23</sup> In consenting to do the will of God, Mary becomes the mother of the incarnate Word and makes salvation come true. <sup>24</sup>

The high reverence for the Virgin Mary by the Copts is best expressed in the Coptic Synaxarion, <sup>25</sup> where she is described as «*the sovereign of the universe, the queen of all womanhood, through whom we have grace*»; thus, the Copts celebrate seven feasts for her. <sup>26</sup>

The role of the Virgin Mary as intercessor for mankind is evident through her depiction as Hodegitria, which is a Greek term meaning «*She who shows the way*» or the guide who shows the humankind the «*Way, The Truth, the Life, and Salvation*» by being witness to the Christ. <sup>27</sup>

The Virgin's role as the most effective of the church's intercessors rests on her intimate connection with the Savior, who listens to his mother's prayers. The veneration accorded to her is also an acknowledgment of the salvific power of the Christ, of which she is the first recipient. The church accordingly teaches that while the saints rightly receive honor *douleia*, she alone of all creatures is appointed by God to receive «high honor» (*hyperdouleia*<sup>28</sup>).

As for St. John, he is glorified because «he alone appeared on earth as an angel incarnate»; he «*participates in the ethereal dignity*», for when he baptized the Christ, angels assisted him as celestial acolytes, and he performed the service in an angelic way though still a mortal. Accordingly, he is sometimes represented with wings and was believed to have been granted the third heaven as his domain. <sup>29</sup>

Being «*greater than all saints*», he has his place in the Eastern church between the angels and the apostles. Therefore, in the mass, the third particle taken by the priest from the *Amons* is sacrificed in honor and memory of «*glorious Prophet, Precursor and Baptist John, and the other prophets*»<sup>30</sup>.

In Deisis, John the Baptist always appears to the left of the Christ, clad in a simple chiton and mantle, with wrinkled face and unkempt hair, his glance directed at the

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<sup>23</sup> Lk. 1: 26– 38

<sup>24</sup> CARVELEY 2011: 599.

<sup>25</sup> *Coptic Synaxarion* is a liturgical book includes list of saints, very important for the history of the Coptic Church and it appears in two forms: the recension from Lower Egypt, and the recension from Upper Egypt. °ATIYA 2000: 2171.

<sup>26</sup> RONCAGLLA 2000: 2256; GABRA 2009: 126.

<sup>27</sup> MCGUCKIN 2011: 307.

<sup>28</sup> ATANASSOVA 2011: 599.

<sup>29</sup> KANTOROWICZ 1942: 71.

<sup>30</sup> KANTOROWICZ 1942: 71; BRIGHTMAN 1896: 357.

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beholder and his crossed or outstretched hands expressing supplication.<sup>31</sup> As for his role as an intercessor for mankind, it has been suggested that he works in parallel with the Virgin because he is responsible for the Lord's second birth, the baptism,<sup>32</sup> and also because John was of a miraculous birth and therefore closely associated with Christ and the Virgin.<sup>33</sup>

### III. ICONOGRAPHY OF DEISIS

There are many representations of the Deisis in Christian Egypt, usually in the form of murals and icons in different compositions. However, the earliest preserved example of the Deisis is represented in a mosaic of St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, dated back to the sixth century<sup>34</sup>.

#### 1. Murals

##### A. Deisis with the Four Living Creatures, Monastery of St. Antony [FIGURE 1]

On the east wall of the Chapel of the Four Living Creatures, a seventh century image of Deisis is shown. The haloed figure of Christ Pantocrator is represented within the *mandorla*<sup>35</sup> supported by four angels, holding a codex in his left hand and blessing with the right. The Coptic text within it reads: «*Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, our God*». Christ's feet rest on a semicircular hoop representing the earth, inscribed: «*Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool*»<sup>36</sup>. On the sides of the *mandorla* are two groups. To the left, the Holy Virgin Mary and two apocalyptic beasts are shown with the sun above them. To the right, John the Baptist is depicted with the remaining two beasts and above them is the moon. Both figures stretch their hands in supplication gesture. An Armenian text under the scene reads: «*Holy, holy, holy, Lord*».<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 18.

