

A Comparison between Coptic Icons in Christian Churches and the Icons of the Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai

The paper aims at examining Christian icons in Egypt, particularly the Coptic icons of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, and the Greek Orthodox icons, particularly from the Monastery of St Catherine in Egypt. Icons probably started from early Christianity, at least as early as the 2nd century as they were mentioned by Tertullian (c. 160-220) and in Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-212). They were then spread by the 24th Pope Kirolos 1st who became Pope in 420. Vansleb the historian reported that there was an icon in the church of St Mark of Alexandria done by Luke the Prophet depicting Paul the Evangelist. Since Luke was known to be a good painter he is also said to have drawn the likeness of the Virgin Mary who is said to have been one of the prettiest girls of the tribes of Israel.

The word icon (eikón) itself meant image or portrait in Greek. It came to mean figure with Christian religious connotations representing saints and holy Christian figures and historical events related to Biblical history. They are usually placed in centres of worship such as monasteries and churches for the worshipers to honour them by touch or adoring gestures and are generally made out of painted wood.⁽¹⁾ One of the most basic definitions of an icon was given by Jens Fleischer in the introduction of his book on icons in Ny Carlsberg. His rendering is:

An icon is a picture for cultic use in the church and in the home. The choice of material, painting method and motifs are based – especially in the earlier icons – on the carefully prescribed rules of the late Byzantine traditions. The motifs are restricted to representations of the Saviour, the Mother of God, the angels and the saints, either as portraits or in narrative scenes (the Virgin and Child, the Nativity, the Ascension of Elijah etc.). Only when the icons has been consecrated by the priest can it be used. Thereafter the faithful can honour the personage depicted with candles and kisses of veneration.⁽²⁾

Another definition is:

Icon is a Greek word meaning ‘image,’ and just as the Greek Orthodox Church thinks of itself as the heavenly kingdom’s reflection upon earth, so does it regard icons as the images of the Orthodox Church, and although in later times some were made of metal, the bulk consists of paintings upon wood. The form originated from the tomb portraits of ancient Egypt.⁽³⁾

Icons have also been known to be executed in other mediums such as metal, stone, embroidered cloth, mosaic or fresco work, paper or artificial substances nowadays. Sculptures and statues are banned by the Orthodox Church, therefore icons may not be

(1) The definition of an icon as made out of a board or wooden panel goes back to the Middle Ages according to Jens Fleischer, *Catalogue: Greek and Russian Icons: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*, (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1995), p. 8. In other churches, icons may be made out of other elements such as ivory, bone, silver, mother of pear and enamel. G. Galavaris, *The Icon in the Life of the Church: Doctrine, Liturgy, Devotion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), p. 1.

(2) J. FLEISCHER, *Catalogue: Greek and Russian Icons: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*, (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1995), p. 7.

(3) D.T. RICE, *Icons*(London: Studio Editions, 1990), p. 10.

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more than three quarters in relief. This is probably based on the Jewish precedent and what was written in Exodus 20:4, King James Version (KJV):

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

In the Veneration of Icons, St John of Damascus says the following:

“If we made an image of the invisible God, we should truly do wrong. For it is impossible to make a statue of one who is without body, invisible, boundless, and formless. Again, if we made statues of men, and held them to be gods, worshipping them as such, we should be most impious. But we do neither.”⁽¹⁾

In Robin Cormack’s book *Writing in Gold* there is an opening quotation from Theodore the Stoudite which states: “The gospels were ‘writing in words,’ but icons are ‘writing in gold.’⁽²⁾

The influence of the Fayoum mummy portraits can be felt strongly in icons. These were mummy masks painted on wood with tempera or encaustic during the Greek and Roman period in Egypt. They were painted during a person’s lifetime and there is evidence that they were hung as paintings before a person died and they were used later as mummy masks or placed on the face of the deceased. They are the earliest portraits in the world and most of them show individualistic features of a person and are far more professionally executed.

Icons have purely religious subjects. Coptic icons do not show violent scenes or if they do, they do not have beasts such as lions appear very violent in the scene.⁽³⁾ Many of the greatest icon artists felt they were humble servants and often did not write their names thus making it quite difficult to date some icons. As a general rule though, most Coptic icons tend to have more writing than Greek icons.

The earliest icons known in Egypt are from the St Catherine Monastery in Sinai. The most famous are the icon of Christ Pantocrator, and an icon of the Virgin with other figures, but there are around six icons in the Monastery dated from the 6th and 7th century and executed in the same method. These were made of encaustic as a medium and are strongly influenced by the Fayoum mummy portraits as slabs of wood with individualistic portraits drawn using encaustic.

The Position and Importance of Icons in the Eastern Churches:

Icons are a main part of the Eastern churches and they are usually consecrated by a religious figure and holy Myron oil for them to become certified icons that may be used during worship and at special times.⁽⁴⁾

(1) St John of Damascus, *The Veneration of Icons*, p. 3.

(2) Icon and Word: *The Power of Images in Byzantium*, Studies presented to Robin Cormack, ed. By Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), p. xxix.

(3) In Arabic: M. SHAFIK, *Coptic Icons in the Churches of the St Mena Monastery in Fumm al Khalig* (Cairo: The Church of St Mena the Miraculous in Fumm al Khalig, 2008).

ممدوح شفيق، الأيقونات القبطية بكنائس دير مار مينا الأثري بقم الخليج (القاهرة: كنيسة مار مينا العجائبي بقم الخليج، ٢٠٠٨).

(4) When an icon has been consecrated, it goes through a process. The bishop or priest has to say certain things. Part of the words he recites are: ‘We beseech you, our king, to send the grace of your holy spirit and your angel to this icon so that if one prays to it his prayers may be fulfilled.’

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The Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council which took place in Nicea in 787 AD,⁽¹⁾ declared that “the icons of naked divinity or the Person of the Trinity who have not become incarnate were not to be made.” In other words, the Orthodox firmly believe that the other members of the Holy Trinity who were never incarnate so people could see them, meaning God the Father and the Holy Spirit, were generally not depicted in icons except in few cases where the Trinity may be represented in symbolic form as three angelic figures.⁽²⁾

In the Orthodox Church, a worshipper would usually go into church, offer a candle to the icon on the *proskynetrion* which is a pulpit-like stand inside the church. After kissing it, the worshipper would move to the miraculous icon if the church has one, or the lower icons of the iconostasis which are usually the oldest and most venerated icons in the church. After adoring and respecting them he would then contemplate the icons on the upper register. The iconostasis forms an integral part of the church rituals. The priest and deacon would recite prayers and move incense smoke around the icons.⁽³⁾ The icons to the left and right of the royal doors receive the highest attention. At the beginning, the priest bows before the icons of the iconostasis and stands before the icon placed on the *proskynetarion*. He invokes the Heavenly King, the paraclete, then says three prayers before the icons of the Saviour, the Virgin, and St John the Baptist.

Confession is usually heard in front of an icon. In other cases, the faithful would pray before an icon of the Virgin before confession.⁽⁴⁾

During the festival of the Synaxis of the Archangels and of all the heavenly powers celebrated on November 8, special emphasis is placed on the icons of Archangels Gabriel and Michael. It is Michael who protects the faithful and the church from evil, whereas Gabriel the Messenger of God, came with the news of a child born to the Virgin.⁽⁵⁾ However, Archangel Michael figures more prominently in the Coptic Orthodox faith.

Coptic Icons:

The history of the icons in Egypt is not fully known. The historian al-Maqrizi (1441), says that Pope Cyril I (412-44) introduced or hung icons in the churches. The Old

(1) The Seventh Ecumenical Council was also known as the Second Council of Nicea. It concentrated on the subject of icons and was held after the end of the iconoclasm which ended in 780 AD by Empress Irene. Therefore the issue of representations was also a matter of great importance.

(2) St Pope Gregory II of Rome, an early defender of the Church’s iconographic tradition and icon-veneration likewise testifies: “We do **not** delineate and paint the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” St Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople firmly states: “We make no icon or likeness or figure of the invisible Divinity upon Which even the sublime orders of angels themselves cannot look or comprehend, but, because the Only-Begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, accepted to become man by the merciful will of the Father and the Holy Spirit,...we draw His human face and the icon of His human form, according to the flesh and not of his incomprehensible and invisible divinity.” St Germanos of Constantinople, quoted in: V. GRUMEL, “Images (Cult des)”, *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique* 7,1, LETOUZY et ANE, Paris, 1927, p.838, as reproduced in: Bigham, Fr. STEPHEN, *The Image of God the Father in Orthodox Theology and Iconography and Other Studies*, TORRENCE (CA: Oakwood Publications, 1995), p.27-28.

(3) G. GALAVARIS, *The Icon of the Life of the Church*(1981), p. 5.

(4) G. GALAVARIS, *The Icon of the Life of the Church*(1981), p. 6-7.

(5) G. GALAVARIS, *The Icon of the Life of the Church*(1981), p. 17-19.

