

**FIVE COPTIC TEXTILE OBJECTS
AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION ‘NEW
PUBLISHING’**

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ABSTRACT

The Christian textile in Egypt is an important link in the development of Egyptian textiles. The present research paper presents an analytical documentary study of a collection of Christian textile objects woven in the early Islamic era in Egypt and kept at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo (NMEC). The objects were examined by the magnifying lenses, the microscope, and the naked eye that helped identify the materials used in weaving the pieces. It was found that the weavers utilized natural fibers made of wool and linen that were woven in various applied methods. In addition, the collection included various figurative and decorative elements that reflected the spirit and artistic features of Coptic art, confirming the continuity of these artistic features in the Islamic era and their impact on other arts.

KEYWORDS

Coptic textiles, Tunic, natural fibers, tapestry.

المخلص

يعتبر النسيج المسيحي بمصر حلقة مهمة من حلقات تطور المنسوجات المصرية، لذا جاءت هذه الورقة البحثية كمحاولة لتقديم دراسة توثيقية تحليلية لمجموعة من النسائج المسيحية التي نسجت في بداية العصر الإسلامي بمصر والمحفوظة بالمتحف القومي للحضارة المصرية بالقاهرة، التي تم فحصها بواسطة العين المجردة والعدسات المكبرة والميكروسكوب، وقد أمكن التعرف على المواد والخامات التي استخدمها النسيج في نسج القطن، فقد اعتمد النسيج على الألياف الطبيعية المصنوعة من الصوف والكتان، ونسجت هذه المواد بطرق تطبيقية مختلفة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك تميزت باحتوائها على موضوعات تصويرية وعناصر زخرفية متنوعة، تعكس روح الفن القبطي وسماته الفنية والتي تؤكد استمرار هذه التقنيات خلال العصر الإسلامي وأثرت في الفنون الأخرى.

الكلمات الدالة

النسيج القبطي، تيونيك، الألياف الطبيعية، القبايطي.

INTRODUCTION

The textile artifacts discovered in the Egyptian sites are an important link in the development of Egyptian textiles. They reflect the extent of the ingenuity of the Egyptian weaver in weaving and producing threads of different types.

The textile industry developed and flourished in the ancient Egyptian era. Then, it took an ascending line of precision and textile diversity in no other human civilization. Egypt extended its fame with its linen textiles to the Ptolemaic era because the historians of Greece were fond of Egyptian linen and the accuracy of its manufacture.¹ Moreover, the Roman emperors in the Roman Period relied on the royal textile factories in Alexandria- the capital of Egypt at that time- as those factories produced the linen which Egypt was famous for.²

It is worth noting that NMEC holds a collection of Christian textiles, which devolved to it from the Egyptian Textile Museum in Cairo³. This collection dates back to the 4th-19th G centuries.

These textiles were obtained from many sources, such as the stores of various Egyptian museums, including but not limited to the Museum of Islamic Art, the Coptic Museum, the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, and the Gayer Anderson Museum. Another collection was obtained from various archeological sites and excavations, e.g., the excavations of the Monastery of the Banat in Fayoum⁴ and the excavations of Al-Bagwat⁵. These collections contain a large number of antique textiles that have not been previously studied or published. They include five

¹ - Marie. H., *Coptic Fabrics*, Paris du Louvre, Department of Egyptian 1990, P24,

² - El Nembr (A. A.), *Ardeyet Al-Masehiyeen w Mafroshatehem be-Mothaf al-Naseeg al-Masry Bel-Qahira Monzo Al-Qarn 7th: 19th*, Thesis, Faculty of Arts, University of Sohag, (2014).

³ - The Egyptian Textile Museum was located in Al-Muizz li-Din Allah al-Fatimi Street in Al-Nahhasin in Cairo, occupied in the sabil of Mohammad Ali at al-Nahhasin, the establishment of this Sabil was ordered by Mohammad Ali Pasha al-Kabir in 1244 AH / 1828 AD as a memorial of his son Ismail Pasha.

⁴ Banat in Fayoum

⁵ Al-Bagwat

Christian artifacts of linen and wool⁶ characterized by various shapes and woven in different practical ways.



Pl. 1: the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo (NMEC)
The paper aims to answer several questions, which help provide a documentary study and publication of the results under study. The most important questions are "What were the fabric components in these objects? What weaving methods were used? What were the contents, artistic features, and functional uses of the texture? What is the history of manufacturing study pieces?"

Description of five textile fragments



Pl. 2: The Coptic textile fragments, linen and wool (6-8 G. century), NMEC, No. 177.

The first piece

Functional use	Tunic fragments (<i>clavi</i>).
Source (s)	El-fustat
Museum registration	177
Number	
Shape	Rectangular
Measurement	35.2 cm × 13.9 cm

⁶ Nos;

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Fibers	Linen and wool in the floor decoration
Weave structure	Plain weave, weft-face (Tapestry)
Yarn twist direction	From the right to the left (S).
History	From the 6 th to the 8 th G. centuries
Description of ornaments	<p>A fragment of textile with a rectangular shape; a rectangular decorative ribbon divided into five square areas decorated alternately with a human drawing followed by a drawing of a lion, then a drawing of a human followed by a drawing of a rabbit, and ending with an area decorated with three rectangular ribbons.</p> <p>The human drawings are in a half-sided position characterized by a large head that tends to elongate, wide eyes, a wide nose, a narrow mouth that is almost invisible, and thick hair. As for the animals drawing, the artist was able to express the movement.</p>
Yarn colors	Dark brown, yellow floor.
The Case	The condition of the severely deteriorated parts of the worn areas and eroded areas with stains and dirt, a partial and total loss of the threading in the outer parts or edges, and pale colors.

The second piece



Pl. 3: The Coptic textile fragments, linen & wool (6-8 G. century), NMEC, No. 209.

Functional use	Tunic fragment
Source (s)	A gift from Prince Youssef Kamal
Museum registration Number	209
Shape	Rectangular

Measurement	15.2 cm × 15.2 cm
Fibers	linen and wool in the floor decoration
Weave structure	Plain weave, weft-face (Tapestry)
Yarn direction	twist From the right to the left (S)
History	From the 6 th to the 8 th G. centuries
Description of ornaments	It is a square-shaped fragment decorated with animal, plant, and cross motifs and surrounded by a narrow decorative frame. In the center, there is a drawing of a wavy branch that forms four circles, containing a repeated shape of a lion facing a shape of a rabbit. All drawings are surrounded by a narrow rectangular frame devoid of decorations, followed by a decorative unit that is a braided decoration that includes cross motifs.
Yarn colors	Dark brown, yellow floor
The Case	The object is in a bad condition. There are partial and total losses of the threading in the outer parts or edges.

