

Original article

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC STUDY OF ILLUSTRATIONS ON A BIBLE BOX PRESERVED IN VIRGIN MARY CHURCH IN HARET ZUWELLA: NEW PUBLISH*

Elnabarawy, R.¹, Abdelmoatey, A.¹. & Abdelaziz, N.^{2(*)}

¹Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Giza, Egypt

²PhD Student Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Giza, Egypt

*E-mail address: nourhan_adel91@hotmail.com

Article info.

Article history:

Received: 14-9-2023

Accepted: 24-3-2024

Doi: 10.21608/ejars.2024.396698

Keywords:

Coptic art

Coptic metalworks

Bisharah boxes

Church

Coptic painting

EJARS – Vol. 14 (2) – Dec. 2024: 283-292

Abstract:

The Bible boxes, which are called Bishara boxes, are considered one of the distinctive pieces that fall within the Coptic metal artifacts because of their artistic and religious reflection, as a copy of the Bible is kept inside them. Where the priest carries it during that, and it has always been characterized by repeated decorative themes throughout the era, it was concerned with scenes from the life of Christ such as the crucifixion or resurrection, and the appearance of Christ as a child with his mother, in addition to some writings from the Bible that were mentioned repeatedly. This piece, which is being studied and published for the first time, is unique in its decorative composition and the themes. It has an importance in Coptic metalwork particularly and during the f Muhammad Ali's dynasty (1220-1366 AH/1805-1952 AD.) in general. This paper provides a descriptive and analytical study of a model of those important artifacts. It is one of the few studies on artifacts with important Christian significance dated back to the modern age (14th century AH/20th century AD).

1. Introduction

Bishara box is an important tool for the ecclesiastical ritual [1]. The word "bisharah" is an Arabic translation of the Bible and is derived from the Latin word "gospel", which is assigned to the Bible [2]. It is used for the cover of the Bible made of gold, silver, or other materials. It has inscriptions from the Bible and scenes of Christ, the Virgin (peace be upon them), and saints [3]. The bisharah is a manuscript in a wooden box covered from all sides with a completely closed metal cover made of silver or brass [1]. The artifact understudy is a small wooden box covered on all sides with a layer of metal with various high engrave and contains the bisharah. It was always placed above the altar and intended to store the sacred manuscript at a time when Bibles were rare; thus, they were placed in sealed boxes as sacred relics [1,2,4]. It was decorated with high relieved Coptic inscription, flowers, and crosses [1]. it is worth noting that the bisharah boxes have received attention in some researchers studies, for its decora-tions and texts contained on them, and their various styles [2, 5,6]. Although the masterpiece -the subject of the study- is published for the first time, and is distinguished by the appea-rance of some unique decorations on it, especially it is a metal masterpiece, it is possible to consider it as a continuation of a series of those studies.

2. Methodology

This study will depend on a descriptive and analytical methods to study and publish, for the first time, this Bisharah box. This artifact characteristics is highlighted comments in the margins. The study sheds light on the different decorative motives like floral, geometric, humans and inscriptions.

3. Description

- **Name:** Bible box (Bishara)
- **Materials:** Wood and silver
- **Manufacturing pattern:** Lamination and riveting.
- **Decoration pattern:** High relief and bas relief
- **Measurements:** 27 × 19.8×3.8 cm.
- **Period:** 1627 C/1911 AD/1329 AH. (The era of Pope Cyril V (1874-1927 AD).)
- **Bibliography:** Unpublished.

This artifact shows great skill and precision in harmonious and diverse decoration, as well as the ability to emphasize artistic details. It contains human, floral, geometric, architectural, and inscriptions motifs. The first side, fig. (1) has human, floral, and architectural decorations, as follows: The main scene shows the Virgin Mary cradling Christ (peace be upon them) as a child in a three-quarter position close to being obverse. Virgin Mary (peace be upon her) has a round

face, almond eyes, as the artist was interested in protruding the pupils of the eyes, glazed eyebrows, a relatively small straight nose, an ideal mouth, and a small hair strand. She is encircled by a double halo defined by two recessed lines. Virgin Mary appears dressed in traditional clothes with a long cloak and a hair veil. The artist mastered illustrating the clothing folds with recessed lines, resembling the circular water ripples. The Virgin Mary cradles her bare-chested child, Christ (peace be upon him), with a round face, almond eyes, glazed eyebrows, a straight pointed nose, a relatively small mouth, and a circular halo over the head. The Virgin Mary's head is topped on both sides by two winged angels, each with two wings cut short, a round head, almond eyes with protruding pupils looking to the left, and feathers in high relief. On both sides of the Virgin Mary, there are six-petalled flowers from branches with spear leaves. In the lower-left corner, there is a pot-like vase with decorations of parallel lines in high relief from which a seven-petal rosette emerges from a stem with branches, one of which ends with an almond leaf and the other ends with a three-petal rosette. This decorative scene is surrounded by two columns, one in each side. They are consisting of a base, a shaft, and a capital. The two bases are different. The base of the right column is decorated with an arcade, while the base of the left column has parabolic arches. In its capital there is a floral whorl consisting of a stem, from which deformed triangular leaves appear, surrounded by two high borders that separate them from the stem. The shaft consists of a prominent vertical line divided into two parts, separated by overlapping dashed lines forming a diamond shape, and ending with a prominent dotted line. The capital has geometric and floral motifs with two raised frames encompassing plant scrolls consisting of a stem from which acanthus leaves emerge, followed by an area decorated with rhombuses. Moreover, the capital ends with two raised frames encompassing plant scrolls similar to the previous. The columns are topped by brick (or baked brick) courses. The artist might intend that the scene was in the church^(a) [7]. On each side of the columns are two identical vases, shaped like pots. It has a tall oval body decorated with vertical lines, above which it has an undecorated area surrounded by two concave lines, followed by an area decorated in groups. Next to the triangle is the relief line. The vase ends in a conical neck that flares outward as it rises. From each vase emerges a stem containing various floral elements. From the vase on the right, a stem appears with two almond leaves, then a rose with five petals, and then a cup-shaped plant with three almond leaves on top., then his two leaves appear. The stem ends in a lotus shape. There is one trifoliate leaf at the bottom of the stem. In the vase on the left, a flower resembling a sunflower with a lance-shaped rosette emerges from the stem, above which is a group of other lance-shaped leaves ending in a triangular cup-shaped leaf, from which two lance-shaped. The leaves grow and end in three lanceolate leaves. The lobed leaf is attached to another lance-shaped leaf. That scene is framed above by a floral cartouche with inscriptions in the Coptic language could be read: $\tau\alpha\rho\chi\eta \mu\eta\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron$ and completed on another meter from below could be read: $\eta\upsilon\omega\eta\rho\iota \mu\phi\tau \eta\tau\epsilon \iota\eta\varsigma \pi\lambda\tau\epsilon$, i.e. (*In the beginning was the word* $\text{في البدء كان الكلمة}$). Below, there are