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Testament has a section where the Lord asked the Jewish people to produce a monument and inscribe it with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel to commemorate the incident where they crossed the Jordan River with the Arc of the Covenant and the water dried. It was done so that when their children asked them later on they would explain the incident. In addition, God ordered Moses to put the representations of the Sharubim on the Arc (Exodus 18:25). However, Judaism does not allow the representation of God as the Christian tradition allows. St Luke the Evangelist made a picture of the Virgin in the Bible bearing his name. In Christian tradition, Christ is said to have sent a piece of cloth with his likeness to King Abgar, king of Edessa.⁽¹⁾ According to the Coptic Church, icons may not go against the doctrine. They try to adhere closely to the writings in the Holy Books. Coptic icons are characterized by their sweetness and piety and non violence. It is said that the Byzantine iconoclastic movement of the 8th and 9th century affected Egypt and resulted in the destruction of earlier icons. This continued from around 726 to 843. It was started by Emperor Leo III (717-41) who issued the first edict against the use of images in 726 AD. The persecution itself only stopped with the death of Emperor Theophilus in 842. Many monks were martyred during this period.⁽²⁾ There was a great change in the concept of the icon between the 6th and 8th centuries. The icon became more than a religious object and became an object of spirituality. To some people they represented the entity they embodied and were revered and respected before they became a part of the religious service itself. The Council of Nicea in 787 said that the following should be said before the icon of Christ: This is Christ the Son of God.” This sort of sentence augments the above argument that the believers thought the icons represented the entities they were fashioned after.⁽³⁾

Icons are an integral part of the service in the Eastern churches in general, and the Coptic Orthodox Church specifically, as certain prayers need to be recited before specific icons. Father Samuel el Syryani mentions how they are always imbued with incense during liturgies and on feasts such as Holy Friday, Easter, Feast of the Ascension and other occasions. On special occasions they are also taken in rounds

(1) U. ZANETTI, *Le Monde Copte* 19 (1991), p. 92.

It may also be argued that the story of the cloth with the imprint of the face of Christ is something which was mentioned in the 4th century in the History of the Church by Eusebius the Caesarian, book 1, ch. 12. It was also mentioned in detail in the teachings of Aday in Syriac. However, it is a subject of myth. There is not even an agreement whether the story speaks of Abgar 5th, The Black, or Abgar 8th, The Great (178-213), (probably the 5th).

In Arabic: H. BADR, S. SELIM, J. ABOU NAHRA, *Christianity Throughout its History in the East* (The Council of Middle Eastern Churches, Program of Studies and Research, 2001), p. 151.

حبيب بدر، سعاد سليم، جوزيف أبو نهرا، *المسيحية عبر تاريخها في المشرق* (مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط: برنامج الدراسات والأبحاث، ٢٠٠١)، ص ١٥١.

The cloth cured the king from most of his disease, then the Apostle Thaddeus who was one of the seventy, went to Edessa after the Ascension and completed king Abgar's treatment and converted him. It became the subject of legend. Five centuries later it was discovered immured in the city wall. This shows how important the portrait or likeness of a person may be in representing the person and bringing back their attributes, particularly the icons of holy figures. R. TEMPLE, *Icons: A Search for Inner Meaning* (London: The Temple Gallery, 1982), p. 9-10.

(2) Z. SKALOVA and G. GABRA, *Icons of the Nile Valley* (2003), p. 28.

(3) G. GALAVARIS, *The Icon of the Life of the Church* (1981), p. 3.

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around the church from the inside accompanied by special hymns.⁽¹⁾ An icon has religious figures and subjects from the holy books. The Copts differentiate between a picture with a religious theme and an icon by the fact that the wooden icons hung in churches and the murals with religious subjects in churches, need to be consecrated by a religious figure such as the bishop or the Pope himself. They are anointed with the holy Myron oil and certain prayers are said to consecrate them. In order to understand the importance of the icon in the Coptic Church we asked a number of Copts. Most Copts believe that the icon is a requirement and that the church itself is a form of an icon. The Late Father Gregorios, General head of Graduate Studies and Coptic Culture wrote an article in *Watany* newspaper (10 March, 2002) where he said the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt encourages and orders the construction of pictures. The Coptic Church does not allow statues or raised reliefs of figures inside the churches as forms of decoration based on the Bible, but they believe that icons are necessary. In fact, they construct an iconostasis which is a veil or wall separating the nave of the church and the holiest section in a church represented by the sanctuaries. This may be reminiscent of the division of the temple in ancient Egypt where the innermost sanctuaries or the holiest part of the temple, had doors leading to these closed rooms. In reports about the great temple of Solomon, a veil was said to separate the sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was probably kept, from the rest of the temple. Images of Christ and other figures are to be shown there. The images are like a message to the human spirit whenever viewed. Icons were often used to educate the ignorant people, and also to remind them of the great deeds done by the different holy figures as an act of veneration. The Coptic liturgists often call the icons the “Bible of the Poor.” These words are so indicative of the main educational function of icons. Since people of all ages and all levels of education are allowed in the church, the images represent a pictorial depiction of the events recorded in the scriptures. The Western churches also use religious statues. Both the Eastern and Western churches however denounce any ideas concerning worshipping icons or symbols. However, we must accept that there is a real confusion between the idea of worshipping the portrait or image, and the person or entity portrayed.⁽²⁾ In accordance with the idea of simplifying the icons for the public, they stick to the truth as expressed in the Bible and depend more on simplification and not so many complicated symbols as in other art forms. However, the Coptic icons do not employ beaten gold or silver as you may find in the Greek icons for examples. Although Father Ugo Zanetti says that the Greek icon painters often employ very strict artistic traditions,⁽³⁾ it appears that Coptic icon painters employ even stricter traditions when it comes to religious accuracy and following what the Bible says. In doing that they follow the Old Testament where God asked the Jews to commemorate the Ark of the Covenant passing the river and drying up the water. There is also the example of the copper serpent which is compared to Christ:

(1) S. EL SYRIANI (Father), L'Icone dans la tradition liturgique de l'Église Copte, *Le Monde Copte* 19 (1991), p. 102.

(2) H. BELTING spoke about this confusion (see *Bild und Kult-Eine Geschichte des Vildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich 1990, no page number). Moreover, the Eighth Ecumenical Council declared that “if anyone does not venerate the icon of Christ, they will not see him in the Second Coming. *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium, Studies presented to Robin Cormack*, ed. A.EASTMOND and L. JAMES (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), p. 67.

(3) U. ZANETTI, *Le Monde Copte*, 19 (1991), p. 90.

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Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. (Jo 3:14)

Most of the icons in the Coptic Museum were taken from old Coptic churches when they were no longer necessary for worship. A large number of icons executed by Copts were destroyed when churches were destroyed, some in the 8th and 9th century, and others with the destruction of the churches in the 15th and 16th century. Copts cooperated with Greek and Armenian artists by the 17th century, and by the end of the 18th centuries, Copts were not painting icons so much and depended on artists of other origins.⁽¹⁾ The 18th century witnessed a grand increase in the number of icons due to the economic activity of the Coptic community.

Coptic art reflects a number of artistic influences such as Pharaonic influences, Greek, Roman, and Islamic influences, as well as influences from the artistic schools of Persia and Syria. Pharaonic influences and soulful wide eyes also influenced Byzantine art, which in turn influenced European art.⁽²⁾ Certain artistic characteristics and motifs in Coptic icons were taken from ancient Egyptian artistic traditions. Examples are the depiction of the central figure in a scene usually proportionally larger than the others, the use of certain symbols⁽³⁾ such as the 'ankh sign or Pharaonic symbol for life, and the shape of the pyramid, as well as the scales held by Archangel Michael which are reminiscent of the scales of the Pharaonic deity Osiris who judges the dead. Other Pharaonic influences include the scene of St George slaying the devil and may be seen in the warrior Horus stabbing the crocodile form of Seth, and the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus which are similar to the representation of Isis and her son Horus. The tradition of painting faces taken from the Fayoum mummy portraits and the representation of large soulful eyes is another tradition that continued in Coptic icons. There is also the position of the upraised arms in adoration or prayer or surrender to the divine and the full prostration which are all based on ancient Egyptian monuments and objects and require a separate study on the influence of Pharaonic art and tradition on Coptic art.⁽⁴⁾

Technique of Icon Production:

The technique of icon production varied according to time and place. The traditional material used for an icon is wood, although religious figures are also portrayed in stone,

(1) M.S. SEMAIKA Pasha, *A Brief Guide to the Coptic Museum*, translated from the French by G. H. Costigan (Cairo: Government Press, Bulaq, 1938), p. 46.

(2) The influence of oriental art continues to be seen in the figures of Cimabue and Giotto. This was also apparent in the Venetian Renaissance and the Baroque era. The oriental churches spread through Turkey, Armenia and Salonika, to Europe. The influence of their artistic traditions continued to influence the churches in Serbia and Yugoslavia. O. BIHALJI-MERIN, *Frescoes and Icons: Mediaeval Art in Siberia and Macedonia*, translated by B.V.WALDSTEIN (Munich: Hanns Reich Verlag in collaboration with "Jugoslavija," Bergrade, 1958), p. 5.

(3) The study symbolism may be confined to four main principles: the idea of higher and lower levels of the cosmos, the outer material world and its relationship to its unseen counterpart which is the inner spiritual world, the idea of the significance of light, and the idea of multiplicity and unity. The ordinary mind generally tends to go towards the literal and hence the lowest meaning. R. TEMPLE, *Icons: A Search for Inner Meaning* (London: The Temple Gallery, 1982), p. 36.

(4) M. RASSART-DEBERGH, De l'Icone Paienne à L'Icone Chretienne, *Le Monde Copte* 18 (1990), p. 39-70. The issue of Pharaonic influences is not the main one addressed here and will only be referred to in passing.