The third piece



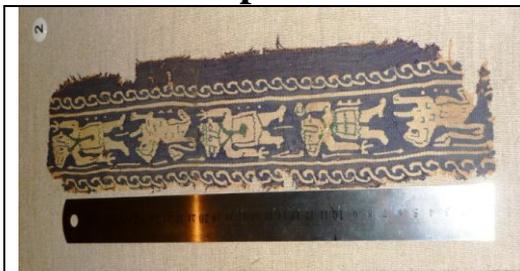
Pl. 4: The Coptic textile fragments, linen & wool, (6-8 G. century), NMEC, N. 213.

Functional use	Tunic fragment (<i>clavi</i>)
Source (s)	A gift from Prince Youssef Kamal
Museum registration Number	213
Shape	Rectangular
Measurement	15.2 cm × 15.2 cm
Fibers	Linen and wool in the floor decoration
Weave structure	Plain weave, weft-face (Tapestry)

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Yarn twist direction	From the right to the left (S).
History	From the 6 th to the 8 th G. centuries
Description ornaments	of It is a part of an irregularly elongated tablecloth decorated with a rectangular decorative ribbon as an outer frame and divided into consecutive circular areas. It is decorated with a plant leaf in the shape of the heart, followed by an indefinite circle. The drawings appear alternately to the end of the ribbon and exiting from the horizontal ribbon.
Yarn colors	Dark brown, yellow floor.
The case	The object is in a bad condition. There are partial and total losses of the threading in the outer parts or edges.

The fourth piece



Pl. 5: Coptic textile fragment, linen and wool (6-8 G. century), NMEC, No. 165.

Functional use	Tunic fragments (<i>clavi</i>) ⁷ .
Source (s)	unknown
Museum registration Number	165
Shape	Rectangular
Measure	35.2 cm × 6.6 cm
Fibers	Linen and wool in the floor decoration
Weave structure	Plain weave, weft-face (Tapestry)
Yarn twist direction	From the right to the left (S).
History	From the 6 th to the 8 th G. centuries

⁷ *clavi*

Description of ornaments	It is a narrow rectangular strip decorated with human and animal drawings and framed with two plexus, in which there is a drawing of a human in a fully erect position, raising his right hand with the palm of a three-finger hand, and lowering his other hand, characterized by an irregularly head with wide eyes, a nude nose, and a mouth. Tightness is almost visible, and something like a necklace hangs from the neck, followed by a drawing of a crouching lion raising its tail and opening its mouth, followed by a drawing of a human very similar to the previous drawing, followed by a similar drawing of a human but with nothing hanging from his neck and the abdomen and chest area is occupied by an equilateral cross. The drawings end with a drawing of a crouching lion with a wide eye, an open mouth, and a raised tail. The drawings are surrounded by a narrow frame devoid of decorations and followed by the decorations of wavy lines forming braided motifs.
Yarn colors	Yellow, green, dark brown floor
The case	The object is in a bad condition. There are partial and total losses of the threading in the outer parts or edges.

The fifth piece



Pl. 6: The Coptic textile fragments, linen and wool (6-8 G. century), NMEC, No. 175.

Functional use	Tunic fragments (<i>clavi</i>).
Source (s)	A gift from Prince Youssef Kamal
Museum registration	175
Number	
Shape	Rectangular
Measurement	61.2 cm × 7.4 cm
Fibers	Linen and wool in the floor decoration
Weave structure	Plain weave, weft-face (Tapestry)
Yarn twist direction	From the right to the left (S).

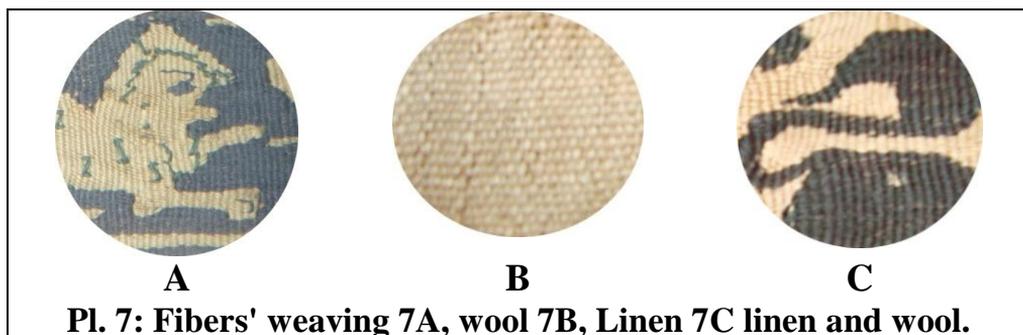
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History	From the 6 th to the 8 th G. centuries
Description ornaments	of It is a part of decorative vertical stripes that ran over the shoulder on the front and back of the Coptic tunic. It is decorated with fish and plant patterns. The <i>clavi</i> ends with a medallion shape motif decorated by a bird (duck).
Yarn colors	Yellow, blue, green, dark brown floor.
The Case	The object is in a bad condition. There are partial and total losses of the threading in the outer parts or edges.

Analysis of Techniques

The examination of the five investigated pieces proved that the weaver used natural fibers made of linen and wool. While the first fragments were made of warp fibers and a linen weft, the second ones were made of warp fibers and colored wool weft (used in decorations) (Tab.1, Pl.no.7).

N.	Pl.no.	Linen	Wool
177	2	√	√
209	3	√	√
213	4	-	√
165	5	√	√
175	6	√	√



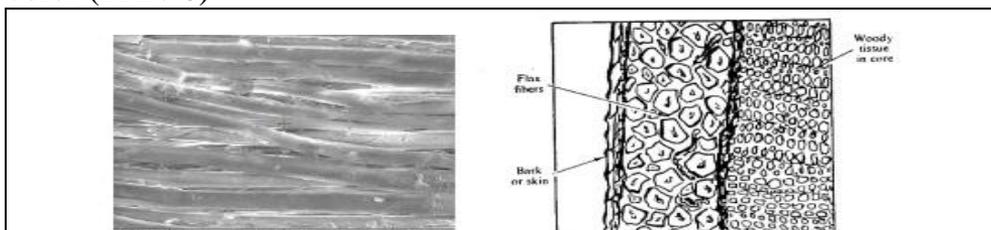
Linen fibers were widely used in weaving this collection. Linen was used as the primary material in the investigated textiles as warp and weft threads, especially in flooring. In addition, weavers used a unique method of employing linen threads. They used linen dual-use, making it a warp thread, then as a weft

thread in the floor of the decorations, which used another material for weaving (Pl. 7).