<sup>32</sup> **Baptism** is the first sacrament of the Orthodox Church. In the Early Christian centuries this mystery was known under various names, including «the washing of regeneration» Illumination *photismos* and «the sacrament of water». It is considered the most important sacrament of the church, as it initiates one into mystical communion with Christ. Therefore, it is also called «the door» that leads peoples into the Christian Church. In the New Testament it is associated with St. John the Baptist and his washing of repentance and forgiveness. TROSTYANAKIY 2011:65.

<sup>33</sup> KANTOROWICZ 1942: 71.

<sup>34</sup> It is called **the Mosaic of the Transfiguration**. The Christ is standing in glory between Moses, Elijah and three disciples. The Virgin is depicted in bust form on the left side of the Christ and St. John is on the right side. For more information. LARISON 2016: 362, f. 2.9.

<sup>35</sup> **Saint Antony Monastery**: In the second half of the fourth century, a monastic community seems to have grown up around the site where the Saint Antony lived in the Eastern Desert near the Red Sea. The recent Monastery possesses a number of churches, the most important of which is the Old Church or the Great Church of Saint Antony, which has many impressive preserved paintings. **Mandorla** is an oval enclosing a scene. GABRA 2002: 73- 75, 135

<sup>36</sup> ISA. 66: 1.

<sup>37</sup> GABRA 2002: 79, Pl. 6.4.



[FIGURE 1]: Deisis depiction in the Monastery of St. Antony  
GABRA 2002: pl. 6.4

### B. Deisis with Moses and Aaron, Monastery of St. Macarius [FIGURE 2]

On the Eastern wall of the Sanctuary of St. Mark, Monastery of Saint Macarius, a twelfth century illustration of the Christ Pantocrator stands holding the Holy Bible and raising the right hand in blessing. To his right is represented the Virgin Mary inside a medallion, and Saint John the Baptist is depicted in a medallion to his left. Above the arch, priest Aaron is represented to the right holding in his right hand the incense box, and swinging a censer with his left hand, and Moses is depicted to the left, wearing a red cloak and stretching his arms to take the incense box.<sup>38</sup>



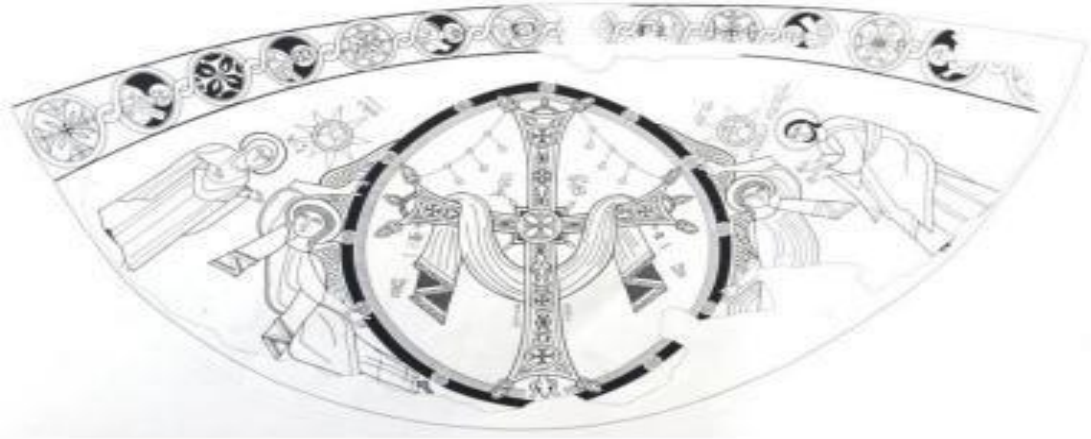
[FIGURE 2]: Deisis mural in the Monastery of St. Macarius at Wadi Natrun  
LEROY 1982: pl. 54

<sup>38</sup> **The Monastery of Saint Macarius Anba Maqar** is named after its patron saint Macarius the Great. It is the southernmost Monastery in Wadi Natrun and contains the Old Church of St. Macarius which has two sanctuaries: the southern dedicated to St. Benjamin and the northern to St. Mark. LEROY 1982: 37, pl. 54; ATTALA 2000: 64- 65; GABRA 2002: 56.