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plaster, ivory, metal, and all other types of materials. According to Dr. Raouf Habib, the Coptic artists used eggs instead of oil in the icons. In the earlier times they painted directly on the wood and in later periods they applied a layer of gypsum first. Gold water was used in the background. There are also signs that indicated that the icons were transferred from models drawn on paper.⁽¹⁾ Most of the icons we are dealing with are made of non-resinous wooden panels. The panel must be totally dry, without knots. The icon takes a coating, then the drawing is done with a brush or a pencil. If some areas or the background need to be covered with gold, this should be done before the painting process itself, or the gold would adhere to the paint. As a general rule, larger areas are covered with sheet gold, while smaller areas are made with gold leaf. The surplus gold is removed, then the actual colouring starts. Earth colours are used. The pigments used are mostly powders dissolved in and prepared of egg yolks. Colours such as white, blue and amber, require more egg. Egg whites are not encouraged as they cause the paint to crack. The painting of the icon is sometimes done with darker borders or outlines and lighter interiors. There is also a principle of dark to light which is a Byzantine style. After drying, the icon is often covered with olipha which is boiled linseed oil. It requires a great skill in applying it though.

Most Coptic icons are made of wood with a coating of hot gelatin, then a white gilded coating which includes gelatin so the icon may absorb the colours upon painting. In earlier cases, a layer of light cloth is used before a layer of gelatin is applied. The colours used are the same pigments used by the ancient Egyptians.⁽²⁾

Coptic Icon Artists:

Ibrahim al Nasikh was a famous Egyptian artist who lived between 1720 and 1780. From some icons in the church of Abou Seifein, he wrote the full name of “al Haqir” or “the Humble Ibrahim Sam`an al Nasikh.”⁽³⁾

However, many of the icon artists were not in fact Egyptian, so the word “Coptic” icon then should mean an icon found in an Egyptian church perhaps. Some of the most famous icon painters were non-Egyptians such as Yuhanna al Armani who was an Armenian, and Anastasi al Rumi who was Greek as their names indicate.

We should note however that several of the foreign icon artists were known by name since they signed their works. Most Egyptian icon artists were not in the habit of signing their names and are therefore unknown. There was an Egyptian artist who signed his name as Monk Priest Minkarius or Minkarius Gerges and used the Hijri

(1) R. HABIB, *The Coptic Icons* (Cairo: Mahabba Bookshop, 1979), p. 9.

(2) In Arabic: S.S. ISKANDAR, A Study of the Church of StMercurios in al-Fustat - Old Cairo from Archaeological, Historical and Artistic Aspects, unpublished M.A. dissertation in Coptic Archaeology presented to the Institute of Coptic Studies, Dept. of Archaeology, Architecture and Restoration, thesis supervisor Dr. Heshmat Meseha, January 1990, p. 75.

ملوى شكرى إسكندر، دراسة كنيسة القديس مرقوريوس بالقسطاط - مصر القديمة من النواحي الأثرية والتاريخية والفنية، رسالة ماجستير غير منشورة في الآثار القبطية، مقدمة لفهم الآثار والعمارة والترميم، معهد الدراسات القبطية، تحت إشراف د. حشمت مسيحه، يناير ١٩٩٠، ص. ١٧٥.

(3) In Arabic: M. IMMERZEEL, The Collection of Icons kept at the Coptic Museum, *Essays on Coptic Art and Culture*, published by the project: Egyptian-Netherlands Cooperation for Coptic Art Preservation (ANCCAP) (Leiden, 1994), p. 4.

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Islamic calendar. He worked between the years 1765 and 1793. His colours are mostly dark and his work is similar to Ibrahim and Yuhanna and Anastasi el Rumi in that he also had thin people, severely arched brows over almond-shaped eyes, and generally small mouths except in the case of St George. Other icons include one signed by Monk Priest Kirolos which goes back to 1779 and shows a distinctly Greek style, and another icon from 1790 signed by Gerges al Rumi. Although the latter's style is close to that of Ibrahim and Yuhanna, his name indicates his Greek origins.⁽¹⁾

In addition to artists identified by name, there are art styles or schools of art, such as the school of Akhmim apparent from the simplistic icons in the monastery of Anba Thomas al Saeh near Akhmim. One icon is signed by Father Abdel Shaheed from Akhmim and the date goes back to 1868. The style of the Akhmimic school of icons is close to the Ethiopian style in the 17th and 18th centuries. The heads tend to be larger than normal and the eyes are distinctly almond-shaped.⁽²⁾ In a study by Noubar Deir Mikailian in Armenian, he mentions that in all the joint works, the style reflected that of Ibrahim al Nasikh. In fact, most scholars agree that Ibrahim al Nasikh was the older artist, while Yuhanna al Armani was a student, a disciple and a helper. Some even argue that Yuhanna's part in the joint works between the two artists, was mainly to fill in the scenes with paint.⁽³⁾ The two artists tried to observe the Byzantine style and use items from Islamic dress and hair styles so in the end they ended up having their own distinct style.⁽⁴⁾

The most famous icon artists who influenced and produced icons for the Coptic Church are: 1) Luke the Evangelist who was also known as a physician, is said to have painted a likeness of the Virgin Mary, 2) St Macarius the 59th patriarch of the Coptic Church (931-950 AD), 3) Abou Yosr Bin Yalag, a 12th century icon artist, most of his icons are in the church of the Lady Virgin in Harat al-Rum, 4) Bishop Ghobrial al-Nasikh or Gabriel the Artist, he became patriarch number 76 in year 936 in the Calendar of the Martyrs, around the 13th century, and is famous for copying manuscripts of the four bibles with coloured paintings, 5) Boghdady Aboul Saad in the 17th century, 6) Ibrahim al-Nasikh in the 18th century, 7) Yuhanna al-Armani in the 18th century, 8) Anastasi al-Rumi who lived during the time of Patriarch Kirolos V.⁽⁵⁾

(1) J.A. DE LAPIERRE, *Saint Shenouda Coptic Quarterly*4, no. 1-2 (SSCQ) (Fall/Winer 2007-8), p. 6-7.

(2) J.A. DE LAPIERRE, *Saint Shenouda Coptic Quarterly*4, no. 1-2 (SSCQ) (Fall/Winer 2007-8), p. 10

(3) In Arabic: S.M.A. ASHOUR, *The Icons of the Church of Abi Sefein Dated to the 18th century AD: A Study in Civilization and Archaeology*, unpublished M.A. Thesis in Islamic Archaeology, Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University. Researcher Ms. ASHOUR is of the opinion that Yuhanna's main part in the joint works with Ibrahim al Nasikh, was the painting.

شروق محمد أحمد عاشور، أيقونات كنيسة أبي سيفين المؤرخة في القرن ١٨ م: دراسة حضارية وأثرية، رسالة ماجستير غير منشورة في الآثار الإسلامية، كلية الآثار، جامعة القاهرة.

(4) In Arabic: S.M.A. ASHOUR, *The Icons of the Church of Abi Sefein*, p. 432.

(5) In Arabic: Y.Z. KHALIL, *The Appearance and Reality in the Sacred Coptic Art: A Contemporary View*, unpublished M.A. dissertation to the Dept. of Art, Institute of Coptic Studies, Cairo, thesis supervisor Dr. Isaac Fanous, Head of the Art Dept. at the Institute, 2003, p. 127.

يوسف زكي خليل، الشكل والمضمون في الفن القبطي المقدس: رؤيا معاصرة، رسالة ماجستير للحصول على ماجستير في الفن القبطي من قسم الفن بالمعهد العالي للدراسات القبطية بالقاهرة، تحت إشراف د. إيزاك فانوس رئيس قسم الفن بالمعهد، ٢٠٠٣، ص

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The more contemporary artists of Coptic icons include: 1) Dr. Isaac Fanous,⁽¹⁾ 2) Dr. Bodoor Latif, 3) Galal Ramzy, 4) the brothers Emad and Bedaba Nessim, 5) British national Jaqueline Ascott (or Scott), 6) Martha Naeem, 7) Ashraf Fayek, 8) Salwa Shoukri, 9) Seham William, 10) Monk Youssab al-Sury, 11) Monk Iliya al-Baramousi, 12) Monk Samoeil al-Suryani, 13) Magdy William, 14) Samir Tadros.⁽²⁾

Miraculous Icons:

There have been reports of miraculous icons which performed functions such as bleeding and crying, or oozing oil.⁽³⁾ In fact, miraculous icons were probably one of the main reasons people revered icons.⁽⁴⁾ Leontius argues that if bones are impure, why were the bones of Jacob and Joseph brought back with all respect from Egypt, and why was a dead man raised having touched the bones of Elisha. In light of that it is not

The famous icon artist Anastasi, Astasi or Eustathius the Greek painted between 1838 and 1871. His icons are on the walls of several historical churches in Cairo such as the church of the Virgin in Haret Zuwayla, and the Virgin Damshiriya in Old Cairo. See: O. MEINARDUS, *The Iconography of Astasi Ar-Rumi, Studia Orientalia Christiana Aegyptiaca, Edizione del Centro Francese di Studi Orientali Cristiani* (Cairo, 1970-1971), p. 3.

(1) Isaac Fanous was one of the first students who joined the Institute of Coptic Studies when it opened in 1954. He became one of the most famous icon painters in Egypt and established a school for icon production with distinct features such as triangular faces and gold backgrounds. Some of his students and disciples are Ayman Adib Shafik, Mary Guirguis Khalil, Salwa Shokry Eskander, Ebtissam Anouar Bibawy, Dalia Sobhy Girgis, Martha Naim Ghali Mahrous, Emad Bibawi Tawfik, Ashraf Fayek Georges. Foreign disciples include Stephane Rene from France, Monica Rene, and Jacqueline Ascott from Britain.