Linen fibers are one of the oldest fibers that have been used in the textile industry since ancient times because linen was known before wool, cotton, and silk.⁸

It is well established historically that Egypt knew linen agriculture in prehistoric times over more than 3100 years B.C. Linen fibers in Egypt are very old as demonstrated by the textiles found dating back to the Neolithic Period, the Badari Period, the Pre-dynastic Era, and the First Dynasty, respectively. The fame of Egypt for its linen textiles extended to all historical eras - the Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine eras - until the Arabs advent.⁹

The frequent use of linen in the examined textures may be related to its natural properties, morphological structure, and physicochemical properties, which had a major role in choosing it as a basic material in weaving ancient textiles, in general, and the textiles under study, in particular. Linen fibers are taken from the flax plant's stalk known as *Linum usitatissimum* of the Linaceae family after turning into threads or fabrics known as linen¹⁰. Linen is an annual plant that grows to a height of about one meter and has a small flower with a light blue color (Pl.no.8).¹¹



Pl. 8. Morphological structure and physicochemical properties of linen fibers, Varcisa. N., Linen Fibrous Composites, p. 5.

⁸ - El Nemr, *Ardeyet Al-Masehiyeen w Mafroshatehem*, P141.

⁹ - Marie., *Coptic Fabrics*, P24.

Batigne. R. & Bellinger. L., *The Significance and Technical Analysis of Ancient Textile as Historical Documents*; Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol.97, No . 6 (Dec.16, 1953), P.670

¹⁰ Mahadevan. G., *Dictionary of Textile*, Abhishek Publication, 1st ed, Chandigarh, 2003, p130

¹¹ Vogelsang. G., Wood. E., *The Production of Linen in Ancient Egypt*, Linden,1992, p 269

Linen fibers consist of thick-walled, cellulose-filled bundles running at the length of the plant's stalk. These cells hold together. They consist of pectose and a little wood. Linen is a very thin rounded fiber in the middle long (average 20 inches). Weavers also used wool threads in the decoration (Pl.no.8), as is the case of the third piece with wool-like warp threads and weft. Wool fibers were one of the earliest fibers used in the weaving and spinning of textiles. Egyptians knew wool and took care of breeding sheep since the Neolithic period. However, little wool was found in Egyptian tombs until the late eras. Brown and white woolen fabrics were found from the pre-dynastic era (Petri). Furthermore, pieces of red and blue wool dating back to the Twelfth Dynasty were discovered. Only a little wool was found because the sheep wool at the time was not suitable for spinning. After all, the Egyptians believed that it was not pure and used it to weave their outer garments, which they used to take off when they enter the sanctuary of their temples.

The use of wool increased since the Greek era and flourished in the Roman era. With Christianity, woolen clothes were used for various purposes, whether religious or worldly. Coptic textiles in Egypt indicated the frequent use of colored woolen threads in weaving linen textile motifs.¹²

Twist threads:

Examination showed that all threads were twisted in a right-to-left direction (S) as is the case of Egyptian textiles. The strings used were of different thicknesses which helped have an adequate impregnation average. They completely concealed the warp threads, leaving no trace other than a slight ribbing on the surface (Pl.no.9).

Pl. 9: Twist threads in Egyptian textiles, Marouf. M., *Identification and Characterization o Fibers and Weave Structures.p.15.*

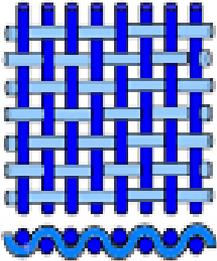
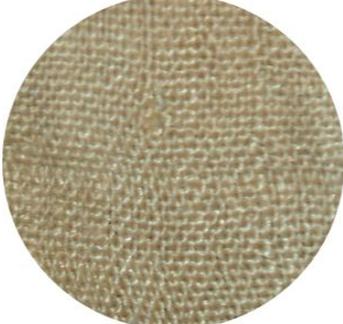
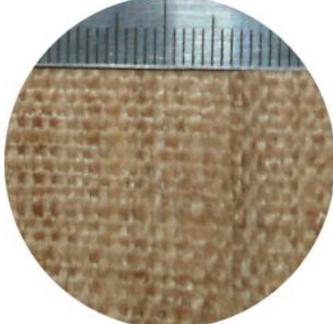


¹² - El Nemr, *Ardeyet Al-Masehiyeen*, p 140.

Fibers were used in these objects with different thicknesses that caused a kind of soaking enough to create a complete veiling of wrap fibers. Only a slight projection remained on the surface. In addition, weft fibers became thicker; therefore, they became firmer in the decorated parts.

Analysis of Techniques

As for the textile structure, the weaver used the well-known plain weaving method (1/1) in creating the ground of the pieces under study. In this method, both warp and weft fibers are regularly intersected with a 90 degrees angle (Pls. 4/5) causing warped fibers to disappear (e.g., single fibers) and others to appear (e.g., twofold fibers), which are inverted in the next layer of warp fibers...etc.¹³ (Pls.10, 11, 12, 13).

	
<p>Pl. 10: The plain weave structure (1/1); the simplest of all weaves in archaeological textiles.</p>	<p>Pl. 11: Figured texture pattern shows plain weave (1/1) structure.</p>
	
<p>Pl. 12: Figured texture pattern shows the plain weave (1/1) structure.</p>	<p>Pl.13: Figured texture pattern shows the plain weave (1/1) structure.</p>

¹³ Barber. E. J. W., *Prehistoric Textile: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with a Special Reference to the Aegean*, Oxford, (1991), p.149, Hooper (L.), *The Technique of Greek and Roman Weaving*, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. (18), No. 95, (1911) p.140

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The decoration was carried out by the weavers in a non-extended manner. The technique took more than one name, such as the tapestry¹⁴, the woven decoration¹⁵, the painted textiles¹⁶, and the weft-faced textiles¹⁷, but the precise nomination is the textile of non-extended weft because it is the closest to describe the texture composition of this technique and not the tapestry that includes a general concept of Egyptian textiles and not a specific technique.¹⁸

Such decorations were accomplished using colored wefts weaved in a non-extended way across the woven piece. A weaver begins by inserting the colored fiber of the weft into the decorated part among wraps within an opening on pulling/hauling the half of the harness; single fibers are separated from the twofold ones. Then, he passes the second fiber of the weft in the same area or according to the decoration ...etc. until it is completed¹⁹ (Pl.14).

The subject of the study is characterized by many of the following textile features: The weaver used fibers of different thicknesses, causing a kind of soaking enough to create a complete veiling of wrap fibers, which gives the effect that only a slight projection remains on the surface. In addition, it became firmer and more decorated (Pl. 14).



Pl. 14: The Tapestry weaves: Dovetailing wefts and slit wefts Tapestry

¹⁴ Maher. S. M., *Mansougāt al-Muthaf al-Qebty*, al-Matbāah al-Ameeriya, Cairo, (1957), p 15.