two cartouche. The upper cartouche has inscriptions in the Arabic Thuluth read (سنة الف وستمائة سبعة وعشرين للشهدا); which means “one thousand six hundred and twenty-seven year of the Calendar of Saints” encompassed by some simple leaves. All the previous decorations are framed by a raised frame consisting of a zigzag stem, from which short branches emerge and end in trifold leaves.



Figure (1) the 1st side of the box depicting *Virgin Mary* cradling Jesus Christ as a child

The second side of the box, fig. (2) is showing Christ's resurrection is similar to the previous scene, surrounded by his two-winged angels in short form with similar details to his two angels in the first photo. However, the core human element is different. Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) appears three-quarters from the front in the resurrection scene, with an oval face, almond-shaped eyes crowned with arched, frowning eyebrows, and long, pointed eyes. It has a nose, a relatively small mouth, and a well - A formed mustache and beard, shoulder-length hair, a halo around the head and chest, a naked body suggesting strength, and the body is covered only with a short apron. It is surprising that the artist depicts Jesus, despite his relative age, with a young, strong body and standing from the tomb. The artist made the tomb by stacking bricks that the artist had baked and putting a lid on the back. On each side of the column there is an identical vase in the form of a pot with a tall oval body decorated with vertical lines, one on each side, and above it two hollows. There is an undecorated space surrounded by dashed lines, followed by a decorated space. Add a relief line to the group of triangles. The vase ends in a conical neck that flares outward as it rises. From each vase emerges a stem containing various floral elements. From the vase on the right appears a stem with two almond leaves, then a rose with his five petals, and then a cup-shaped plant with three almond leaves on top of it. and then his two leaves appear. The stem ends in a lotus shape. There is one trifoliate leaf at the bottom of the stem. In the vase on the left, a flower resembling a sunflower with a lance-shaped rosette emerges from the stem, above which is a group of other lance-shaped leaves ending in a triangular cup-shaped leaf, from which two lance-shaped. The leaves grow and end in three lanceolate leaves. The lobed leaf is attached to another lance-shaped leaf. Christ holds a cross in his left hand and a sign of the crux immissa in his left, characterized by a longer lower arm and topped by another crux immissa, confirming the Christianity of the theme. Perhaps it took a rare shape. The circumference is decorated with clusters of stems bearing lan-

ceolate trifoliate leaves, connected by a rosette of six petals and a rosette of almond-shaped leaves, which may represent sunflowers.



Figure (2) the 2nd side of the box depicting *Virgin Mary* cradling *Jesus Christ* as a child

To the right of the right column, a vase takes the shape of a pot (similar to that of the first side), with an emerging stem, from which two lanceolate leaves, a sepal-shaped rosette, another lanceolate leaf and almond-shaped leaf emerge, as well as other almond-shaped leaves. On the other side, a stem emerges from which an open lotus and another curved lotus emerge. That scene is framed above by floral cartouche from above and below. One meter above the layout of the church has Coptic inscriptions could be read: ΠΕΡΨΩΗΡΙ ΜΦΤ. ΉΕΝ ΤΑ ΡΧΗ ΝΕ ΠΙΣΑΧΙ. The meaning is completed in a cartouche below in Coptic could be read: ΟΥΟΡ ΠΙΣΑΧΙ ΝΑΦΧΗ ΉΑΤΕΝ ΦΤ. The sentence means "and the Word was with God" *والكلمة كان عند الله*. This cartouche ends with four half-palmettes facing each other. Each two halves form a trifold leaf perforated in the middle. Below, there are two meters. The upper one has Arabic inscriptions in the Thuluth script and reads (في عهد قداسة البابا العظيم (الانبا كيرلس الخامس) *which means "In the era of His highness, the great Pope, Cyril V"*. The former details are surrounded by a frame of a zigzag branch, from which trifold leaves emerge. Rivets appear on the edges of the box. The sides of the box (pl.3) are completely undecorated, except for some inscriptions in the Thuluth script in bas-relief could be read as follows:

- **The right side:** A life-long endowment and eternal confinement for the cause of the Virgin Mary, in Haret Zuwella Awad, fig. (3-a)
- **The left side:** O Lord, who has fatigue in the realms of the heavens, O Lord, bestow mercy, fig. (3-b).



Figure (3) the two sides of the box

4. Results

According to the previous data, the following results were excluded: **1)** The study investigated a box that is being studied and published for the first time. **2)** It showed that the artist has mastered the embodiment of real religious painting, despite the complexity of working with metal materials. **3)** He utilized space, distributed decorative elements, considered anatomical proportions and emphasized details. He also demonstrated the artist's success in combining Arabic and Coptic scripts. **4)** This study showed great expressiveness of movement using the folds of clothing, flying angels, and images of the Resurrection of Christ. **5)** It emphasizes the rules of perspective with which the artist realizes the images of the Virgin Mary and the Child (peace be upon them) and the image of Christ, with the feet of Christ disappearing, as if in the tomb. **6)** It showed that the artist did not consider the relationship and proportion between the size of Christ and the size of the Resurrection scene, perhaps to emphasize the importance and holiness of the depicted figure. **7)** It also reflected a general realistic study of the anatomical details of Christ (peace be upon him). **8)** The artist was able to draw attention to the significance of the Resurrection scene through the angel looking at Christ (peace be upon him), **9)** The artist emphasizes observing the laws of symmetry. **10)** That is, the sacred figure is placed in the center, balanced on either side by angels, columns, and floral patterns. **11)** The artist's precision and efficiency in working with raw materials is emphasized, as seen in the marble columns and bricks of the tomb's depiction. **12)** The study also revealed the tripartite style, the most prominent style of Coptic art related to human decoration, and the almond-shaped eye design throughout the scenes of the relic paintings. **13)** The study confirmed that all decorations executed on the masterpiece are consistent with its nature.