(2) In Arabic: Y.Z. KHALIL, *The Appearance and Reality in the Sacred Coptic Art* (2003), p. 149-150.

(3) B. SADEK, *Les Icônes Miraculeuses: Un exemple récent, Le Monde Copte* 19 (1991), p. 107. The article cites Coptic sources which recount a recent exuding of oil from miraculous icons in the Coptic Church in Cleveland, Ohio on May 15, 1990, during a feast of St Athanasius. The icon was that of the Virgin with the Child. The phenomenon occurred again on May 22 and June 4. An icon of Jesus Christ with a halo with a cross in it in the same church also exuded oil on September 6, 1990. Other holy objects are also said to exude oil or blood occasionally such as altars.

(4) In Arabic: D.A. ZAKI, *Icons that Talk, Move and Perform Miracles* (Mahalla el Kobra, Church of the Archangel Michael in Mahalla, Egypt, 1998).

أيقونات تتكلم وتتحرك وتصنع المعجزات، كنيسة رئيس الملائكة ميخائيل بالمحلة الكبرى، جمع وإعداد القس: دانيال عزمي زكي،

.١٩٩٨

This Arabic book has a number of the most famous miraculous icon stories. St Mena al-`Agaybi or the Miraculous, is said to have spoken to a grieving woman from his icon before she went to see her daughter in hospital. The daughter's eyesight was returned to her before she went in to surgery. That was in the church of St. Mena in Fomm al-Khalij, Cairo, p. 35-37. Another miracle took place in Crete in 1507 AD. There was an earthquake and two boys were in a store and they cried of fear before the icon of the Virgin. They say she constructed a shelter over their heads and spoke to reassure them so they wouldn't be harmed. The wall which had the icon of the Virgin was not destroyed and the miracle became famous in the island. In Nicea, an icon of the Virgin was hunted by soldiers of king Thaophilus. A rich widow took it out to save it and prayed, then tossed the icon into the sea. The icon was protected and it was as though the icon was walking over the water. It disappeared then reappeared years later near a monastery in Thessaloniki where the woman's son had become a monk. One of the monks in the monastery had a vision where the Virgin asked him to take her icon from the sea and keep it in their monastery. He did as she said and walked on the water like Paul, and took the icon back. Miracles have been reported about this icon since then, including filling the stores with food during siege and famine, p. 15-17.

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surprising that icons with the likeness of religious figures may ooze oil, blood or tears.⁽¹⁾ They were also believed to be protectors and healers. The mother of the Patriarch Peter (300-11) was said to have been barren and was cured by an icon of Sts Paul and Peter. The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church apparently refers to a visit of Khumarawaih son of Ahmed Ibn Tulun to Scetis (c. 880-907 during the time of Patriarch Khalil III). He is said to have thrown a bunch of basil at an icon of St Theodore the Martyr and asked the icon to catch. A hand came out of the icon and caught the basil and included it in the image. Since then he was said to be kinder to Christians, particularly the clergy.⁽²⁾ There is also talk of taking icons like that of St Mena, by Athanasius on travels to protect him.⁽³⁾ Icons were also used in the church services such as the *Difnar* or *Antiphonarium* of the Coptic Church. It has a reminder that certain prayers should be said before certain icons. Present day Copts venerate icons and often kiss them or kneel before them. Also in visits and birthdays or celebrations of saints, they sing the praise in front of the icon of the holy figure venerated.⁽⁴⁾ Icons were also venerated by hanging curtains on them, or enclosing them with wooden doors, frames and covers. Tiny pieces of cloth are attached to icons of saints seeking services such as healing. Coptic homes, businesses and vehicles usually have some figure of holy entities, but they should be differentiated from the main icons which are consecrated and are usually in churches.

Order of Icons on an Iconostasis:

The icons are placed in a certain order on the iconostasis in the Coptic Church. The scenes are in the following order:

First:

- . Christ holding the Holy Bible and on it is written "I am the Good Shepheard."
- . John the Baptist, the Greatest Women Bore
- . Saint to whom the church is dedicated
- . Saints and martyrs and events from the Old and New Testament

Second: Left of the person entering the sanctuary

- . The Virgin as the Queen on the King's right
- . The Annunciation
- . Archangel Michael

(1) N.H. BAYNES, The Icons Before Iconoclasm, *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Apr. 1951), p. 101.

(2) Z. SKALOVA, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, p. 33-4.

(3) Z. SKALOVA, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, p. 34. Miraculous icons are known in other Christian churches. There were reports of a miraculous image of the Virgin at Lydda. That church was built by a leper cured from leprosy by St Peter. Ainea who was cured built a church dedicated to the Virgin. The image of the Virgin appeared miraculously to settle a dispute between the Jews and the disciples where they took the church after the Jews had claimed it. Since then they reported many miracles such as curing the sick and driving out the devils. In Alexandria though, there was a more powerful icon of the Virgin in the courtyard of the Great Church. Apparently the Virgin appeared with two eunuchs at the site of the icon and they held a prefect of the city who customarily mocked the Virgin's icon, while she tore him apart at his limbs. R. CORMACK, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (Hampshire: BAS Printers Limited, 1985), p. 126-128.

(4) Z. SKALOVA, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, p. 36.

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- . St Mark the Evangelist
- . Saints and martyrs and events from the Old and New Testament

Third: Above the Royal Door

- . Peter the Prophet to the right of the Christ
- . John the Prophet to the left of Christ
- . Jacob Son of Halavi
- . Thaddaeus the Prophet
- . Matthias who replaced Judas the Iscariot
- . Matthew the Prophet

Above there is a picture of the Last Supper. In the Coptic Church, only 11 apostles are shown since Judas did not attend the Last Dinner.

In Byzantium, the iconostasis consisted of two rows of icons. On the lower range there were large icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of the church and the Archangel Michael. The icons in both types of churches tend to follow the same order. On the upper register there are icons of the great feasts of the church and an extended Deesis which is traditionally an icon representing Christ Pantocrator with the book and offering blessing, while the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist and sometimes others are standing and looking up to him. In most cases, Christ enthroned is flanked by the icons of the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist. In Russia the iconostasis is made of five rows of really high carved wood.⁽¹⁾

The Coptic Museum in Old Cairo has quite a number of icons from Egypt and other parts of the Christian world. Most of the records show that there are around 200 icons in the Museum, but that most of these were not produced in Egypt. The Coptic icons in the Museum are around 70 pieces which constitute around 40% of the collection.⁽²⁾ Some are from the Greek islands, the Holy Land, Ethiopia and some areas of Europe, in addition to 15 Proskyneterua⁽³⁾ from the Holy Land, four icons from the 17th and 18th century Creto-Venetian Workshops, and pieces from the Balkans in addition to six pieces from Russia.⁽⁴⁾

The oldest pieces in the collection are eight icons which range between the 5th and 7th century. The dry Egyptian climate helps preserve the wood of the icons. The most important part of the collection is a group of less than 80 Coptic icons which all date

(1) G. GALAVARIS, *The Icon of the Life of the Church: Doctrine, Liturgy, Devotion, Iconography of Religions*, ed. By P. VAN BAARAN, fascicle 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), p. 5.

(2) In Arabic: M. IMMERZEEL, *The Collection of Icons kept at the Coptic Museum, Essays on Coptic Art and Culture*, published by the project: Egyptian-Netherlands Cooperation for Coptic Art Preservation (ANCCAP) (Leiden, 1994), p. 2.

(3) Greek *προσκυνητάριον* (from: *προσκύνησις*) meaning "oratory" or "place of worship", plural *proskynetaria*) is a monumental icon usually of Christ, the Virgin, or the patron saint of a church. It was normally placed on the piers separating the parts of a templon in a Byzantine church. They were usually made of mosaic or fresco in a marble frame. Proskynetaria of patron saints were often in the narthex or on the nave walls.

(4) P. VAN MOORSEL and M. IMMERZEEL, *A Short Introduction into the Collection of Icons in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo*, in: P.P.V. VAN MOORSEL, ed., *Called to Egypt: Collected Studies on Painting in Christian Egypt*, Publication of the "De Goeje Fund, no. XXX (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2000), p. 251-253.

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from around the 18th century or later. There is a considerable gap in icon production between the 14th and 17th centuries.⁽¹⁾ A number of churches were destroyed in the 15th and 16th centuries as recorded in the chronicles of the Mamluke period (1250-1517).⁽²⁾ Despite opinions that Egypt escaped the iconoclasm, it appears that icons may have been destroyed during this period, especially after the Council of 754.⁽³⁾ This period during the 18th century witnessed an amazing increase in the production of icons in Egypt. This may be due to the fact that it became fashionable for *archons* or Coptic nobles, to act as artistic patrons and support or commission the production of icons and murals in churches and monasteries.⁽⁴⁾ There were also numerous reasons why the economy of the Christian community was at a good level during the 18th century. In addition to Ibrahim al Nasikh and Yuhanna al Armani al Qudsi, many icon artists were very influenced by the style of those two artists.