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**C. Deisis with the Holy Cross, White Monastery [FIGURE 3]**

The southern semidome is decorated with a twelfth century scene of the Holy Cross, symbol of the Christ supported by two winged angels. The Virgin and John the Baptist are represented on either side of the Cross with the sun and moon above them. A series of medallions occupied by alternating crosses and busts of prophets frame the entire scene.<sup>39</sup>



**[FIGURE 3]: Deisis depiction with the Holy Cross in the White Monastery**

**LAFERRIERE 2008: pl. II**

## **2. The Icons**

The Deisis theme is more often represented on icons than in the murals. There are many icons found at Saint Catherine Monastery bearing different representations of the Deisis, their dates ranging from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. They can be divided into two categories: the original version that includes only the three main figures of the Deisis; and the developed composite form that includes the original depiction accompanied by other elements.<sup>40</sup>

### **A. The Original Depiction**

This includes the iconography of the Christ, either enthroned, standing or even in bust form, flanked by the Virgin at his right and John the Baptist at his left:

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<sup>39</sup> **The Monastery of St. Shenute, known as the White Monastery** is located on the edge of the cultivation in the Libyan desert, about eight kilometers to the west of the city of Sohag. It is very close to the ancient village of Atripe, where Christianity existed long before Shenute. The hermits knew the mountain of Atripe prior to the beginning of the fourth century, but it was under the leadership of St. Shenute that the monastery grew considerably. The church of the monastery is the most important Christian monument in Upper Egypt and dated back to the middle of the fifth century. LAFERRIERE 2008: 124, Pl.II ; GABRA 2002: 94- 95.

<sup>40</sup> DRANDAKI 2006: 497.



**- Deisis Icons with Enthroned Christ [FIGURE 4]**

The Christ Pantocrator is depicted enthroned, his feet resting upon a footstool. He is wearing colored chiton and himation, making the gesture of blessing with the right hand while holding a closed or open Bible with the left hand. Through the open book and inscriptions in it, the Christ offers the path to salvation and presents himself as the Light of Life.<sup>41</sup> The closed Book is decorated with pearls. The Virgin stands to the right of the Christ turning in a three-quarter view towards him with slightly bent head, her hands extended in prayer position, and her son responds with a visual affirmation of divine benevolence or his blessing. She wears a long tunic and maphorion with tasseled fringes and red shoes. To the left of the Christ, stands John the Baptist turning also in a three-quarter view towards the Christ. He is clad in a chiton and a mantel, his hands extended or crossed in a gesture of supplication. The heads of the three figures are surrounded by *nimbi*,<sup>42</sup> with that of the Christ decorated with crosses.<sup>43</sup>



**[FIGURE 4]: Deisis Icons with enthroned Christ at Sinai.**

St. Catherine's Monastery. [Http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6924, 6827](http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6924,6827)

<sup>41</sup> NELSON 2006: 183.

<sup>42</sup> **Nimbus** pl. *nimbi* is a ring or emanation of light around the head of the Christ, the Virgin, the saints and angels. GABRA 2002: 135.

<sup>43</sup> From 1958 to 1965, the University of Michigan, Princeton University, and the University of Alexandria carried out four research expeditions to the remote Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; for the online database, MOURIKI 1968: 14; *The Sinai Icon Collection*, accessed August 5, 2020. [Http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6827](http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6827); : <http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/introduction>.