5. Discussion

5.1. Materials

The artifact contains two raw materials, they are wood and silver.

5.1.1. Wood

It is one of the materials that decompose and perish due to several factors, such as weather and fire. Moreover, some types are not good, especially in Egypt, with some types of wood used only for simple works [8]. Therefore, the artist adopted some methods to preserve the wooden piece, such as lamination.

5.1.2. Silver^(b)

It is ranked second after gold in terms of importance and use. In nature, it is often found with lead, copper, and other metals. It takes the symbol (Ag) [9]. Silver is characterized by ductility and malleability, and copper (Cu) is added to it to improve hardness and reduce its melting point [10]. Silver has a beautiful bright white color, and its compounds are easily obtained from nature. In some civilizations, it was more important than gold. Noticeably, pure silver is not suitable for use and formation without mixing with copper. The ancients called it white gold because they might find some mines of gold close to silver [9].

5.2. Manufacturing and decoration methods

5.2.1. Lamination

it is the cladding of doors, cupboards, boxes, and other woodworks with sheets of metal. It spread in the early Mamluk era [11]. The manufacturer adopted this method to keep those woods. The sheets were probably silver or copper and were fixed by riveting or welding. In Coptic art, they were widely used in the Bible (bisharah) boxes [1].

5.2.2. Riveting

This is done by connecting the masterpiece parts with nails. The artist drills a hole of the same size and inserts a nail into the hole to join the two pieces together. Next, tap the protruding nail head and try to insert it into the artifact [1]. This method is commonly used for Bible boxes and is durable and inexpensive [10]. It is must be noted that The Gospels preserved in the bisharah boxes are not used for reading, as they are held tightly closed with nails or welded and are difficult to open, and their role is limited to the ceremonial aspect in relation to the Gospels [5].

5.2.3. High relief and bas relief

One of the most common ways to decorate metal products was to use pointed tools to create a specific decorative theme [12]. This is done by engraving the metal surface according to a pre-prepared form. The high relief is different from the main relief. Using relief carving, artists highlight decorative elements and carve around them so that they are elevated above the ground [13]. The groove is different from the depth of the panel relief. In the case of a bas-relief, the manufacturer cuts a groove around the peri-meter so that the details of the decoration can be seen [10].

5.3. Decorations

5.3.1. Human decorations

All human motifs are in three-quarters of the way in the front. They have round heads, prominent almond-shaped eyes, arched eyebrows, long pointed noses, and relatively small mouths, whereas Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) has a well-groomed beard and straight hair. Regarding clothing, the Virgin Mary's attire indicates a modest Arab environment, while Jesus Christ wears only an apron, indicating the Resurrection scene^(c) [13,14].

5.3.1.1. *Virgin Mary and the Child*, fig. (4)

The scene of the Virgin Mary cradling Christ as a child is frequent in Coptic art [15,16]. It represents the mother-son relationship, which triggers reassurance, kindness, and tenderness through motherhood [16,17]. It was inherited from the depiction of the goddess Isis with her son Horus. Virgin Mary takes care of her son Jesus Christ, who will grow up and brings salvation for humanity, like Horus, who was a symbol of the victory of good in ancient Egyptian art [14]. This scene is repeated on many Coptic artifacts, especially icons and niches [18-20], and is a common theme in most bisharah boxes with human decorations [5,6], but here she completes the traditional costume of the Virgin Mary, including a long-hooded abaya and a veil.



Figure (4) scene of the *Virgin Mary & Child*

5.3.1.2. *Resurrection of Jesus*^(d), fig. (5-a)

The artist always focuses on highlighting the greatness of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) through a huge stature and head [21] and adds details of strength, such as the bare chest. Although the scene of the Resurrection is a common scene on icons and manuscripts, it is rare on these types of artifacts, some technical details are different. However, we always notice the similarity of the character of Christ from the point of physical strength, appearance as a young man, and raises the banner of the cross, standing on a high position, reflects the grave. We find this on one of the boxes, fig. (5-b) kept in St. George's Church in Hessa Barma (Tanta Metropole) [5], and on another box, fig. (5-c) preserved in the same collection preserved in the *Church of the Virgin in Harat Zuwella*, dated to 13-14 century AH/19-20 century AD.

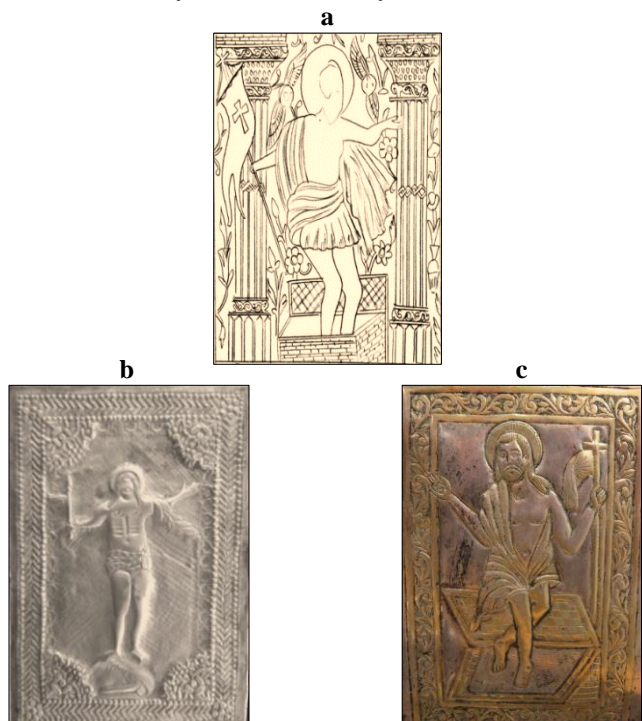


Figure (5) **a.** Resurrection of Jesus, **b.** the resurrection scene on Bishara box, St. Georges's Church in Barma, **c.** Bishara box, preserved in *The Virgin Churce in Haret Zewella* (published for the first time & taken by researcher)