The German Dominican monk Vansleb visited Egypt at the end of the 17th century.⁽⁵⁾ He wrote two books and mentioned that the preparation of the chrism or Myron, meaning the holy oil used in baptism and Coptic Church rituals, was done by adding burnt icons to the oil to increase the holiness. This information is doubtful though and has not been proved and a written preparation recipe for the chrism in 1703, does not mention any such ingredient as burnt icons.⁽⁶⁾ However, we are sure of the fact that icons in the Coptic Church are anointed with the Myron oil which is the same oil used for baptism. They are also placed on the iconostasis facing west since the sanctuaries are placed in the east. Icons also play a major role in the Coptic Church during certain festivals and rituals such as the fifty days where people walk around the icon of the resurrection, also the Great Friday, Holy Sunday and the Feast of the Cross where certain prayers and hymns are said before certain icons.⁽⁷⁾

Halos:

The main theme in the icons is that most of the figures in them have a round halo surrounding their heads. It is usually represented in yellow or gold, although the colour

(1) Other references indicate a gap in icons in Egypt between the 7th and the 18th century L. LANGEN, *La Peinture d'Icones en Égypte*, *Le Monde Copte* 18 (1990), p. 13.

(2) M. GUIRGUIS, translated from the Arabic by A. ELBENDARY, *An Armenian Artist in Ottoman Egypt: Yuhanna al-Armani and His Coptic Icons* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), p. 18.

(3) R. CORMACK, *Writing in Gold* (1985), p. 109.

(4) L. LANGEN, *La Peinture d'Icones en Égypte*, *Le Monde Copte* 18 (1990), p. 18.

(5) J.M. VANSLEB was a German theologian who had converted to Catholicism and became a Dominican monk. He had been sent by king Louis XIV of France in 1671 to report on the state of the churches and monasteries in Egypt. He said he saw an inscription on the walls of the Hanging Church in Old Cairo by Islamic General Amr Ibn al-As asking the Moslem people to treat the church with respect. He also spoke about the consecration of icons and how important they were to the Coptic church. There is also a report about an icon of Archangel Michael he saw in a church in Alexandria which was said to be made by Luke the Prophet himself. In Arabic: Icons, by G. DAWOUD, *Week of Coptic Art, First Coptic Week, Church of the Virgin in Rod el Farag* (Cairo, 1991), p. 15.

جرجس داوود، أسبوع الفن القبطي، أسبوع القبطيات الأول، كنيسة العذراء بروص الفرج (القاهرة: ١٩٩١)، ص. ١٥.

(6) M. GUIRGUIS, *An Armenian Artist*, 2008, p. 19.

(7) M. SHAFIK, ed., *The Coptic Icons in St Mina Monastery in Fum al-Khalig Cairo* (Cairo: The Church of St Mina, Fum al Khalig), p. 163, (p. 9 in Arabic section).

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varies and can be shown in darker colour. The edge of the halo may have double red lines or other darker colours if the background is yellow or gold.⁽¹⁾ Coptic icons differ slightly from the ones in St Catherine's Monastery in that the latter show intricate floral or plant designs during some periods, and sometimes have a silver colour instead of gold. However, many icons in both the Coptic and Greek Orthodox tradition show a red cross inside the halo surrounding the head of Christ.

Colour Symbolism in Icons:

On the issue of colours, it must be noted that certain colours are viewed as very important indeed. The colour green which was venerated by the ancient Egyptians for example, is never used in the clothes of saints or other holy figures. According to the Bible it is the colour of evil, and as such, evil beings such as the dragon slain by St George, are often painted in green. Christ is represented wearing the colour blue on the outside, and white on the inside. These colours are also worn by the Virgin as she wears white on the inside and blue (often with three stars; one on her head and one on each of her shoulders), on the outside. The blue is celestial and represents the sky and is viewed as a colour related to white as well, since the water often reflects the blue of the sky, whereas the white represents purity and holiness. Christ and the Virgin are also shown wearing robes in red and blue robes. Blue is also mentioned in texts from the Bible, such as Exodus 24:10:

And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

Also in Ezekiel 28:13:

Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

Angels are also often shown wearing white since they represent light and purity as well. On this particular note, the Bible says in the Transfiguration incident:

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them (Mark 9: 2, 3).

In Matthew the Bible says:

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (Matthew 17:2).

(1) The halo or aura, appeared from around the mid 4th century and at first was just for Christ. It is usually round or oval. In some of the Western icons, square halos are depicted, probably to signify that the saint represented was still alive. This was discussed by Elizabeth Boleman in the Ninth International Congress of Coptologists which took place in Cairo in 2008. See also: In Arabic: A. AWAD, The Origins of the Halo in Coptic art archaeologically and artistically, *Bulletin of the Institute of Coptic Studies*, vol. VIII (2009), p. 118.

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Christ is also compared to the light on more than one occasion. He himself said “I am the light of the world (in Jo 8:12)

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12).

That is also probably why the Christians believe that the colour white symbolizes purity and truth. White is for the light and the divine the clarity and unblemished heart. It is the colour of holiness and purity.

Gold was often used by the Pharaonic artists as gold leaf or gold paint since it reflected the sunlight. A lot of Coptic icons have plenty of gold, also because as a precious metal it was used as an act of piety. Gold is also positively viewed in the New Testament and is compared to light and divinity.⁽¹⁾ Byzantine icons also have gold hues and backgrounds.

As for red, it represents theology as well as bloodshed. Red is also strongly associated with Christ. It is the colour of his blood. His stability and firmness is also red. In the meeting tent, blood was sprinkled on its walls and altars with the idea that the one who presents the sacrifice shall obtain the white life of purity. Since Christ is also associated with royalty and is viewed as the ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven, red was also a colour associated with monarchy. However, the colour red is also associated with sin. Perhaps then it is used to remind mankind that the blood of Christ (red) freed them from sin. Red is also the colour of fire, lust, anger. Some of the texts which mention red are:

In the Song of Solomon 5:10, ‘My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand.’

Isaiah 1:18:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Matthew 27: 28:

Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head.

In Genesis 25:25, the sinful Esau came out of his mother’s womb red:

The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau.⁽²⁾

An icon artist at the Institute of Coptic studies said that the icon painter may fast, recite certain prayers while working on icons, use only natural substances such as real wood, natural colours such as the ancients used, gold sheet, gelatin strips and other material. She also said that the artists start with dark colours and rework them into white

(1) Z. SKALOVA, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, p. 76.

(2) In Arabic: E.N. ELIAS, *Colours in Coptic Art (al-Alwan fi al-Fann al-Qibti)*, *Institute of Coptic Studies (ICS)* 6 (2007), p. 120.; Also in Arabic: Pope SHENOUDA III, *My Beloved is White and Red*, *Watani* 2 (March 10, 2002), p. ?

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colours on the icon to symbolize the move of the faithful from the dark into the light of knowledge.

Icons in the Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai:

St Catherine's is the oldest continuously operating monastery today.⁽¹⁾ Around 330 AD Empress Helen mother of Emperor Constantine who had issued the famous Edict in 313 ending the persecution of Christians, ordered the construction of a sanctuary around the place where tradition said that Moses had seen the burning bush.⁽²⁾ A group of monks had pleaded with the Empress since 324 to establish something to mark this holy spot. Around two centuries later in 527 AD, Emperor Justinian established the Monastery and enlarged the walls and built a massive structure. It was originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Burning Bush. The building inscriptions indicate that the church was finished between 548 and 565 or 557. St Catherine lived in Alexandria and was tortured then beheaded by Emperor Maximian Maxentius. Her body was carried by angels to the top of one of the hills of Mt. Sinai where the monks found it in the 7th century. Since her body was moved to the monastery she became its patron saint. By the end of the 10th century, St Catherine was linked to Mount Sinia by the Byzantine hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes.⁽³⁾ Due to its isolation and the massive walls around it, the monastery has managed to survive the iconoclasm or attack on the icons around the 8th and 9th centuries AD.⁽⁴⁾ The movement was strongly opposed by members of the clergy and devout Christians, as well as by the icon makers of Ephesus who rose to defend their livelihood. One of the most famous opposition leaders was John of Damascus who was one of the strongest opposers to the ideas of Leo III. He

(1) R.S. NELSON and K.M. COLLINS, ed., *Icons from Sinai* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), p. xi.

(2) C. ROSSI, *The Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), cover flap and p. 44.

(3) Y. PIATNITSKY, Sinai Byzantium and Russia, in: Y. PIATNITSKY, O. BADDELEY et. al., eds. *Sinai Byzantium Russia: Orthodox Art from the Sixth to the Twentieth Century* (The Saint Catherine Foundation and the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2000), p. 19.

(4) In the 6th century there were many references to icons and how they hung in churches and houses, and were even carried during travel for protection. Some icons were said to be produced by divine powers. Two factions emerged as a result of the increased importance of icons: The "iconoclasts" who were against this belief, and the "iconodules" who were the believers or advocates. In the 8th century a movement emerged which started to destroy icons since they felt people were putting too much importance on them and almost worshipping them. This movement commenced around 720 AD and ended in 843 AD by a formal ecumenical council in Constantinople which restored the veneration of the holy images, but after it accentuated the rift between the Eastern and Western parts of the empire and finally ended with the separation of the Church of Rome from Byzantium. It is celebrated in the Orthodox world in the first Sunday in Lent, and took place on March 11, 843 AD. This was mostly carried out by Emperor Leo III who issued an edict in 726 for the destruction of icons. The two main periods of icon destruction took place between 726-787 and 815-843 (A.S. ATIYA, ed., *The Coptic Encyclopedia* IV (New York, Toronto, Oxford and Sydney: Macmillan, 1991), p. 1277). Other main figures who supported the destruction were the Emperor Constantine V and his son Leo IV. Constantine V also added to the destruction of icons an attack on monks who were persecuted mercilessly during his reign. He also wanted to replace the sacred figures with imperial art and figures from the palace. Many people believe this attack on images was influenced by Islamic ideas since Islam is against human and animal representation in general. Unfortunately the movement resulted in the destruction of a large number of icons. There was also a period of upheaval between the 11th and 14th centuries with the Crusaders, the Tartars and the Mongols attacking the East.