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**- Deisis Icons with Standing Christ [FIGURE 5]**

The same iconography of Christ Pantocrator appear in these Deisis icons, but in standing position. Otherwise, the details are almost the same, except in the icon to the right, where John the Baptist replaces the Virgin to the right of the Christ, and is pointing to the Christ with his left hand<sup>44</sup>.



**[FIGURE 5]: Deisis Icons with standing Christ, St. Catherine Monastery at Sinai**  
Right: John the Baptist replaces the Virgin. <http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6781>, Michigan Inventory Number 690. Left, MOURIKI 1968, F.2

**- Deisis Icon with Bust Figures [FIGURE 6]**

Beautiful traditional representation of the Deisis in a bust form, found in the Monastery of St. Catherine. It was probably part of a larger composition, now destroyed<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> NELSON 1983: 217.

<sup>45</sup> PARPULOV 2010: 365, f. 108.



[FIGURE 6]: Deisis Figures in bust form.

Reproduced courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai

[Http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/7097](http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/7097)

## B. The Composite Depiction

### - Deisis with St. Euthymios, Moses, and the Archangel Michael (FIGURE 7)

This icon consists of two registers. In the upper one, the Christ is enthroned in the center, but on a backless throne. As usual, at his right and left sides stand the Virgin and John the Baptist respectively, their arms extended in the gesture of prayer or supplication. In the lower part, there are three saints, whom Professor Weitzmann has identified from left to right as Euthymius, Moses and Michael.<sup>46</sup> Moses is pointing upwards to the Christ, to his left stands the Archangel Michael holding an orb in one hand and a sword in the other, while Saint Euthymios stands to his right.<sup>47</sup> The two saints hold an unrolled scroll upon which texts are inscribed. Euthymius's text reads: ΗΠΑΚΟΤ|ΗΝΖΟΗ|ΝΠΑΡΑ|ΚΟΗΝ|ΘΑΝΑ|ΤΟΝ, that is: Τπακούεινζωήν,παρακούειν θάνατον *obedience is life, disobedience is death* referring to salvation by obedience to the Christ. Moses' text reads: ΕΙΠΕ|ΝΚΣ|ΠΡΟΣ|ΜΩΗ|ΣΗΣΑ|ΝΑΒ|ΕΙΠΡ|ΟΣΜΗ|ΗΣΤΟ|ΟΡΟ, which corresponds to the text of Exod. 24.12 : ΕΙπεν κύριος προς Μωσήν Ανάβηθι προς με εις τό ορός *The Lord said to Moses : Come up towards me on the mountain*. The angel, the prophet and the monk have been chosen as typical witnesses of Christ's divinity, while the Virgin and John the Baptist are the intercessors.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> MOURIKI 1991- 1992: 169,f. 1.

<sup>47</sup> KESSLER 2000: 54.

<sup>48</sup> NELSON 1983: 203; KESSLER 2000: f. 2.7; WEITZMANN 1963: 194.

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[FIGURE 7]: Deisis with St. Euthymios, Moses, and the Archangel Michael

[Http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6597](http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6597)

- Deisis and Trinity [FIGURE 8]

This unique icon shows a representation of the Deisis with the Holy Trinity including the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Christ is enthroned as usual but, to his left, sits an old bearded man representing God (the Father) who makes the gesture of blessing with his right hand. The Holy Spirit takes the form of a dove, which releases light rays and hovers over them both. The Virgin and St. John are represented in the usual form.<sup>49</sup>



[FIGURE 8]: Trinity-Deisis Icon, St. Catherine Monastery

[Http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/7335](http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/7335)

<sup>49</sup> MOURIKI 1968: 24, F. 10.