¹⁵ - Marzouk. A., *Al-Zaghrafah Al-Mansougah fī al-Aqmisha al-Fatimiya*, Dar Al-Kutob Al-Masrya, Cairo, (1942), P1

¹⁶ - Ibrahim. T. A., *Estehdath Uslopp Taṭbeqy lelohmat ghair al-Momtadah letahqiq Tašmemāt mobtakarah lel-Kelim al-Mo`āšir bewahadāt Handasiya*, Thesis, Faculty of Applied Arts, Helwan University, (1996).p.11.

¹⁷ - Collingwood. p., *The Techniques of Rug Weaving*, 1st ed, London, (1968), p. 55.

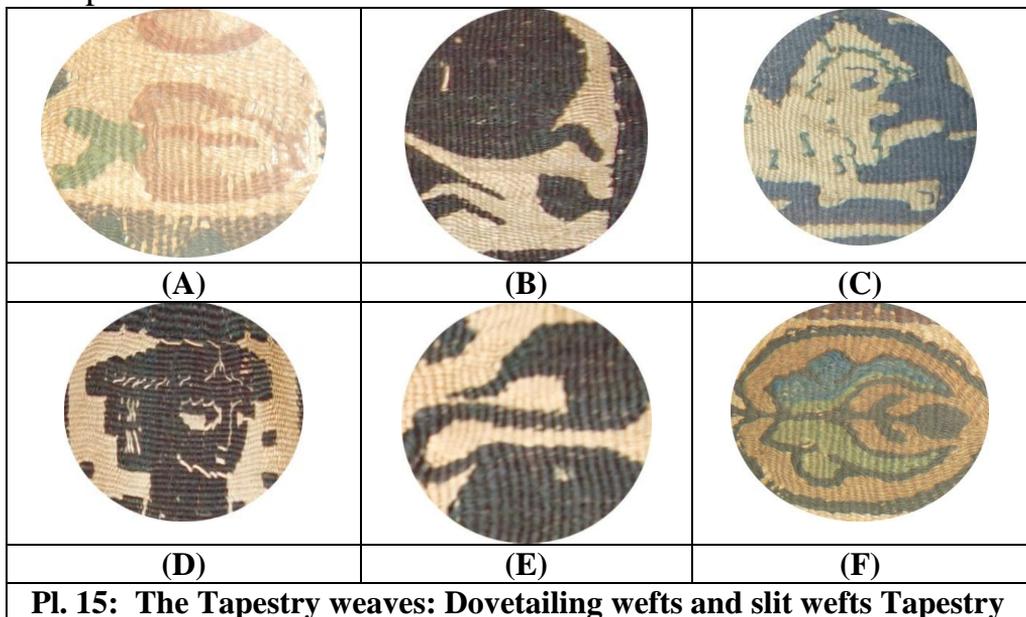
¹⁸ - Marouf. M., *“al-Tahlil al-Teqqany lelmansougat thāt al-lohmā ghair al-momtadah”*, *The international conference and workshop of the concept of maintenance and restoration of antiquities*, Faculty of Fine Arts, Minia University, (2005), p. 2.

¹⁹ - Kamel. A., *Madkhal ela Technologia al-Naseeg w al-Tapestrey*, Dar al-ma`aref, Cairo, 2st ed, (1992), p.108.

Wool fibers are used because they are characterized by considerable flexibility and elasticity²⁰, causing a kind of soaking. Linen fibers are used in designing the ground (as both warp and weft) because it is more coherent. Various interlocking techniques are applied in wrap and weft to avoid interface cracks caused by the reversion of weft (Pl. 15), such as:

- The dovetailing method of weft and warp fibers with a parallel motion. In this case, the area of the color zone extends within the neighboring color zone. At the same time, the area adjacent to the first zone extends to the first one alternatively. In this method, the waver uses one or two weft fiber(s) between the two areas.²¹
- The double or triple dovetailing method in which a weaver uses two or three colored wefts into two neighboring areas on mutual fibers.²²
- The waver used the intersection of weft with wrap fibers with an acute angle in weaving most decoration units, e.g., face and cup decorations.

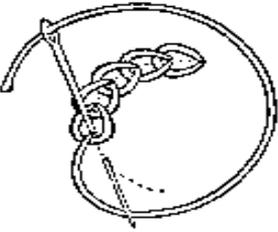
Therefore, the five pieces can be weighted into one texture and one piece.



²⁰ Niceties. L., *Clothing Fibers*, Learning Seed, U. S, (2008), p.16.

²¹ Marouf. M., *al-Tahlil al-Teqqany lel-Mansougat thāt al-lohmā ghair al-Momtadah*, p.6.

²² Madani, *al-Kelim al-Quoqazy w al-Anaḍoly*, p.101.

	
<p>Pl. 16: Figured embroidery Needle.</p>	<p>Pl.17: Figured texture pattern shows embroidery structure</p>

In this collection, the weaver used a needle for determining the decorations. He used the colored wool threads in the implementation of the various animal, floral, and geometric decorations (Pl. 16.17). This method was used after the completion of weaving, using a sewing needle, often using colored threads, and utilizing a material that was more expensive than the weaving material. The needle is the tool used to create the required embroidery. In ancient times, the needle was made of bone, fishbone, or bronze. It was usually used to create embroidery on the material, whether cloth or leather.

Analysis of style

The decorations of the five investigated pieces vary and include pictorial scenes that consist of decorative items, such as human, animal, and geometrical decorations.

Human motifs

Human motifs used in decorations don't resemble the decorations of living beings, that we should not call any of them decorations if the intention is pictorial to illustrate a story, legend, or subject. Almost all of the civilizations all over the world used this element in decoration. The drawings of humans were widely spread in Coptic (Christian) works. It helped to keep the gospel stories and the sermons and wisdom associated with them.²³

It is striking that the Christian Coptic weavers used the most comprehensive scenes of the human beings in this collection of Coptic weavings. These scenes were represented inside rectangular areas. Moreover, human motifs came in single pieces

²³ - El Nemr, *Ardeyet Al-Masehiyeen*, p199.

separated by animal motifs. To a large extent, human beings took the dancing human forms (Pl. 5,20).

These motifs were woven with a rectangular decorative strip within decorative areas, a drawing of a human, followed by a lion, then a drawing of a human followed by a rabbit. The human drawing is distinguished in a semi-lateral position characterized by being executed in a simple style with a huge head that tends to elongate, wide eyes, a wide nose, a narrow mouth that is almost invisible, an elongated neck, and thick hair (Pl. 18).