5.3.1.3. *Flying angels*, fig. (6)

The artist carried them out on the artifact understudy in a simplified idiomatic manner. They consist of a round human head with two wings attached⁽⁶⁾ [22]. They are common decorative elements in Coptic art and applied artifacts in general. Angels are luminous beings that inhabit the sky and take care of human beings from creation and monitor human works, etc. [11]. They transmit to man the will of Allah [23], so humans consider them the messengers of Allah [24]

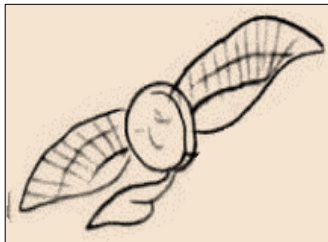


Figure (6) flying angel from, the 1st side

5.3.2. Floral motifs

5.3.2.1. *Branches*, fig. (7)

They took a simple form as a frame of pictorial views. A simple zigzag branch appears from which three-lobed leaves emerge.



Figure (7) simple zigzag branch

5.3.2.2. *Trifold leaves*

They appear emerging from the branches that frame the main scenes in the two covers of the box. Some argue that the trifold leaves represent the trinity [24,25], which is a symbol of all the trinities known to all civilizations. Christianity has used them to express the trinity [25,26].

5.3.2.3. *Roses*

Romans took roses as a symbol of victory and love, while Christianity considered them a symbol of martyrdom and purity [22].

5.3.2.4. *Lotus flower*, fig. (8)

The lotus flower is sacred in many civilizations. It was one of the most important flowers for ancient Egyptians and was frequently discovered in Thebes tombs. It was one of the most frequent floral motifs in ancient Egypt and symbolized resurrection and renewal [27,28]. It probably started in the 3rd century BC [29]. It also was a symbol of eternity [30] and the common denominator between spirit and matter [24]. In Coptic art, it is symbolized purity and beauty as it emerged from the mud clean and undefiled. Some considered it a symbol of the Virgin Mary (peace be upon her) [31]. The painting of the lotus was not limited to the Egyptians, but it was one of the most important motifs in the Achaemenid, Sassanid, and Byzantine arts and spread to the Mediterranean basin [32]. Moreover, it was one of the most important decorative elements in Coptic and Islamic arts, from the early Islamic era to the Muhammed Ali dynasty. It was preferred by Muslim artists throughout the ages.



Figure (8) lotus

5.3.2.5. *Four-petal rosettes*

They are a floral representation of the cross. There was a similar decorative element in ancient Egyptian art known as the Rosetta flower [28]. They continued in Islamic art and were one of the most common elements in the Umayyad arts in the Levant and Andalusia [33].

5.3.2.6. *Five-petal rosettes*, fig. (9)

They emerged from the vase to the right of the Virgin Mary.



Figure (9) five-petals rosette

5.3.2.7. *Six-petal rosettes*, fig. (10)

Six-petal rosettes spread in early Islamic art in the Umayyad era [29]. They were also found repeated in the decorations that reappeared on Iranian metals, ceramic coatings attributed to the Ilkhanate and Timurid eras [31], and the common elements in Ottoman arts [34].



Figure (10) six-petal rosettes

5.3.2.8. *Calyx decorations*⁽⁶⁾

Some considered them a reduced form of the lotus flower, executed in the form of a trifold calyx leaf⁽⁶⁾ [33,35].

5.3.2.9. *Elements related to floral motifs (vases)*

The artifact included vases without handles in two forms. The first resembled a long bottle, fig. (9). The second resembled a short and bulky pot, fig. (10). Some reported that using vases in decoration had Byzantine origins, then moved

as important Islamic decorative elements, like the decorations of the Dome of the Rock (72 AH/691 AD) [36]. Others mentioned that these decorations had Hellenistic artistic origins [37]. It is worth noting that the vase from which the rose emerges symbolizes the *Virgin Mary* (peace be upon her) from which *Jesus Christ* (peace be upon him) sprouted or a symbol of the baptized [25,38]. In ancient times, the vase was a symbol of motherhood and fertility. It sometimes represented the Tree of Life. The Greeks and Romans thought that the vase symbolized the wine bowl. In ancient Egypt, it had several symbols, such as the womb, water, and heart [24].

5.3.3. Geometric decorations

5.3.3.1. *Crux immissa*^(h)

This cross contains three equal arms, fig. (11) [22,24,39-41] while the lower fourth arm is slightly longer. It appears on the flag held by *Jesus Christ* (peace be upon him). The cross is a symbol of Christ and his sufferings, the Christian religion and salvation, and redemption and sacrifice [42,43]. It is a common form in Coptic metalwork, either as a decorative value or intended for hanging.



Figure (11) crux immissa

5.3.3.2. Zigzag decorations

They appeared on jar-like vases decorations on the scene of the *Virgin Mary* cradling *Jesus Christ* as a child. They also appeared on the echinus of the Corinthian column. Intersecting zigzag lines appeared on the body of the column, creating a rhombus. This decoration probably was one of the oldest artistic features in Greek art [44].

5.3.3.3. Circular halo

A halo is simply a circle, light, or halo surrounding the head of *Jesus Christ*, an angel, or a saint. It symbolizes holiness. Its purpose is to identify holy people [30,45,46]. A halo is simply a circle, light, or halo surrounding the head of *Jesus Christ*, an angel, or a saint. It symbolizes holiness. Its purpose is to identify holy people. Circular halos were widespread in classical and Roman art [47]. The Byzantine artist used to paint haloes or circles around the heads of Caesars, but it was rarely depicted in Christian art. Later, artists began to paint it around the heads of people, especially churchmen, in Christian depictions in the Middle Ages. It became a symbol of sanctity [43]. The artist might paint this decorative form to highlight the importance of the painted character [47]. It probably appeared in the early 4th century AD after the recognition of Christianity in the Edict of Milan in (313 AD). Some considered it an artistic inheritance from Sasanian art [48]. The sacred halo in Coptic art might be an artistic

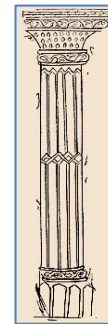
ideological heritage with some external influences with restrictions from the new faith. In Coptic art, this halo is a circle or disk of light encompassing the head or the entire body in rare cases. It appeared for the sake of *Jesus Christ*. Then, it spread to include *Virgin Mary*, saints, and angels, especially with the spread of innovations and heresies, to stress some doctrinal concepts [47] or to define their importance in the painted subjects to distinguish them as extraordinary personalities [21].