**- Great Deisis [FIGURE 8]**

This twelfth century icon shows the Great Deisis theme, which includes the same three main figures with the two winged archangels Michael and Gabriel flanking the holy figures. They are dressed in beautiful mantels and hold orbs decorated with crosses. In addition, around 50 figures of Hierarchs, Martyrs, and crowned Saints are arranged in five registers.<sup>50</sup>



**[FIGURE 9]: Right Great Deisis Icon. Left the part includes the main Deisis Figures**

[Http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6664](http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6664)

**- Deisis with Crucifixion and Saints [FIGURE 10]**

This icon summarizes the whole process of salvation for mankind through the crucifixion of the Christ, and the intercession of the two main persons who witnessed it. The Christ is crucified on the Holy Cross, the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist stand on both sides and busts of the prophets Elijah and Moses with thirteen other saints are represented inside circles framing the scene, witnessing the process of intercession and supplication. The Virgin turns her thumb up to her mouth and Saint John touches his eye and mouth in grief. Two mourning angels are also depicted above the Cross.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> PARPULOV 2010: 371.

<sup>51</sup> NELSON 2006: 157.

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[FIGURE 10]: Deisis with Crucifixion and Saints.

NELSON 2006, FIG. 106

Through [TABLE 1], some observations about the iconography of the Deisis in the paintings of Christian Egypt can be summarized as follows:

- The Deisis theme is more often represented on the icons than in the murals of Byzantine Egypt.
- The enthroned Christ is the preferred posture in the Deisis iconography.
- The representation of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist is almost the same in all examples, with the exception of the replacement shown in (Fig.5.)
- Holy figures including prophets, saints and the four living creatures are widely shown with the Deisis as witnesses of the Christ's divinity and representing all who consecrated their supplications to receive salvation.
- Most of the icons and murals are dated back to the period from the twelfth to sixteenth century or the so-called Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods. At this time, icons are influenced with the artistic features of the so-called Cretan school, which are especially clear in the icons of St. Catherine Monastery in Sinai.<sup>52</sup>

To sum up, the Deisis composition is an outstanding feature of the Christian paintings in Egypt, which reflects one of the important rites in the Eastern Orthodox Liturgy.

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<sup>52</sup> **Cretan school** is one of the most important schools of icon painting that flourished in Crete during the post-Byzantine period, where the artists developed a new artistic approach that combines the Eastern and Western artistic traditions. SPRATT 2012: 2-19.

Description	Christ's Posture	Context		
		The Virgin	John the Baptist	Others
Mural- Monastery of St.Antony - <b>Seventh century</b> , On the east wall of the Chapel of the Four Living Creatures [FIGURE 1]	Enthroned <i>in mandorla</i> , holding a closed codex in his left hand and blessing with the right	Right of the Christ- Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ- Supplication gesture outstretched hands	The Four Living Creatures- Representations of sun, moon and angels.
Mural-Monastery of St. Macarius, <b>Twelfth century</b> , On the Eastern wall of the Sanctuary [FIGURE 2]	Christ stands holding the closed Holy Bible and raising the right hand in blessing	In a medallion to his right	In a medallion to his left	Priests Aaron and Moses
Mural -The southern semidome, White Monastery, <b>Twelfth century</b> [FIGURE 3]	The Holy Cross symbolizes the Christ	Right of the Christ- Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ - Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Winged angels, crosses, sun, moon, busts of prophets
Icons, St.Catherine Monastery, <b>Twelfth century</b> [FIGURE 4]	Enthroned Christ, open / closed bible	Right of the Christ- Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ – Supplication gesture outstretched /crossed hands	-
Icons, St.Catherine Monastery [FIGURE 5] ca.1571 AD	Standing Christ, open / closed bible	Right of the Christ- Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ - outstretched hands Right of the Christ	-