Pl. 18: Human motifs in Coptic textile, fragments, NMEC, No. 177

A narrow band is also decorated with human drawings that appear alternately with a drawing of a lion, which is a drawing of a human in a fully erect position, showing a man raising his right hand with the palm of a three-fingered hand and lowering his other hand characterized by an irregularly shaped head with wide eyes. An equilateral cross hangs from the neck, some of which occupy the abdomen and chest area. These drawings are represented within rectangular areas (Pl. 18).



Pl. 19: Human motifs in Coptic textile, fragments, NMEC, No. 165.

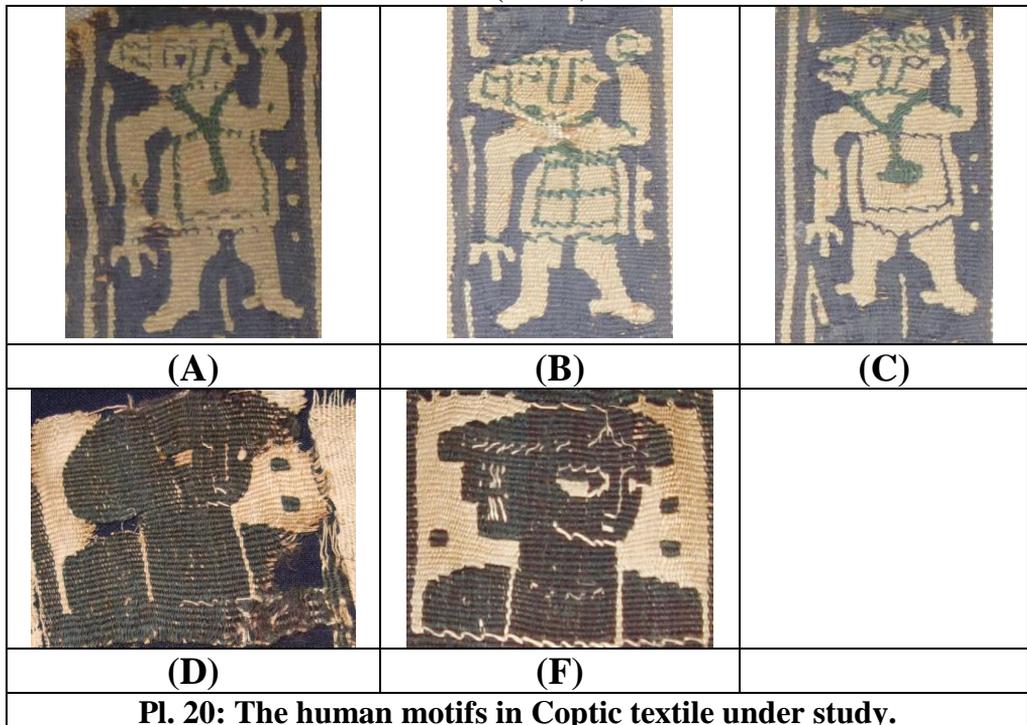
As for their positions, they come in different positions as they tend to move very similarly to the dancing human figures. It is worth noting that they were woven with faces irregularly rounded with narrow eyes that are almost invisible and a wide nose. Human drawings take the position of a moving erection, as the détente of the legs and the movement of the hands indicates this as it comes in a half-image in a side position (Pl. 20).

These human drawings were characterized by many artistic features, although they came in a simple and caricatured style characterized by thinness. The weaver did not take into account the anatomical proportions and tried to express the human

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features by highlighting the facial features diverse of their shapes between round faces, ones that tend to elongate, and a third rectangular group (Pl. 20).

The drawings characterized by narrow eyes are barely visible and others wide, separated by a wide nose and a small mouth. Human drawings were also distinguished by not highlighting the charms of the body and the tendency to flow, agility and movement while showing few details, which gave the drawing a character of transformation and abstraction (Pl. 20).



Pl. 20: The human motifs in Coptic textile under study.

Human figures were represented in many Coptic works, especially textiles, such as the collection of Coptic textiles preserved in the Museum of Coptic Art in Cairo. For instance, a piece of linen and wool decorated with a simple drawing of two standing human figures, each woven with a round face and simple clothes that do not reach the knee. These figures are separated by a drawing of a pivoting tree and the drawing in a facing position. The piece dates back to the 7th-8th G. centuries (Pls. 21, 22).

	
<p align="center">Pl. 21: The Coptic textile fragments, linen & wool, 7-8 AD, saved at Museum of Coptic Art in Cairo , N. 1709</p>	<p align="center">Pl. 22: The Coptic textile fragments, linen & wool, 7-8 AD, saved at Museum of Coptic Art in Cairo , N. 1708</p>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art also holds a Coptic tunic of linen and wool dated back to the 7th G. century decorated with vertical stripes that ran over the shoulder on the front and back of a Coptic tunic with human beings (Pl. 23).

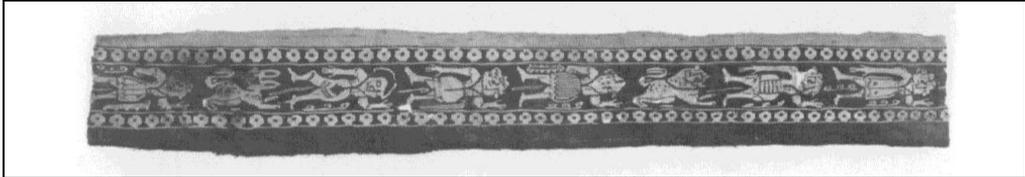


Pl. 23: The Coptic Tunic, linen & wool, 7 AD, saved at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, N. 1709, Stauffer (A.); textile of late Antiquity, the metropolitan museum of Art, New York, 1995, p27

The Rietberg Zurich Museum also preserves a stripe of linen and wool, dimensions (82 x 17.5), dated back to the 7th and 8th G. centuries, decorated with recurring circular medallions, inside of which there is a woven an axial view of human beings separated by a tree and a drawing in the mode of movement close to the figure of the dancer.²⁴

²⁴ Thompson. D., *The Evolution of Two Traditional Coptic Tape Patterns: Further Observations on the Classification of Coptic Textiles*, Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, Vol. 23, (1986), pp. 145-156

We find these decorations on parts of vertical stripes and shirts preserved in the courtesy of the Byzantine collection Dumbarton Oaks decorated with ribbons that include human motifs, which appear alternately with a drawing of a lion dated back to the 9th G. century (Pl. 24).



Pl. 24: The Coptic textile fragments, linen & wool, 9 AD, saved at the Byzantine collection Dumbarton Oaks, Thompson. D., "Miniaturization" as a Design Principle in Late Coptic Textiles of the Islamic Period, Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, Vol. 22 , 1985, fig.4.