5.3.4. Architectural decorations

The artist could express raw materials and represent some buildings in the scenes executed on the artifact, such as the church represented by the columns surrounding the scene of the *Virgin Mary* and her child and the tomb in the resurrection, despite its difficulty by notching and engraving the metal. Such representation reflected the skill and distinction of the artist who could reflect marble⁽ⁱ⁾ [34] as a raw material for the columns^(j) [25,44,49], as follows:

5.3.4.1. Columns^(k) with Corinthian capitals

The Corinthian capital^(l) [25,50], fig. (12) appeared in Greek architecture. It consists of a base, an agile body, and a capital decorated with acanthus leaves^(m) [51]. Then, it spread to and characterized Roman and Byzantine architecture [44,51], where it spread to Islamic art. It is worth noting that the Coptic artist initially copied the Roman and Byzantine models. He had a unique style starting from the 6th-7th century AD. Later, many symbols related to the Christian faith emerged [40].



the details of the column with a Corinthian capital on the first side of the box

5.3.4.2. Mudbrick course

It appears as a building material for the tomb in the scene of Christ's resurrection, figs. (2 & 4).

5.3.4.3. Inscriptions

➤ Arabic inscription

They were recorded in the Thuluth inscription⁽ⁿ⁾ [52-54], they included:

- **Documental inscriptions:** A historical inscription, fig. (12) appeared on this artifact could be read "one thousand six hundred and twenty-seven year of the Calendar of Saints" in the reign of *Pope Cyril V*, corresponding to 1911 AD during the reign of the *Muhammed Ali* dynasty in Egypt, specifically *Khedive Abbas Helmy II* (1892-1914 AD)^(p). On the other side of the box, there was a registry (During the reign of His Holiness, the great *Pope, Anba Cyril V*). Some phrases were also recorded on both sides of the box as if they were a founding text, as follows:

"life-long endowment and eternal confinement for the cause of *Virgin Mary*, in Haret Zuwella".

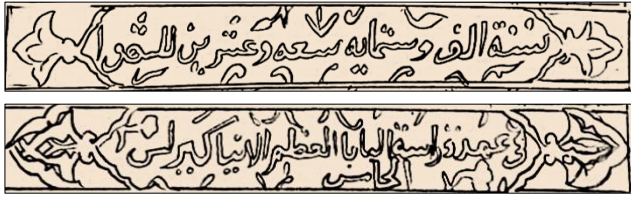


Figure 12) Arabic inscription of the 2nd side

- Prayer inscriptions, fig. (3)
"O Lord, who has fatigue in the realms of the heavens, O Lord, bestow mercy," starting with invoking Allah, seeking relief, and concluding with seeking mercy.
- Names of persons
The name of *Pope Cyril V* (no. 112) (1827-1927) appeared, fig. (12). He was one of the most important Coptic patriarchs in the modern age and was patriotic, as he supported the Urabi revolt and the 1919 revolution. Additionally, he made great contributions to culture and education and opened many Coptic schools and charities [55].

➤ Coptic inscriptions

These inscriptions are quoted from the Bible. They are a Coptic text of the first verse of the Gospel of John (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God)

ⲧⲀⲢⲬⲏ ⲙⲡⲉϩⲁⲓⲛⲓⲟⲛ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲓⲏⲥ ⲡⲬⲥ
ⲛⲰⲏⲣⲓ ⲙⲑⲧ. ⲉⲖⲎ ⲧⲀⲢⲬⲏ ⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲥⲁⲕⲓ
ⲡⲉ. ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲡⲓⲥⲁⲕⲓ ⲛⲁⲩⲒⲏⲏ ⲉⲁⲧⲎ ⲑⲧ

6. Conclusion

To conclude, Coptic artifacts and metalworks drew considerable attention during the Muhammed Ali dynasty, as shown by this and other artifacts preserved in the church. The artist's demonstrated great accuracy in the decorative details, technical elements, and harmonious lines on the sides. This masterpiece, which has a great deal of accuracy in detail, revealed the artistic capabilities that the Coptic artist reached during this period. What made him focus the details of the architectural elements, despite the difficulty of implementing this on metals. It is also one of the few Coptic metal artifacts dated to the modern era, which fills a gap in the history of Coptic art, and allows us to reveal that this art was a single unit throughout the ages with the repetition of decorative themes and many artistic styles. It also focuses that the Church was not isolated from life in Egypt, which is what made the artist combine the Arabic and Coptic languages.

(* This paper is extracted from my doctoral dissertation entitled "*Metal tools of the altar kept in the church of the Virgin Mary in Haret Zuweila: An artistic archaeological study*" (In Arabic)

Endnotes

- a) This scene was frequently presented in some icons. Some reported that it depicts the Egyptian Orthodox doctrine of the Christ since birth with angels in the background waiting for instructions of devotion. This scene appeared in the 5th century regarding the establishment and devotion of the church.
- b) Silver is mentioned in many verses of the Holy Qur'an, such as "Upon the inhabitants will be green garments of fine silk and brocade. And they will be adorned with

bracelets of silver, and their Lord will give them a purifying drink." (Surah Al-Insan: 21).