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			exception pointing to the Christ with his left hand	
Icon with Bust Figures [FIGURE 6] Ca. 1230–50, Michigan inventory N°. 1246	Bust form, closed Bible	Right of the Christ-Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ - Supplication gesture outstretched hands	-
Icon, St.Catherine Monastery, <b>Thirteenth century</b> Michael, Michigan Inventory Number 293, [FIGURE 7]	Enthroned Christ, closed bible	Right of the Christ-Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ - Supplication gesture outstretched hands	St. Euthymios, Moses, and the Archangel Michael and inscriptions
Icon with Trinity, Michigan, <b>Sixteenth century</b> , Inventory Number 1693, [FIGURE 8]	Enthroned Christ, open bible	Right of the Christ-Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ - Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, old bearded man symbolizing God
Icon of Great Deisis, Michigan Inventory Number 416, <b>Twelfth century</b> [FIGURE 9]	Enthroned Christ, closed bible	Right of the Christ-Supplication gesture outstretched hands	Left of the Christ - Supplication gesture outstretched hands	The Archangels Michael and Gabriel with about fifty figures of Hierarchs, Martyrs, and crowned Saints
Icon with Crucifixion, St.Catherine Monastery, <b>Thirteenth century</b> [FIGURE 10]	Crucified Christ	Right of the Christ-outstretched hands, turns her thumb up to her mouth.	Left of the Christ - outstretched hands, touches his eye and mouth in grief.	Prophets Elijah and Moses with thirteen other saints, two mourning angels

**[TABLE 1]: Different Depictions of Deisis**



#### IV. CONCLUSION

The idea of intercession is well established in Egyptian belief and can be traced through ancient and modern historical ages. Ordinary people used to make supplication and prayers to God through an intermediary, such as a king, a priest, a saint or even an angel, who has the ability to deliver the prayers on behalf of them and assuring their acceptance. In Eastern Liturgy, this practice of entrusting of the prayers to the Virgin or someone else is pictorialized in an artistic Byzantine context called Deisis. Here, the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist can be considered the most prominent intercessors, who will beg the Christ with outstretched hands for the salvation of humanity.

Due to the crucial liturgical character of these Deisis murals and icons, they are used to decorate the walls of the Sanctuary. In particular, they appear in the iconostasis, where the Deisis icon occupies the upper central part among the other icons, emphasizing the value and importance attributed to the Virgin and St. John's intercession. Being in an accessible part of the church, the worshipers are confident that their prayers to Mary and the other saints ultimately made their way to Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, the eye-catching colors used in these murals and icons, especially the burnished gold, offer a great shimmering glitter that acts as a mirror, thus giving viewers a so-called visual path of salvation within the church space, linking these paintings to the glistening Eucharistic chalice and paten on the altar table in the inner sanctuary.<sup>54</sup>

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manalmahmoud69@yahoo.com

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<sup>53</sup> ATANASSOVA 2011: 597.

<sup>54</sup> CARR 1991: 600; NELSON 2006:185;.

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الديسيس فى تصويرات مصر المسيحية  
تصوير للدعاء التشفعى

منال محمود عبد الحميد

أستاذ مساعد - كلية السياحة والفنادق/ جامعة الاسكندرية

الملخص

نشأ مفهوم الشفاعة فى الأرثوذكسية الشرقية من خلال تلاوة صلاة الشفاعة ومخاطبة المسيح، باعتباره الشفيع الرئيسى، وكذلك الأشخاص المقدسين الآخرين بما فى ذلك العذراء والقديسين والشهداء وحتى الملائكة للتوسط والتشفع نيابة عن المؤمنين وتقديم صلواتهم الى الله. يعتبر «الديسيس» أحد أشكال موضوع الشفاعة والمصور على نطاق واسع فى جداريات وأيقونات مصر المسيحية فى عدة تراكيب مختلفة، لكنه يتكون بشكل أساسى من ثلاثة شخصيات رئيسية؛ المسيح البانتوكراتور محاطاً بالشفيعين الرئيسيين: العذراء مريم ويوحنا المعمدان، ثم تمت إضافة العديد من العناصر والشخصيات الأخرى التى تؤكد قدسية المسيح وممارسة الشفاعة بشكل أساسى. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إظهار المكانة الفريدة لمريم العذراء ويوحنا المعمدان فى الليتورجيا الأرثوذكسية ودورهما المهم كشفيعين لخلاص البشرية من خلال الصور المختلفة للديسيس فى مصر المسيحية.

الكلمات الدالة: ديسيس، العذراء، يوحنا المعمدان، التشفع، الخلاص.