The Angelic Spheres in Coptic Art: Different Ornamentations and Interpretations
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Abstract
In the East angels are believed to be not simply pure immaterial spirits, but to consist of a substance occasionally visible to saintly mortals. This belief gave them bodily form on the Coptic icons, murals, and stone sculptures, usually represented with The Christ and The Virgin, wearing liturgical vestments of Byzantine inspiration, holding a staff and a sphere decorated with different motifs, symbolizing the universality of the Kingdom of The Christ, emphasizing their position as God's ministers, assistants at the Heavenly Court, and the messengers who are responsible of delivering the holy messages of the God, evoking the presence of God Incarnate, honouring the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven, and is also considered as part of their formal uniform, acting as their identity card or token.

Keywords: Sphere, Globe, Angel, Archangel, Cross, Sacred Monogram, Token, Seal, Virgin, Christ, Messenger

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Angels are the myriad of incorporeal superhuman creatures whose natural abode is heaven and who, on certain occasions, appear to man in the shape of human beings to reveal God's will and execute His commands, they are frequently mentioned in Old and New Testaments, being common to both Judaism and Christianity (Basilios, 1991).

The idea that there are several classes of angels arose partly from the various functions assigned to them in the Bible and from the names given to them by St. Paul (Eph. 1:21; col. 1:16). They were arranged in hierarchies by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite in his Celestial Hierarchy of c.500, which was translated into Latin in the ninth century, became the standard text. He divided angels into three groups of three, starting with the highest Cherubim, Seraphim, Thrones, all of whom are red, the colour of love; Dominations, Principalities (Authorities), and powers, all blue, the colour of heaven and therefore of light, and Knowledge; Virtues, Archangels, and Angels (Muray, 2004).

A Coptic doxology, forming part of the service of the evening and the morning offering of incense, includes the names of the seven archangels who constantly glorify the Almighty: Michael (Mikha'il), Gabriel (Ghubriyal), Raphael (Rufa'il), Suriel (Suryal), Sadakael, Saratael, and Ananael, they are the great, pure, and luminescent beings who intercede on behalf of humanity, the Copts believed that the archangel, specially Michael, is the powerful friend who can help human beings in their life (Basilios, 1991).

Archangels are commonly represented in Coptic murals, icons, manuscripts, and stone reliefs, usually distinguished by holding in their hands a sphere, decorated with different motifs, a long staff, and a nimbus around the head. A limestone relief in The Coptic Museum of the sixth century represents The Virgin and The Christ child in an unusual informal pose, concerned not with each other but the men who stand at either side (PL. 1). The halos identify the men as saints, perhaps apostles, the setting is a colonnade, The Virgin enthroned with flanking pairs of columns with drawn curtains between them, better preserved reliefs depicting similar compositions suggest that Mary once handed a crown-encircled cross to the figure at her right. The Christ child turns his upper body to hand a scroll to the bearded man at his left. Each of the archangels with wings wears a tunic lightly
folded at the waist and a cloak clasped at the shoulder with a fibula, ankle-high shoes, holding a sceptre and a sphere decorated with diagonal cross (Gabria, 2007).

On a double-sided icon of St. Theodore the General and the archangel Gabriel, was found in Bawit, the Monastery of St. Apollo and dated back to the sixth century (Pl. 2), the figure of archangel Gabriel is depicted on one side of the icon dressed in a tunic and holding in his left hand a gray sphere decorated with diagonal cross and a small black circle in the intersected point (Gabria, 2007).

On the central conch of the church of the White Monastery, is a painting of the twelfth century, representing The Christ Pantocrator enthroned within a mandorla from which protrude the winged four creatures of apocalypse. The four evangelists are depicted inside medallions, John and Luke to the right, Mathieu and Mark to the left writing their Gospels (Pl. 3).