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was said to have been a Greek who spoke Arabic and lived in Damascus. Exalted opposers were the Patriarch of Constantinople Germanus, the Pope of Rome Gregory II, then Gregory III took a very firm stand against those opposed to icons.⁽¹⁾ We should also look at the beginning of this movement to understand the reasons behind it. Constantinople had a number of relics of the Virgin such as a robe, a girdle and a cloth where Christ is said to have hung from her as an infant. Remains of her milk are said to be on that cloth and the robe is said to be in a miraculous state of preservation.⁽²⁾ An increase in the importance of the Virgin in Constantinople continued to rise throughout the 7th century. Icons and images of all sorts of mediums including ivory, ebony, metal as well as wood, increased in importance, together with the importance of relics of holy figures and saints. From the early 10th century, icons in St Catherine seem to indicate the return of the influence of the capital Constantinople in terms of style including proportions.⁽³⁾ After a Council in Constantinople in 1575, it was decided that the monastery would be part of the patriarchate of Jerusalem where the archbishop/abbot of St Catherine had to be invested by the patriarch of Jerusalem.⁽⁴⁾ The Moslems gave the Monastery special status as well and offered protection.

The Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai has some of the oldest icons in the world, and certainly some of the oldest icons in Egypt. It has over 2000 icons that span from the 6th to the 19th century. The early encaustic icons from the 6th and 7th centuries are quite rare and cannot be found in many places. This technique employs wax and vegetable pigments mixed at high temperatures and spread on wood. The encaustic technique was used from early antiquity and was used until the end of the 7th century. It was replaced by the secco or tempera technique.⁽⁵⁾ The technique used in the Fayoum portraits had a

(1) In Arabic: H.M. RABIE, *Studies in the History of the Byzantine State*, ch. 3, Age of Opposing Icon Worship (717-867) (Cairo: Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiyya, 1983), p. 113.

(2) The robe was removed to Saint Sophia for safe keeping and many emperors carried at least icons of the holy figures on their campaigns such as Heraclios around 610. See: Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (London: George Philip, 1985), p. 159.

(3) K. WEITZMANN, *Loca Sancta* and the representational art of Palestine, in: *Studies in the Arts at Sinai: Essays by Kurt W. Weitzmann* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 52.

(4) Y. PIATNITSKY, *Sinai Byzantium and Russia* (2000), p. 20.

(5) A. PALIOURAS, *The Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai* (Sinai: St Catherine's Monastery at Sinai, 1985), p. 18-20. The famous encaustic icons which use the system of the Fayoum mummy portraits, are St Peter with three medallions representing the Virgin and Son or the Emperor and Empress, and possibly St John the Evangelist (0.52x0.39 m.), The Virgin and Child enthroned between saints and angels (0.79x0.49 m.), Christ Pantocrator wearing a tunic or chiton and holding a thick bejeweled Gospel book in his left hand while offering blessing with his right hand (0.85x0.45 m.), The Virgin Paraklesis badly destroyed, shows the Virgin in a Hodgetria pose with her hand pointing to Christ, possibly part of a diptych (0.65-0.40 m.), Christ Pantocrator (0.35x0.21 m.), The Ascension showing the Virgin with the apostles, around the 6th century, Christ Emanuel wearing a chiton and himation or the three versions or manifestations of Christ, which is the incarnate logos of God (0.76x0.53 m.), Christ of the Ancient of Days in eternity with a white hair and beard. There is also the famous icon of the three youths in the fiery furnace (called Hanania, Azariah and Mishael—they are shown wearing Persian costumes here and are shown in the furnace amidst red flames with their heads surrounded by halos (0.35x0.50 m.). A. PALIOURAS, *The Monastery of St Catherine* (1985), p. 21-22.

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basis of animal glue or wax and the paint was applied by a spatula.⁽¹⁾ Icons of monastic Eastern art of the 7th-9th century came from local workshops in the East, particularly Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Cappadocia. They display folk art and are famous for their realism. One of the most famous icons in this group is one showing the Crucifixion and Christ with closed eyes, clad in a long purple colobium. The icons from the 9th to the 12th centuries are important since they show how iconoclasm did not stop the production of icons altogether. They are also characterized by a return to the classical art forms and a move towards miniatures.⁽²⁾ The Middle East suffered from the Crusades from the 11th to the 13th centuries. However, it did result in a number of icons in the Monastery being dedicated to or by Crusaders.⁽³⁾ Some of them follow the style of the artist's homeland altogether, while others show a Byzantine influence since it was after the iconoclasm.⁽⁴⁾ Icons from the 11th and 12th centuries include a group known as the Comnenian age icons. This is largely related to the tradition of the icons in the Macedonian school with its classicist tendencies, the provincial character of icons or monastic inspiration. Well known examples are the Virgin enthroned surrounded by the Prophets and the scenes from the Dodecaorton and the Crucifixion with a frame containing busts of saints. A group of icons on iconostasis epistyles are also famous in St Catherine's. Most of them date between the 11th and 14th centuries. The most famous example of these is composed of eleven scenes from the life of St Eustratios and is 2.75 m. in length. The scenes are those from the life of the Virgin and miracles of saints. The workmanship of this group is of a very high artistic standard and reflects a great tradition of icon painting. Another group of icons in the Monastery is known as the Menologia icons. Those depict the saints honored on each day of the ecclesiastical year. They are divided into several kinds: Twelve large icons showing the saints of each month in full length portraits, two large icons in diptych form showing all the saints of the ecclesiastical year, a four-wing icon and twenty wing icons of saints and martyrs, portrayed in successive rows. The Menologias have some double inscriptions in Greek and Iberian thus reflecting a relationship with the Church of Georgia. They also display an influence of miniature illustrations in manuscripts. A large group has icons dated from the 12th to the 15th centuries. Those were related to Sinai and the Monastery and are often called Sinaitic icons. They have depictions of personalities associated with the monastery such as monks, abbots, patriarchs and saints. They must have been painted in the Monastery itself and in most cases the skill depended on the skill of the person executing the icon. They also include a representation of the dedicating monk himself in the course of leaning, praying or making proskynesis before a saint. They are important in tracing the people associated with the monastery and the service within. A group of icons from the 13th to 15th centuries are known as the icons from the age of the Palaeologi or Palaeologan. They showed influences of work from Southern Italy and the islands of the Aegean sea which were under the rule of Venice. There is a particularly famous

(1) E. DOXIADIS, The Fayoum Portraits: 'They are Not Art, They Are "Truth," ' in: *Living Images: Egyptian Funerary Portraits in the Petrie Museum*, ed. J. Pictor et. al. (London, University College, 2007), p. 146-147.

(2) A. PALIOURAS, *The Monastery of St Catherine* (1985), p. 23-24.

(3) Y. PIATNITSKY, *Sinai Byzantium and Russia* (2000), p. 20.

(4) K. WEITZMANN, Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom, in: *Studies in the Arts at Sinai: Essays by Kurt Weitzmann, Iconography of Religions, fascicle 8*, ed. By P. Van Baaran, Institute of Religious Iconography (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 326.

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double sided icon depicting Sts. Sergius and Bacchus on horseback on one side, and the Virgin Hodgetria on the next side (13th century). The Great Deesis with its full length saints belongs to this group of icons. Several icons after the 14th century show a Cretan influence since there were ongoing relations between the Monastery and Crete at that time. This group contains icons by some of the most famous artists in the Cretan school of icons and has many examples of fine post Byzantine icon painting. Some of the artists include Michael Damaskeonos, Georgios Klontzas, Emmanuel Lampardos, Victor the Cretan, Angelos the Cretan and Ioannes Kornaros.⁽¹⁾ The Monastery honours 170 saints in addition to St Catherine.

Kurt Weitzmann who conducted studies on the icons in the St Catherine Monastery in Sinai between 1956 and 1965, counted around 2048 icons from all periods in the Monastery.⁽²⁾ According to Weitzmann there appears to be a distinct division of the icons in the monastery. The icons from around the 6th to the 12th centuries, are supposed to be unique. Icons from the 7th and 8th centuries in the Monastery seem to have been from areas already dominated by the Moslems.⁽³⁾ Icons of the 13th century are influenced by the Crusades. Starting the 14th and 15th centuries the icons at Sinai lose their uniqueness and some are not of a high artistic standard. The so-called Cretan icons in Sinai are mostly from the late 15th to the 18th century. A number of those later icons are signed and dated. This enriches our knowledge of the art of the period. A number of Sinai icons were produced after 1453 when Constantinople fell.⁽⁴⁾ The last known icon painter at St Catherine's was Pater Pachomios, a monk who died in 1960.⁽⁵⁾

In the 1800s there was a great deal of interest in the icons of St Catherine. The Russian Archimandrite Porphyrius Uspensky took some early encaustic icons back to Russia between 1845-53.⁽⁶⁾ N. P. Kondakov who was a Russian searching for the origins of Christian art, took a great deal of interest in the icons and used them to understand influences on Byzantine art.⁽⁷⁾

Conclusion:

After examining Coptic and Greek Orthodox icons, and despite the differences in dates and styles, we may conclude the following:

Similarities:

First of all, both churches greatly revere icons and use them in services. Once an icon is consecrated it becomes an object to be used in the services and assumes an important role. The Eastern Church as opposed to the Western Church, puts a great deal of importance on the icons.