- c) Some report that the oval face, protruding eyes, small mouth, and the wide clothing of Virgin Mary are often repeated in the paintings of Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. Additionally, the small mouth is only dedicated to glorifying Allah.
- d) Resurrection of Jesus is the Christian belief that God raised Jesus from the dead. This story is frequently reported in the Bible. See the New Testament: Mathew (28: 1-15), Mark (16: 1-8), Luka (23: 55-65, 24: 1-12), John (20: 1-10; 20: 11-18).
- e) Wings denote divine messages; thus, angels are depicted with wings.
- f) It is worth noting that calyx elements resemble the lotus flower in the outer structure, but differ in formation. While the lotus flower has many rows of petals, the calyx may be originally a lotus with some reduced details.
- g) This decoration also appeared on some ceramic Mamluk pieces, probably derived from the Seljuk art. It appeared in some details of Sultan Hasan Madrasa and the Sultan Al-Ghuri Complex.
- h) The cross was used in execution by crucifixion by tying the feet and hands with a central point, so it was one of original signs of the four directions. It is the symbol of Christianity in general. Moreover, it expresses the redemption and sacrifice of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) for humanity.
- i) Marble was one of the most important raw materials dedicated for designing columns thanks to its durability and glamor throughout ages.
- j) It is a body that bears the roof and consists of three parts: The base, the body, and the capital. It is one of the most important elements used as carriers throughout ages. Its aesthetics reflect the splendor and grandeur of the building. Ancient Egyptians excelled in the diversity of the shapes of the columns and capitals. Some argue that the Greeks were the first to introduce the complete column, which consists of the base, the body, and the capital and created several styles of capitals, such as the Corinthian capital, in which the acanthus leaf played an important role. Muslims imitated some of them at the beginning when they built civilization. Later, they made some innovations.
- k) The term column appeared several times in the Bible. Some of them highlight its function in raising the bishop, and among them in describing Lot's wife who turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26), as well as its function in buildings, as was the case in the altar that Moses (peace be upon him) built.
- l) Columns in the Church indicate the believer supporting Christianity "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God" (3:12).
- m) This style of capitals belongs to Corinth in the 5th B.C. It is believed that its origin is a girl who died. Her loving nursing mother collected all belongings in a basket near her tomb and covered them with baked brick tiles. A thistle grew and encompassed the basket. Thus, the Corinthian

capital emerged and became one of the most important in the Roman and Byzantine arts.

- n) Acanthus belongs to the family Acanthaceae. It is a Greek word meaning thistle and is also known as the Jews thistle. It is an always green plant in the Mediterranean countries.
- o) Thuluth script, in calligraphy, medieval Islamic style of handwritten alphabet. Thuluth (Arabic: "one-third") is written on the principle that one-third of each letter slopes. It is a large and elegant, cursive script, used in medieval times on mosque decorations. It took on some of the functions of the early Kufic script; it was used to write sura (Qur'anic chapter) headings, religious inscriptions, and princely titles and epigraphs. It was also used for many of the large copies of the Qur'an produced from the 13th century.
- p) Khedive Abbas Helmy II (1874-1944 AD): He was Abbas Helmy bin Khedive Tawfiq bin Khedive Ismail bin Ibrahim Pasha bin Muhammad Ali Pasha. His mother was Amina Hanim Elhamy, the granddaughter of the Ottoman Sultan Abd Al-Majid I. He came to the throne of Egypt, succeeding his father, Khedive Tawfiq 1892 AD and continued until dismissal in 1914 AD and was succeeded by Sultan Hussein Malik after the British declaration of a Protectorate over Egypt at the beginning of World War I.

References

- [1] Suliman, S. (2002). *Dirāsah asālīb tashkīl al-mashghūlāt al-ma'dinīyah al-Qibṭīyah wa-al-ifādah minhā kamadkhal li-tadrīs māddat ashghāl al-ma'ādīn li-tullāb al-Kullīyāt al-naw'īyah (A study of making Coptic metalworks and its use as an approach to teaching the subject of metalworks for the art education students at the specific education colleges in Egypt)*, Art Education Faculty, Helwan Univ., Egypt.
- [2] Shehata, A. (1998). *Al-ta'thīrāt al-Islāmīyah 'alā al-tuḥaf al-ma'dinīyah al-kanasīyah fī daw' majmū'ah al-Mathāf al-Qibṭī (Islamic influences on ecclesiastical metal artifacts in light of the collection of the Coptic museum)*, MA. Islamic dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [3] Hermina, G. (2015). *Mawsū'at al-fann al-qibṭī (Encyclopedia of Coptic art): Metalworks*, Vol. 7, Trinity for Pub. & Distr., Egypt, p. 10.
- [4] Butler, A. (1993). *al-Kanā'is al-qibṭīyah al-qadīmah fī al-Qāhīrah (Ancient Coptic churches in Cairo)*, Vol. 2, General Egyptian Book Org., Egypt.
- [5] Metwalli, A. (2002). *al-Bishārāt al-ma'dinīyah dirāsah li-majmū'ah jadīdah min Muṭrānīyat Ṭantā (Metal gospels' caskets: A study and publication of a new collection from Tanta metropole)*, *J. of Humanitarian and Literary Studies*. 27: 623-669.
- [6] Omar, I. (2018). *Aghlīf wa-ṣanādīq anājl maḥfūzah bi-Mathāf al-Fann al-qibṭī bi-al-Qāhīrah (Bible covers and boxes preserved in the Coptic museum in Cairo)*, *J. of the Faculty of Arts*. 46 (2): 367-391.
- [7] Hamed, E. (2004). *al-Īqūnah fī Miṣr: Dawruhā wa-Dalālātuhā (The icon in Egypt: Its role and implication)*. In: Jaballah, J. (ed.) *Symposium on Coptic Antiquities*, 1st ed., Supreme Council of Culture, Egypt, pp. 165-188.
- [8] Altaish, A. (2000). *Al-funūn al-zukhrufīyah al-Islāmīyah al-mubakkirah fī al-'aṣrayn al-umawī wāl'bāsā (Early Islamic decorative arts in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras)*, 1st ed., Dar Zahraa Al-Sharq, Egypt.
- [9] Musa, W. (2018). *Al-adawāt al-manzilīyah al-ma'dinīyah fī 'aṣr usrat Muḥammad 'Alī: Dirāsah atharīyah fannīyah" (Metal utensils in the era of the Muhammed Ali dynasty: An archaeological artistic study)*, MA, Islamic dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [10] Salem, A. (1999). *Al-funūn al-Islāmīyah fī al-'aṣr al-Ayyūbī: Al-tuḥaf al-ma'dinīyah (Islamic arts in the Ayyubid Era): Metal Artifacts*, Part 1 1st ed., Al-Kitab Center for Publ., Egypt.
- [11] El-Gamal, I. (2021). *Al-tuḥaf al-manqūlah bi-kanīsat mārā Jirjis bi-Miṣr al-qadīmah: Dirāsah atharīyah fannīyah (Movable artifacts in the church of St. Mary George in old Cairo, an Artistic Archaeological Study)*, Ph.D., Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [12] Zahran, M. (1965). *Al-ashghāl wa-al-tuḥaf al-ma'dinīyah (Metal works and artifacts)*, Anglo, Egypt.
- [13] Yassin, N. (2017). *Madrasat al-taṣwīr bi-'Rmynyā khilāl al-'aṣr al-Islāmī fī daw' makhṭūṭāt al-'ahd al-Jadīd (Painting school in Armenia in the Islamic era in light of the Old Testament manuscripts)*, M.Sc., Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [14] Luka, S. (2009). *Al-Īqūnah fī al-kanā'is al-rasūlīyah (Icon in the Apostolic Churches)*, 2nd ed., St. John Publ. House, Egypt.
- [15] Al-Bakhshongi, A. (2010). *Ta'thīr al-funūn al-Masīḥīyah al-miṣrīyah 'alā al-funūn al-Ūrūbbīyah khilāl 'aṣr al-hijrāt (486-1000 M) (Influence of Egyptian Christian arts on European arts in the migration period (486-1000 AD))*. In: Jaballah, J. (ed.) *Symposium on Coptic Antiquities*, 1st ed., Supreme Council of Culture, Egypt, pp. 11-83.
- [16] Andraos, E. (2013). *Al-suwar al-jidārīyah bāl'dyrr al-Qibṭīyah wa-mawḏū'ātuhā wa-tiqnīyātuhā (Pictorials in Coptic Monasteries: Themes and Techniques)*, *Fellowship Course for Coptic Arts and Studies* (Jan.-March 2013) Supreme Council of Culture, Egypt, pp. 155-184
- [17] Langen, L. (1991). *Fan rasm al ayqonat fi Misr (The art of icon painting in Egypt)*. In: Hollendijk, H. (ed.), *Coptic Art and Culture in Egypt*, Dar Shohdi Pub., The Netherlands Institute of Egyptian and Arab Archaeology, Egypt, pp. 61-101.
- [18] De Villard, U. (1925). *Les couvents pres de Sohag (Deyr el-Abiad et Deyr el-Ahmar)*, Vol. 1, Tipografia Pontif. Arciv. S., Italy.
- [19] Gabra, G & Eaton-Krauss, M. (2007). *The treasures of Coptic art in the Coptic Museum and churches of old Cairo*, the AU Cairo Press, Cairo.
- [20] Afifi, M. (2019). *Kanīsat al-Malāk Mīkhā'īl bi-kufr al-Dayr: Dirāsah atharīyah mi'māriyah fannīyah (The Archangel Michael church in Kafr-Ehdir: An archaeological and artistic study)*. *J. of Sohag Faculty of Arts*. 50: 567-614.
- [21] Khalaf, A. (2021). *Body language of the Holy Virgin Mary in Coptic iconography*. *JAAUTH*. 20: 1-14.