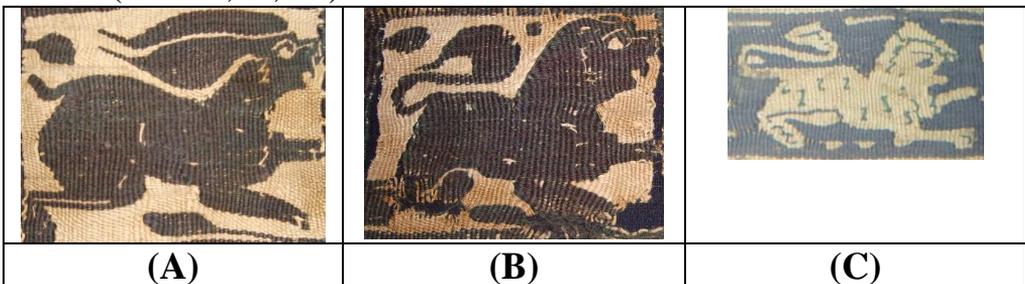
The Coptic Museum also preserves a piece of linen and wool tapestry with dimensions (21.8 x 11 cm) decorated with simple human and animal drawings, some of which represent hunting, dancing, and equestrian scenes dated back to the 7th and 8th G. centuries (Pl.no.25).

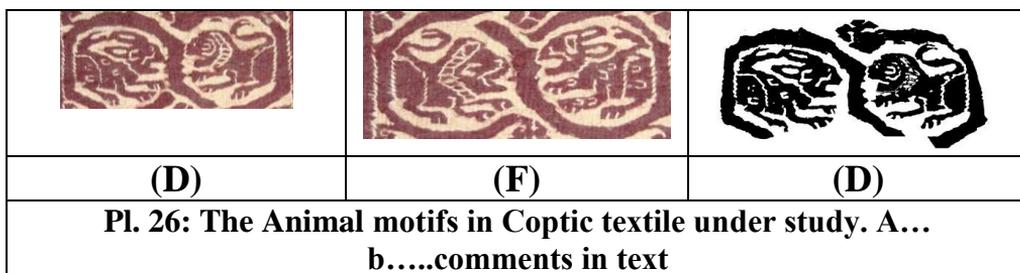


Pl. 25: The Coptic textile fragments, linen & wool, 7-8 AD, saved at Museum of Coptic Art in Cairo , N. 1699.

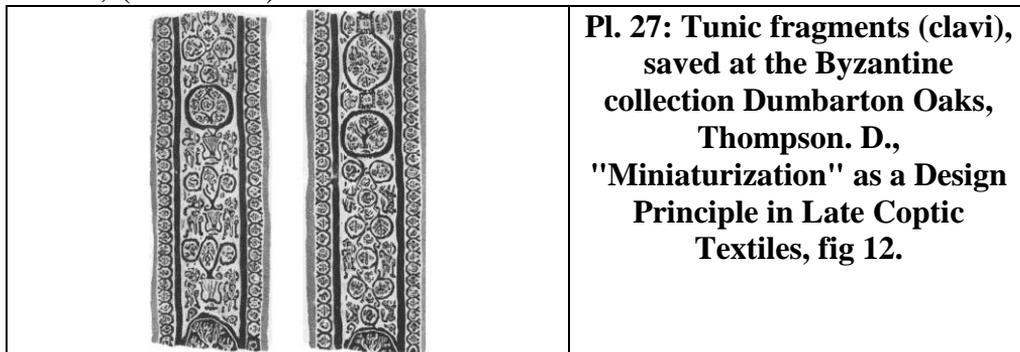
Animal motifs

Animal motifs were represented on the Coptic textile under study. The weaver used the drawings of lions and rabbits in the decoration of the weaving piece woven with a rectangular decorative strip within decorative areas surrounded by a human motif (Pls. 18,19, 26).

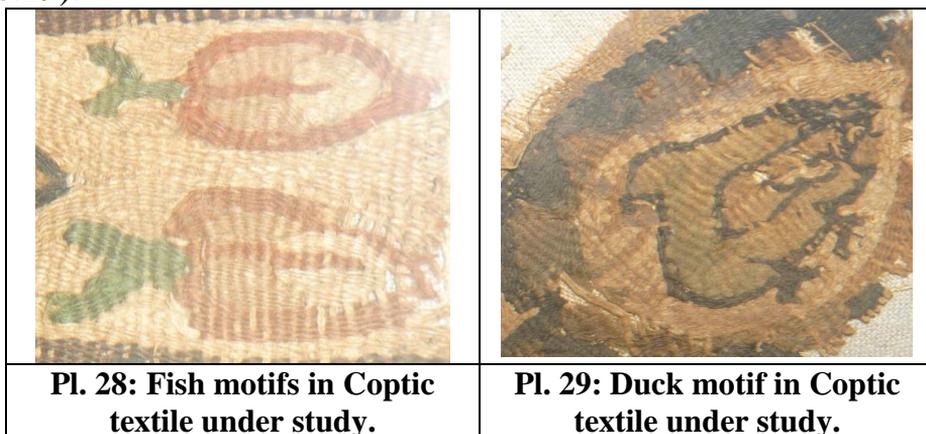




Animal motifs were also represented on many Coptic monuments, especially textiles, such as the group of Coptic textiles preserved in the Museum of Coptic Art (Pl. 22). These decorations appeared on parts of vertical stripes and shirts preserved in courtesy of the Byzantine collection Dumbarton Oaks, (Pl. 24.27).



Weavers used drawings of fish and ducks in the decoration of piece No.6 that took a simple style with multiple colors (Pl. 28.29).



Botanical motifs

The pieces in question were decorated with various botanical motifs, which came in the form of wavy plant branches or a separate leaf (Pl.no. 4, 6,30).



Botanical and floral drawings occupy the second place in Coptic art after cross shapes. Therefore, they adorned many Coptic artifacts. They were modified and sometimes close to nature. For example, a large group of Qabbati tapestries preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, including a piece of linen and wool fabric from the Coptic textile was decorated with drawings of intertwined round plant scrolls, containing woven human and plant drawings, as shown by another piece from Fayoum dating back to the 6th-7th G. centuries.²⁵

The branches also appear on a square piece of Qabbati tapestry preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum decorated with a wavy intertwining plant branch from which large leaves emerge. The piece of Bahnasa is dated to the 5th or 6th G. century.