(1) A. PALIOURAS, *The Monastery of St Catherine* (1985), p. 23-26.

(2) R. CORMACK, *Sinai* (2000), p. 40.

(3) K. WEITZMANN, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons, volume one: from the sixth to the tenth century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 5.

(4) K. WEITZMANN, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine* (1976), p. 3.

(5) K. WEITZMANN, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine* (1976), p. 4.

(6) K. WEITZMANN, Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai, *The Art Bulletin* 45, no. 3 (Sep., 1963), p. 179.

(7) Z. SKALOVA, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, p. 93.

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Icon painters in both churches started off being holy people or members of the clergy. Before and during painting, the artist should be pure, fasting and praying all the time. In many cases, as an act of humility, the artists did not sign their names thus making it more difficult in several cases to date the icon.

Both churches consecrate the icons with holy oil and prayers. The icons as well as the murals, have to be consecrated by a major religious figure such as the archbishop or patriarch. The Copts conducted consecration since at least the 14th century as prayer books indicate. The Greek Church did not have anything to indicate that before the 16th century according to historian G. Passarelli, so it appears the Greek Orthodox Church took that ritual from the Coptic Church.⁽¹⁾

Both churches tend to use gold sheet a lot in the background of the icons. Gold is considered the color of infinity as well as purity, and is reminiscent of the brightness of the sun and the unchanging nature of gold that continues to shine throughout time. It also represents the light, and Christ is considered the light of the world having said “I am the light of the world” (John 1.9).⁽²⁾

Both churches have an iconostasis or screen carrying icons separating the nave of the church from the sanctuaries. In both churches, the icons on the screen tend to follow a specific order.

Both churches can take out the icons and put them in a more visible part of the church on a moveable iconostasis. They are usually taken out on special occasions. Icons may also be carried around in processions outside the church on certain festivals.

Icons of the baptism of Christ in both churches, tend to follow what is said in the Bible and appear to be quite similar. Christ is often shown wearing little or no clothes, the head is above the water while the body is submerged in water. Often one or more angels are shown on one side usually the right, while John the Baptist is on the other side. Fish are sometimes added to the scene in both icon types.

Differences:

The Copts tend to touch the icons more than the Greek Orthodox. They also do a lot more full prostrations like the Muslim *sojood*.⁽³⁾ Both these acts have their roots in the ancient Egyptian tradition where good energy was thought to be transmitted by touch, and where full prostration was practiced. In addition, Islam influenced the view on icons

(1) U. ZANETTI, La Prière Copte de Consécration d'une Icône, *Le MondeCopte* 19 (1991), p. 99. The oldest version of the prayers was that of Raphael Tukhi in 1762, p. 93; N. VAN DOORN, La Vénération des Icônes chez les Coptes: Aspects Sociologiques, *Le MondeCopte* 19 (1991), p. 113-4. VAN DOORN emphasizes the fact that an icon becomes an object used in ritual (*objet du culte*) after it is consecrated by a religious figure with the proper rituals, particularly holy Myron oil.

(2) A. WHARTON, Icon, Idol, Totem and Fetish, in: *Icon and Word: The Power of Images of Byzantium: Studies presented to Robin Cormack, ed., by Anthony Eastmond and Liz James* (Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), p. 6.

(3) In Genesis 47:31, when Jacob was about to die, Joseph leaned and kissed the top of his staff: “Swear to me,” he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.” This act may not be construed as veneration for the staff, but for his father whose staff it was. It was done to show both respect and love. *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons Written in Arabic by Theodore Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Harrān (755-830 AD)*, translated to English by: S.H. Griffith (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), p. 44.

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in the region.⁽¹⁾ The Jews were known to prostrate themselves before the rock in Jerusalem and kiss it (Maymar, Head 17:7-not the Bible).⁽²⁾

Coptic icons tend to stick more to the exact words of the Bible. So if it says the Queen was to the right of the king, the Virgin is always shown on the right side of Christ. There are examples of icons from the Monastery of St Catherine's where this is not observed.⁽³⁾ On the other hand, there is an opinion that Greek icons adhere more to tradition than Coptic icons.⁽⁴⁾ It is safe to say that although both churches tend to be quite serious about accuracy and following the Bible, but artists cannot be kept altogether from artistic innovations.

(1) A. SOUREN, MELIKIAN-CHIRVANI, L'Islam, le Verbe et l'Image, in: F. BOESPFLUG and N. LOSSKY, ed., *Nicee II, 787-1987* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987), p. 90-91. In the Holy Quran (al-Israa, 17:61: "And [mention] when We said to the angles, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except for Iblees. He said, "Should I prostrate to one You created from clay?") Allah ordered the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam whom He created. There is no way that he wanted them to worship Adam, but rather respect God's achievement. There is an ancient tradition where good energy or the notion of *baraka* بركة is believed to be transmitted by touch. This could also explain where certain statues of deified humans in ancient Egypt such as Amenhotep Son of Hapu, have a smooth knee from being touched for years by people. The Egyptian Moslems and Christians also touch the hems of the clothes of priests and sheikhs and the Moslems touch the metal surrounding the shrines of saints to be imbued with the good energy. They also both write requests to saints of both faiths. Islam in general does not approve of pictures and images, although Allah Himself has a name in the Quran which is *al-Musawwir* or the painter, or the one who gives form. (Holy Quran lix.24: He is God the Creator the Maker the Fashioner). In the Traditions, Sayings or *Hadith* of the Prophet Mohamed, it says that: "The angels will not enter a house in which there is a picture or a dog." This was expressed to Prophet Mohamed by Archangel Gabriel. Arnold tries to delve into the thought behind the opposition to drawings and statuary in Islam. He understands they were opposed in certain instances so as not to distract from prayers (example when the Prophet asked his wife Aisha to remove a carpet with woven figures from a door, but was not opposed to it being made into cushion covers). Despite what is said, there is quite a multitude of Islamic art and architecture where humans and animals are depicted. The golden period for this is probably between the 15th and 16th century in Iran. Also: D.T. RICE, *Islamic Painting: A Survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), p. xv.

(2) In Arabic: N.Y. SAWARSIN, Theodorus Abu Qurrah and his Treatise (or Essay) on the Veneration of the Icons, Unpublished Masters Thesis in Theological Studies under the supervision of Dr. Mark Swanson, Faculty of Religious Studies, Sakakini (Cairo, 1999), p. 27-28. David ordered his people to prostrate themselves in the site where the Lord's feet were (Psalms 99:5: "Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy). They also worshipped towards the pillar of cloud (Exodus 33:10: "Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent") while knowing that God was not inside it or it did not represent God.

(3) One clear example where the Virgin is not on the right of Christ is a mosaic in St Catherine from the late 12th and early 13th century. Made of glass and ceramic, 34x23 cm, artist anonymous. C. ROSSI, *The Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, p. 138-140.

(4) R. HABIB, *The Coptic Icons* (Cairo: Mahabba Bookshop, 1979), p. 7.

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Whereas the Coptic icons depend more on making the figures appear peaceful and avoid scenes of violence, some Byzantine⁽¹⁾ and Western art influences are unlike that and tend to emphasize the suffering and sadness of Christ and the martyrs.⁽²⁾

The Copts adhered to the traditions of their ancestors the ancient Egyptians in terms of technique of production. They used wood covered with gypsum and/or gold sheet. They also used encaustic and tempera and the earliest icons resembled the Fayoum mummy portraits in style as well as production material.⁽³⁾ But apart from the encaustic influence and the poses of the Fayoum mummy portraits, most books on icons tend to overlook the Egyptian influence and speak instead of Asian, Hellenistic, Persian and other Eastern influences.⁽⁴⁾

The halos in Coptic icons tend to be mostly gold, or are just represented with an outer rim. The rim in both churches could be black or white, or red or a combination of colours and designs, or silver with floral designs. Towards the 18th century, another form appeared which had two outer circles of red decorations surrounding the golden halo. As for icons from St Catherine's monastery and other Greek churches, they show a great deal of variety. In some cases there are no halos at all, or they are also in gold with an outer rim of dark red or black. Christ in particular tends to have a cross inside his halo, often made of red lines. In rare cases, other colors such as white and heavily decorated silver are also used in the halos of the Greek Orthodox Church.

In Coptic icons, Christ is often identified in Coptic writing with the letters short for Jesus Christ $\text{ic } \bar{\chi}\rho$. This may also be found in some icons in Greek churches in Egypt.