- [22] Qadous, E. & Abdel-Fattah, M. (2002). *Al-athār al-qibṭīyah wāl-byzntīyah (Coptic and Byzantine monuments)*, Al-Hadary Press, Alex., Egypt.
- [23] Ferguson, G. (1966). *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art*, Oxford Univ. Press, USA.
- [24] Mina, P. (2021). *Taṣwīr al-ashkāl al-murakkabah fī al-fann al-Qibṭī fī al-fatrah min al-qarn al-rābi' ilā al-qarn al-sābi' al-Milādīyayn*, (Depiction of composite figures in Coptic art from the 4th to the 7th G. Century), MA, Archaeology dept., Faculty of Arts, Alex. Univ., Egypt.
- [25] Hassan, A. (2014). *Alzkhārf al-nabātīyah wa al handa-sīyah fī al-makhṭūṭāt al-'Arabīyah al-mahfūzah budayr Sānt Kātrīn (Floral and geometric decorations in Arabic manuscripts in Saint Catherine's monastery)*, MA, Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [26] Copper, G. (1978). *Illustrated encyclopedia of traditional symbols*, 1st ed. Thames & Hudson, UK.
- [27] El-Sayed, N. (2019). *Al-ashghāl al-hajarīyah al-Qibṭīyah min al-qarn 1-2 AH/7-8 AD ṭṭbyqan 'alā dayr al-Anbā Abūllū b-Bāwyṭ: Dirāsah athārīyah fannīyah" (Stonework from the 1stH/7th G. century to the 2nd H./8th G. century applied to the St. Apollo monastery in Bawit: Archaeological and artistic study)*, MA, Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [28] Taymour, A. (2020). *Al-taṣwīr 'inda al-'Arab (Painting of the Arabs)*, Wakalat Al-Sahafa Al-Arabia (Arab Press Agency), Egypt.
- [29] Nazir, W. (1970). *Al-tharwah al-nabātīyah 'inda Al-Miṣrīyīn al-qudamā' (Agricultural resources of the ancient Egyptians)*, General Egyptian Book Org., Egypt
- [30] El-Genuidy, M. (2019). *Alzkhārf al-hajarīyah wāl-rkh-āmīh bi-lmsājd Al-Sulṭānīyah bi-Istānbūl mundhu fath Al-Qusṭanṭīnīyah ḥattā Nihāyat al-'aṣr al-'Uthmānī (Stone and marble decorations in the Sultan mosques in Istanbul from the conquest of constantinople to the late Ottoman Era)*, MA, Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [31] Clark, R., (1988). *al-Ramz wa-al-uṣṭūrah fī Miṣr al-qadīmah (Symbol and Legend in Ancient Egypt)*, trans. A.Saliha, General Egyptian Book Org., Egypt.
- [32] Ismail, S. (1997). *Symbolism in fresco and tempera Coptic mural paintings in Egypt before the Arab conquest*, MA, Touristic Guinness dept., Faculty of Tourism & Hotels, Helwan Univ., Egypt.
- [33] Abdel-Ghani, A. (2000). *Al-ta'thīrāt al-Sāsānīyah 'alā al-funūn al-Islāmīyah min al-fath al-Islāmī ḥattā nihāyat al-quran al-kāranah: Drasa faneia atharia mokaerah (Sasanid influences on Islamic arts from the Islamic conquest until the late fifth Hijri century: A Comparative Artistic Archaeological Study)*, MA, Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [34] Rizk, A. (2006). *Al-funūn al-'Arabīyah al-Islāmīyah fī Miṣr (Arab and Islamic arts in Egypt)*, 1st ed., Madbouly Pub., Egypt.
- [35] Zaki, E. (2018). *Al-ta'thīrāt al-Islāmīyah 'alā kanā'is Al-Iskandarīyah mundhu 'aṣr Muḥammad 'alī wa-ḥattā nihāyat al-fatah al-khidwīyah "1219-1333 H/1805-1914 M" (Islamic influences on the churches of Alexandria from the era of Muhammad Ali till the late Khedival Era "1219-1333AH/1805-1914 AD")*, MA, Archaeology dept., Faculty of Arts, Alexandria Univ., Egypt.
- [36] Emara, T. (1988). *Al-'anāṣir al-zukhrufīyah al-mustakdamah fī 'imārah masājid al-Qāhirah fī al-'aṣr al-'Uthmānī (Decorative elements used in the architecture of Cairo mosques in the Ottoman era)*, Ph.D., Islamic Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Egypt.
- [37] Ghitas, M. (1995). *Al-taṣwīr fī bilād al-Nūbah (Painting in Nubia)*, The Supreme Council of Culture, Egypt.
- [38] Akerman, P. (1976). *Le decore Sculpte` du couvent blanc: Niches et frises*, IFAO, Caire.
- [39] Bastoros, M. (2010). Coptic symbols and implications (1), *Rakoty J.* 3: 6-9
- [40] Abu Bakr, J. (2011). *Al-funūn al-Qibṭīyah (Coptic Arts)*, 1st ed., Anglo, Egypt.
- [41] Evans. E. (1896). *Animal symbolism in ecclesiastical architecture*, W. Heinmann, London.
- [42] Cirlot, J. (1971). *A dictionary of symbols*, 2nd ed., Philosophical Library, England.
- [43] Maher, S. (1977). *Al-fann al-Qibṭī (Coptic Art)*, The Central Organization for University and School Books and Educational Aids, Egypt.
- [44] Shafi, F. (2002). *Al-'Imārah al-'Arabīyah fī Miṣr al-Islāmīyah, Vol. 1: 'Aṣr al-wulāh (Arab architecture in Islamic Egypt, Vol. 1: The age of governors)*, General Egyptian Book Org., Egypt.
- [45] Issa, A. (1988). *Dictionary of Islamic art terms*, Research Center for Islamic History, Arts and Culture, Turkey.
- [46] Atiyya, A. (1991). *The Coptic encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, MacMillan Pub. Company, NY.
- [47] Shenouda, C. (2013). *Dirāsah liṭaṣwīr hālat al-nūr-ānīyah fī al-fann al-Qibṭī ḥattā muntaṣaf al-qarn al-Sābi' al-Milādī (A study of the painting of the illumination halo in Coptic art until the mid-7th G. century)*, MA, Archaeology dept., Faculty of Arts, Alex. Univ., Egypt
- [48] Musa, H. (2013). *Altāthyrāt al-fannīyah wa-al-mi'mārīyah al-mutabālah fī al-'imārah al-dīnīyah wa-al-funūn al-masīhīyah wa-al-Islāmīyah fī madīnat al-Qāhirah fī al-'aṣr Al-Islāmī (Mutual artistic and architectural influences in religious architecture and Christian and Islamic arts in Cairo in the Islamic Era)*, MA, Archaeology dept., Faculty of Arts, Tanta Univ., Egypt.
- [49] Assem, R. (2012). *Irṭibāt al-Naḥt aljdārā bāl'mārh al-dīnīyah fī al-kanīsatayn al-sharqīyah wa-Al-gharbīyah min al-qarn al-thālith ilā al-qarn al-khāmīs 'ashar al-mylādā: Dirāsah taḥlīlīyah muqāranah (The relationship of wall sculpture with religious architecture in the eastern and western churches from the 3rd to the 15th G. centuries: A Comparative Analytical Study)*, MA, Sculpture dept., Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan Univ., Egypt.
- [50] Abdel-Gawad, T. (2002). *Tārīkh al-'imārah wa-al-funūn fī al-'uṣūr al-ūlā (History of architecture and arts in the early ages)*, Part 1, The Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Egypt.