Geometric motifs

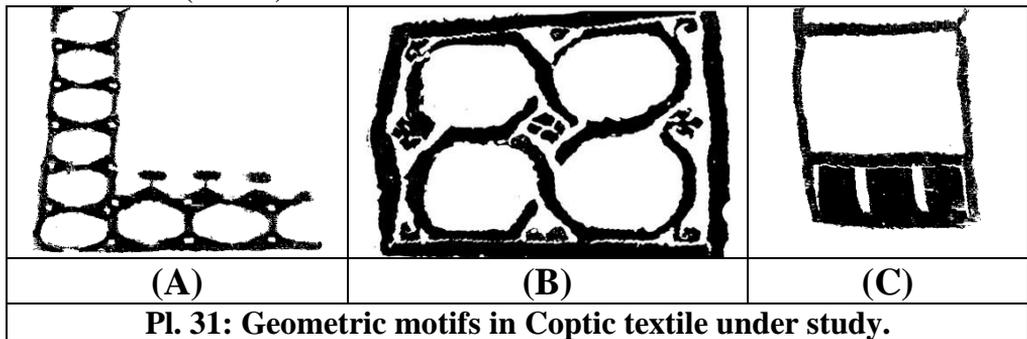
The weaver used geometric motifs in the decoration of the weaving subject under study. These motifs took different shapes, such as complex geometric designs, regular geometric units, and cross shapes. It is known that Coptic art is at the forefront of the arts that were clearly distinguished by geometric motifs. After they were merely auxiliary elements in the design, these motifs began to appear as the main in the work as they filled large areas with abstract geometric lines²⁶.

It is worth noting that Coptic textiles, in general, have many decorative geometric motifs represented by circles and their halves, squares, rhombuses, bowls, and rectangles.

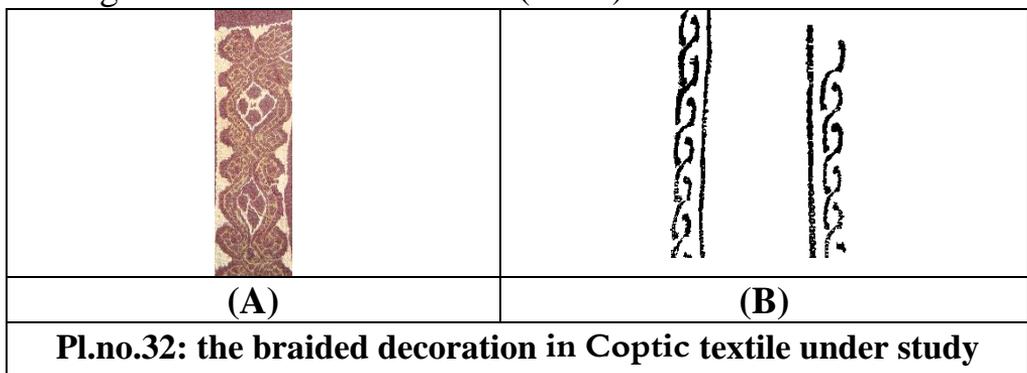
²⁵ The Victoria and Albert Museum, N. 305, 321, 401, Kendrick, (A. F.), *Catalogue of Textile from Burying Grounds in Egypt, Victoria and Albert, Museum, VOL III, London, (1922).*

²⁶ El Nemr, *Ardeyet Al-Masehiyeen*, p219.

The regular geometric shapes are one of the most widely used decorative elements in the Coptic textiles in this study. They took different shapes, including the rectangle, square, round, half-round, and rhombus. They were mostly used in frames and dividers or filled the interior spaces in different places inside bars. Furthermore, they included other decorative elements, such as crosses (Pl. 31).



In addition, the braided decoration executed with the textiles of the subject of the research, are overlapping of two stripes (Pl. 24). There were many forms of braids, including abstract, simple, intertwined and overlapping, and opposite. However, the observer may see that they all originated from one idea, namely the zigzag line from which two branches emerge: One leaning to the right and the other to the left (Pl. 32).

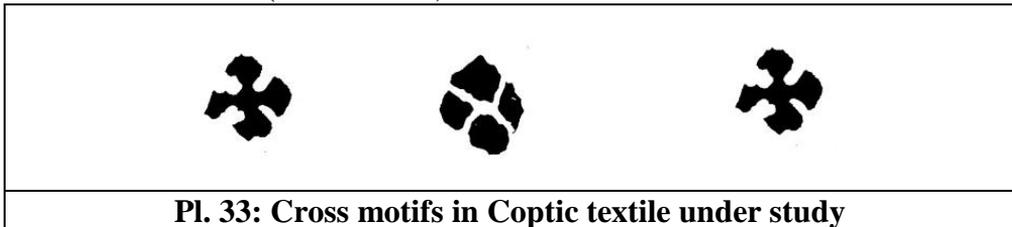


Moreover, the weaver used the longitudinal and transverse stripes in the decoration of the weavings in question, which came in different areas occupied by various decorations. The frames surrounding the decorations varied and took the form of rectangular, square, and round stripes, with different widths. Some of them contain various decorations, whereas others appear devoid of decorations (Pl.no.31).

Cross motifs

The cross is one of the artistic manifestations that appeared in Coptic applied arts. It symbolizes the wooden structure on which Jesus was crucified- as they believe- except for the periods of persecution when the cross was symbolized with non-explicit symbolic signs, such as the Pharaonic ankh sign. After the persecution eras, it was over. Christians, in general, and Copts, in particular, have become blessed by placing and drawing the cross in everything related to their public and private lives. Several types of crosses- more than four hundred- have appeared.

The cross motifs came with various textures of the subject of the research, including simple and complex ones. They came inside decorative units (Pl.no.31.33).



The examination of the investigated five pieces showed that they are similar to the different collections of Coptic textiles preserved in Egyptian and international museums, especially the drapes that were used as clothing and known as tunics characterized by stripes and medallions containing human and animal motifs and geometric shapes. These artifacts date back to Coptic art in the early Islamic era between the 6th- 8th G. centuries. Accordingly, it could be said that this collection belongs to the Christians in Egypt between the 6th- 8th G. centuries.

The symbolism and content of decorations

Through the descriptive study and the previous artistic characteristics, it was shown the diversity of the decorative elements used in the decoration of Coptic textiles preserved in the National Museum of Civilization

Human Figures

The human figures that executed over the textiles in subject of the study were varied, it was woven individually or within a pictorial

subject, as mentioned above, and it came to represent small figure, in different poses. It is noted that these drawings were simple, and modified and caricatured, characterized by thinness; Where the weaver did not take into account the anatomical proportions. The head is usually large, the eyes are wide, defined by lines that almost dominate the face, and the shape of the round pupil varies. Human figures are also distinguished by not highlighting the charms of the body, and the tendency to flow, agility and movement, while showing few details, which gave the drawing the character of transformation and abstraction. We find the human figures represented in the same form as the rest of the Coptic arts, which confirms that the modification in Coptic art came on purpose and not as a weakness(Pl.no 2.4.18.19.20)..

As for the reasons that made the Coptic artist adopt this method, it may be due to the teachings of the Christian faith and religion, which are: If our outward human being perishes, the inward man is being renewed day by day²⁷, we also find a saying: Do not overshadow the beauty that God has given you with another beauty, but let the other be weak and incomplete.