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- (1) The issue of what comprises Byzantine art was discussed by Rice in some detail. There is no real agreement whether it should encompass items produced after the 6th or just the 9th century (Greek and Russian scholars only accept material produced after the 9th century), and whether it should include work done only in Byzantium and its surrounding areas, or should extend to other areas such as Armenia. D.T. RICE, *Byzantine Art* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p. 13.
- (2) K. WEITZMANN, Thirteenth Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai, *The Art Bulletin* 45, no. 3 (Sep. 1963), p. 188.
- (3) The idea of painting a likeness of a person on a wooden sheet arose in Egypt in the Hellenistic period when the Fayoum mummy portraits were produced. No one described the true nature of Coptic art more than the late Prof. Mourad Kamel of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. In Arabic: M. KAMEL, *The Egyptian Civilization in the Coptic Period* (Cairo: Dar al-'Alam al-'Arabi, 1977), p. 132-136. ص. ١٣٢-١٣٦. He مراد كامل، *حضارة مصر في العصر القبطي* (القاهرة: مطبعة دار العالم العربي، ١٩٧٩)، p. 132-136. It was no longer a royal art like many of the Pharaonic objects that reached us. It was strongly influenced by the ancient Egyptian style particularly the further south we go, in addition to drawing on different artistic style such as the art of the Greeks and the Romans, Syrian art and the art of other neighbouring nations. It was not an art of grandeur, royalty large scale productions. It was an art of the people, and most of them poor and deeply religious people at that. It is also much more than just the art with religious subjects, but included many themes of daily life and was used in all kinds of items for everyday use, not just for use in churches and monasteries.
- (4) R. TEMPLE, *Icons: A Search for Inner Meaning* (London: The Temple Gallery, 1982), p. 14-16, p. 82. In Syria and Egypt in the pre and early Christian era, wooden panels in single or triptych forms were made for local deities. Two frescoes from the second century from Karanis in Egypt may serve as an example. One has Haropcrates enthroned, and the other a deity between other deities. They are presently in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan. A cult devoted to the images of Christ and others started to spread from the second half of the 6th century, and it is probably one of the main reasons behind the iconoclastic movement.

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But more commonly in Greek churches, we find Christ icons with the alpha and omega letters signifying that Christ is the beginning and the end.

While the largest number of Coptic icons is from around the 18th century, most of the Greek Orthodox icons at St Catherine's are from around the 16th century, then they tend to be very rare.

Greek icons have a tendency to make icons from beaten gold, silver, or ivory in addition to wooden icons. Coptic icons tend to be mostly of wood and do not apply beaten gold and silver. The most they use is a thin film of gold to line the background of icons.

Most Coptic icons show the face from the front even if they show the figure in profile. Icons in St Catherine with their different influences, have three quarter views and other variations in the faces.

The clothing in the Coptic icons tends to be more concealing than the clothing in Greek icons in general.

In Coptic icons, Christ is usually depicted wearing an inner blue robe and an outer white robe. The Virgin is usually shown wearing an inner white robe and an outer robe in light blue. She also wears a blue dress with a red or crimson mantle. In Coptic icons the Virgin's outer robe is often decorated with three stars. In Byzantine icons, the Virgin is often shown wearing an inner white robe with an outer robe or mantle of crimson or red. In other cases she is shown wearing a purple robe instead of red.

Coptic icons tend to have more writing on them than other icons, probably something they inherited from their Egyptian ancestors who were in the habit of writing on walls, ceilings and even floors. As a general rule, Greek and Roman statues were also characterized by the comparative lack of inscriptions.

The places of icons in the churches may differ. Greek churches often have a *proskynetarion* which is a pulpit-like raised place in the church where important icons are placed. In other Greek churches such as the Greek Catholic church, they may have an icon holder resembling a wooden stand such as the stands used to give lectures. This is usually placed in the nave of the church and before the sanctuary and icons are placed upon it. In the Coptic church the icons are mostly placed on the walls.

Although many icon painters did not sign their names, the Egyptian tradition of writing more on antiquities made it easier to identify icon painters from the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Finally we may say that the icons in St Catherine's were influenced by Coptic icons in terms of artistic methods of production as well as consecration. However, both icon types definitely influenced one another as well, and the Byzantine style could be seen in both, although more so in the icons at St Catherine's.

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Dr. Mostafa SHALABY⁽¹⁾

(1) We would like to thank a number of people who helped in this research. Prof. Emad Nessim Elias, Prof. of Art at the Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo provided articles and other valuable information, his associate Ms. Amal Fomail, Demonstrator at the Institute who demonstrated the method of production and the materials used, Mr. Joseph the librarian at the Institute, Mr. Osama Mahgoub the

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Illustrations:



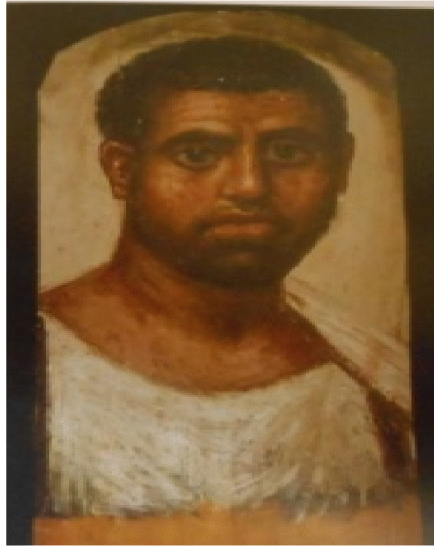
The above icon of Christ and the icon of the Virgin Mary enthroned and Christ the child with other figures (probably St Theodore and St Demetrius) with two angels behind them. They are both from the Monastery of St Catherine's in Sinai. They are the oldest icons we have since they are dated to the 6th century and are made using encaustic colours. The icon of Christ is the oldest known icon for Christ Pantocrator in the world. Christ Pantocrator Blessing 84x45.5 cm. Virgin and figures 70-49 cm.



St Peter the Apostle, encaustic on panel, 93.4x53.7x1.25 cm. Sts Sergius and Bacchus from St Catherine's, 6th century, encaustic and gold on panel, 28.4x42.5x6 cm, the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum of Arts, Kiev, Ukraine.

librarian at the American Research Center in Egypt, and Dr. Bassem Samir El Sharkawy. Father Rafik Greish at the Church of St Cyril in Korba, Heliopolis, and Father Gregorios of the Greek Orthodox Church of St George in Old Cairo, also provided useful information. Special thanks are due to the entire library staff of the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire (IFAO) for all their assistance, particularly M. Philippe Chevrant the Head Librarian.

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Fayoum portrait of a man, British Museum EA 74718. The large eyes, technique and materials used are reminiscent of the icon of Christ Pantocrator and others.



Coptic icons showing Christ and the Virgin wearing an inner blue robe and red cloak or mantle. Icon of Christ Enthroned Pantokrator surrounded by the Four Living Creatures, Coptic Museum no. 3362, icon dated to 1464 of the Martyrs, with Arabic writing. Icon of the Dormition of the Virgin from a larger icon from the Hanging Church in Old Cairo, by Ibrahim al Nasikh and Yuhanna al Armani, 18th century.

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Coptic Icon with the Queen sitting to the right of the king. Icon from St Catherine's not observing this order of seating. Also note different colours of robes in other icon whereas Coptic icons generally show Christ and the Virgin wearing white, blue and red or crimson robes with a strict order in terms of which is worn inside and which is worn on the outside in Coptic icons. The halo on Christ's head has a cross with red lines in the Coptic icon, and with blue and white lines in the St Catherine icon with an outer zigzag rim in white. Coptic icon is from the Coptic Church of St George, Old Cairo, painted in 1580 Coptic, 19th century by Anastasi al Rumi, apparently commissioned by Eryan Son of Yuhanna al Tawil. The icon from St Catherine's is a mosaic, glass and ceramic, 34x23 cm, late 12th early 13th century. Artist anonymous.



Gold is used frequently in both Coptic and Greek Orthodox icons. More writing in general on Coptic icons and other Egyptian antiquities. Above, Coptic icon of the Nativity scene, part of a larger icon, the Hanging Church, Old Cairo, by Ibrahim al Nasikh and Yuhanna al Armani, 18th century. Writing in Arabic and the Virgin is shown wearing an inner blue garment and an outer crimson robe with three stars—one on the head and two on the shoulders. The Heavenly Ladder of St John Climacus from St Catherine's Monastery, end of the 12th century. 41.1x29.5 cm.

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Two Coptic icons on the Baptism of Christ. The first from the Church of St Macarius in Old Cairo, the second from the Hanging Church in Old Cairo, painted by Ibrahim al Nasekh, 18th century. Icon of the Baptism of Christ from St Catherine's, tempera and gold on wood, 33.5x 23.2 cm, second half of the 13th century, the head of Christ standing in the river, is touched by a ray of light that the shape of the dove, symbol of the holy spirit. St. John the Baptist resting his right hand on Christ's head and looking upward. The icons on the baptism in the Coptic and Greek Orthodox tradition, are very similar with Christ submerged, surrounded by fish on both sides, John the Baptist usually on the left side, one or more angles on the right side, etc.



One of the unusual Coptic icons showing the Virgin not at the right of the Christ, but this position was possible while riding the donkey and avoided in scenes where the Virgin is seated. The Hanging Church, Old Cairo. Writing in Arabic and Coptic.

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Coptic icon of Archangel Michael with a distinct Egyptian influence which may be seen in the scales he is carrying which is reminiscent of the Judgement of the Dead of the god Osiris. He also holds a long staff in the form of a double cross. Icon from St Catherine with the Archangel in different attire, and with no scales or staff with double crosses. St Catherine's icon probably goes back to around the 12th century. As usual, the Coptic icon has more writing where it has the year 1188, and a text on it with a dedication inscription from a certain Fanous Abou Mikhail. Second St Catherine's icon is from around the 13th century and reflects different hair style and clothing.



St Mary with Child, Byzantine style in this icon originally Coptic Museum no. 870, now in Tanta Museum. There is a reference on it to a Mr. Victor G. Awadallah.