- [51] Tattersall, B. & Willson, E. (1996). *Acanthus: The dictionary of art*, Vol. 1, MacMillan Pub. Ltd., England.
- [52] Aliwa, H. (1970). Al-Khatt (Calligraphy). In: Al-Bash, H., Fahmy, A., Yousef, A., et al. (eds.) *Al-Khaṭ, Al-Kahera: tarikheha, fnoneha and athariha (Cairo: Its history, arts, monuments)*, Al-Ahram foundation, Cairo, pp. 275-286.
- [53] Jaafar, A. (2021). *Al-tuḥaf manqūlah b' mā'r wasaṭ al-diltā fī daw' majmū'ah jadīdah khilāl 'aṣr usrat Muḥammad 'alī Bāshā: 1220-1373 H/1805-1953 M (Movable antiquities in the buildings of the central delta in light of a new collection from the era of Alawite dynasty: 1220-1373 AH/1805-1953 AD)*, MA. Archaeology dept., Faculty of Arts, Tanta Univ., Egypt.
- [54] Dawood, M. (1991). *Al-kitābāt al-'Arabīyah 'alā al-athār al-Islāmīyah min al-qarn al-awwal hattā awākhīr aālqrn al-Thānī 'ashar lil-Hijrah (7-18 M) (Arabic inscriptions on Islamic monuments from the first until the late twelfth Hijri century (7th-18th AD)*, 1st ed., Nahdet Misr, Egypt.
- [55] Mīna, T. (2004). Imtidād harakat al-tajdīd al-tarbawī ba'da al-bābā kīrullus al-rābī' (1862-1927 M) (Spread of the educational renewal movement after Pope Kyrillos IV (1862-1927 A.D.)) In: Asad, M. *Encyclopedia of Coptic Heritage*, Vol. 4, 1st ed. St. John the Beloved Pub. House, Egypt, pp. 129-138