In light of this, we find that the artist was interested in the content, essence and neglected the external form, which made the drawings appear in a simple caricature form. The artist also paid attention to highlighting some details of the faces, including the wide eyes, which give the impression that they are deep through the shadows around and below the eyes. As for the eyebrows, we find that they are drawn in the straightly, with the width of the face, in the form of a slight arc.

Animal Figures

The textiles in subject of the study contained a group of animals, including lions and rabbits, all of which are among the animals that frequently appear in Coptic textiles, which include symbolic meanings related to Coptic art(Pl.no26).

Lions

The textiles of the study include figures of crouching lions (Pl.no3,26), and the lion has a rich symbolism: it embodies, depending on the circumstances, strength, courage, the sun, eternity, time. It also

²⁷ Corinthians (4:16).

often embodies vitality and protective authority, and may have in the Christian tradition, in addition to this, connotations familiar from Satan and Christ²⁸.

The lion was used a lot in the ancient arts, especially the ancient Egyptian one; The lion is important in the Egyptian civilization, they believed that lions could see at night to the borders of the vast desert where the sun was born and died. Two lions were depicted as guards striking the horizons, they were likened to the two mountains that define the eastern and western borders and symbolize yesterday and tomorrow²⁹.

Some researchers attribute the idea of drawing lions in Christian art in general and Coptic in particular to the legend of the Greek hero "Heraclius." One of his twelve most important works - the killing of a Nemea lion - was the fiercest of animals, and Heraclius was often depicted tying the lion in preparation for killing it³⁰.

The previous drawings of lions symbolize evil, so we find them depicted under the feet of Christ or next to the saints. In contrast to this, we find the lion representing Christ³¹, the victor over evil and Satan³².

Lion also was linked to the resurrection; It tells that the cubs are born semi-dead and immobile, and then begin to move three days after their birth, and from here it was used to denote the resurrection.³³ As the lion is mentioned in many stories of the torment of the prophets as well as the saints, here is Daniel the Prophet being thrown into a den inhabited by two hungry lions, prepared for eating him, and God saved him.³⁴

²⁸ Syringe. P., *Symbols in "Art - Religions - Life"*, translated by Abd al-Hadi Abbas, Dar Damascus - Syria, 1992, p. 86.

²⁹ Diab.H.A.M., *The Evolution of the Symbol in Coptic Art to Create Designs Suitable for Printing Silk Fabrics for Women with Different Printing Methods*, Master Thesis, College of Applied Arts, Department of Textile Obedience, Dyeing and Finishing, 2001, p. 232.

³⁰ Masiha.H., *An Introduction to Coptic Antiquities*, p. 54.

³¹ Ferguson.G., *"Christian symbols"*, translated by Yacoub Gerges, Cairo 1964, p. 19.

³² Syringe, *Symbols in "Art - Religions - Life"*, p. 99

³³ El-Araby.R.E., *Aesthetic Values of Plastic Elements in Coptic Textiles and their Use in Designing Printed Hanging Fabrics*, Master Thesis, Faculty of Applied Arts, Helwan University, 2001, p. 171.

³⁴ Sayed.A.M., *An Artistic Archaeological Study of a Coptic Textile Group*, p. 24.

Rabbits

The weavers used rabbits to decorate the weavings of the research subject (Pl.no. 26). Rabbits are among the wild animals that are widely represented in Coptic applied arts and textiles in particular. The wild rabbit is a symbol of cowardice and villainy, and the hare in Christian art symbolizes the sinner³⁵. It has been noted that the rabbit is unable to defend itself, so it symbolizes the man who places the hope of salvation in Christ and his sufferings, as it symbolizes lust and fertility, as well as symbolizes the good spirit.³⁶

Fish

We find various drawings of swimming fish (Pl.no. 6, 26). And fish is one of the aquatic organisms that individuals like to eat. In ancient Egypt, fish did not carry a symbolic meaning, but was a source of food and livelihood for the people, and no kind of it was forbidden, but all kinds of indigo fish were eaten³⁷.

As for the fish in Coptic art, it carries many meanings. We find them in the Bible symbolizing the believers in God; Christ likened the kingdom of heaven to a net that gathers various types of fish, and the fish is a sacred symbol for Christians, and it symbolizes the blessed supper. The early Christians symbolized the fish to their faith and was a sign of acquaintance between them.³⁸

The fish symbolizes baptism, because fish do not live except in water, and the Lord Christ does not live without baptism³⁹. The fish is a symbol of Christ the Savior. The letters of the fish in the Greek language mean Christ, the Son of God the Savior.⁴⁰

Birds

The weavers used many birds in the decoration of this group of Coptic textile, some of which represent the ducks (Pl.no.6,29).

³⁵ Syringe, *Symbols in "Art - Religions - Life*, p. 78.

³⁶ Diab, *The Evolution of the Symbol in Coptic Art*, p. 239, Metwally.M.,: *An Analytical Study of Some Textiles*, p. 7.

³⁷ Diab, *The Evolution of the Symbol in Coptic Art*, p. 237.

³⁸ Qadous.I.Z.H., Marine symbols and their implications in early Christian art in Egypt, the history of the northern coasts of Egypt through the ages, "*Proceedings of the symposium held by the Committee on History and Archeology of the Supreme Cultural Council in partnership with the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University, on April 22 and 23, 1998 AD*", the Egyptian General Book Organization, No. 200, 2001, p. 423; Syringe, *Symbols in "Art - Religions - Life*, p. 211

³⁹ Ferguson.G., "*Christian symbols* ", p. 10.

⁴⁰ El-Araby.R.E., *Aesthetic Values of Plastic Elements in Coptic Textiles*, p. 179.

Ducks

It is a symbol of evil power in Egypt, and if the pharaoh kills a duck in the swamps with his arrow, it is not only a sport, but a magical act. Where the king conquers the evil force and eliminates the threats of the enemies of the empire⁴¹ The geese in Christianity symbolize wisdom and mind.⁴²

CONCLUSION

The present paper concludes several important results:

- It covered the study of five unique pieces that have never been published before.
- The examination of these five pieces proved that the weaver used natural fibers.
- He used linen and wool to weave all the pieces.
- The results showed that all threads were twisted in a right-to-left direction (S), as is the case in Egyptian textiles.
- The weaver used the plain weaving method (1/1), the weft-faced textiles (Tapestry), and the embroidery needle.
- These pieces date back to the 6th - 8th centuries as they were compared to Coptic textiles in national and international museums. This archaeological fabric represents the fashions of the time.

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⁴¹ Syringe, *Symbols in "Art - Religions - Life,,* p. 186.

⁴² Metwally.M.,: *An Analytical Study of Some Textiles*, p. 7.

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