The arch is decorated with a decorative band of geometric motifs with for medallions, two of them contain The Virgin and John the Baptist, and in the other two medallions are the busts of two archangels dressed in a tunic, holding a staff topped with a cross, in the right hand and a sphere in the left hand, the sphere held by the archangel to the right is decorated with a cross, the other one to the left is decorated with black dots resembling the form of a cross (Laferrier, 2008).

A rich decorated mural of the twelfth century is represented on the southern apse of the northern church in Deir Al-Shuhada at Esna (Pl. 4), showing The Christ Pantocrator within mandorla supported by the four creatures in the upper register, and in the lower register The Virgin, with the title of "Saint Mary, The Mother of The God" inscribed around her nimbus, is enthroned with the infant Christ between two standing archangels who are dressed in a long tunic, which is decorated with circles and vegetal band in the lower part, cloak with folds rested on the left arm, and a decorated loros, the wings are decorated with rhombs and semi-circles, holding spheres, the sphere held by the right archangel is decorated with square and diagonal cross in the centre, and the sphere held by the archangel to the left is decorated with almost the same decoration, but it is partially destroyed (Laferrier, 2008).

Another wall painting in the twelfth century in Deir Al-Shuhada, (Pl. 5), on the northern chapel, represents an archangel standing beside a Seraph, wearing a long tunic decorated with red circles and brown squares, a cloak with fibula, and loros decorated with interlacing branches with flowers, holding a staff with a cross and a sphere decorated with a coloured flower in the middle encircled with a bigger one with many petals, the wings are spreading decorated with coloured feathers and small dots (Leroy, 1975).

A wall painting in Al-Fakhory Monastery on the eastern arch, of the twelfth century (Pl. 6), shows an archangel standing beside a Seraph, wearing a tunic, loros, and a cloak, holding a staff topped with a cross, and a sphere decorated with cross in the form of a flower encircled with three successive circles, the wings are decorated with black dots (Leroy, 1975).

The wall painting of the twelfth century on the eastern semidome of the sanctuary in the Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simon) at Aswan (Pl. 7), shows The Christ Pantocrator enthroned within mandorla held by two archangels, with flames, licking at its base. The Christ holds the bible with his left hand and blessing with the right, the archangel to the left of the Christ stands frontally with long hair and nimbus, wearing a long tunic that has a belt and two orbiculi at the knees and a cloak, holding a sphere, that appeared to be carried above the left wrist, divided into seven parts by seven lines intersected in the middle with small black circle. There is a person in orans position with square nimbus appears to the right (Gabria, 2002).
In another wall painting on the northern wall of the church of the archangel Michael in the Monastery of Abu Maqar, dated back to the twelfth century (Pl.8), Michael stands dressed in a red tunic which is crossed twice diagonally by a piece of cloth like the orarion of the deacon, a yellow cloak falls from his shoulders and shoes, he is holding a long staff in his right hand and a sphere decorated with Greek cross in his left, the wings are decorated with vertical lines like the tunic (Madsen, 1971).  

A wall painting in the Monastery of Saint Antony (Pl.9), of the thirteenth century, on the apse of the eastern wall of the haikal, consists of two registers, the upper one shows the haloed figure of The Christ Pantocrator within mandorla, holding a codex in his left hand and blessing with the right, to the right of the Christ stands the archangel Michael in adoration attitude with the representation of the sun as human face, and to the left stands the archangel Gabriel with the moon, the inscription reads: “Jesus The Chris, Emmanuel our God, the angel Michael, the angel Gabriel, the man’s face, the lion’s face, the eagle’s face, ox’s face, the sun, the moon”.  

In the lower register a rich decorated painting of The Virgin Hodegetria enthroned with the Christ child sitting on her lap between two archangels standing frontally with nimbi around the heads, each one of them holds in his right hand a staff topped by a cross, and in the left hand a sphere decorated with small circle at the centre with a big cross surrounded by a wide band with small crosses separated of each other by double and triple lines. They are dressed in the same long-sleeved belted tunic and a cloak, clasped at the shoulder by a fibula and loros decorated with squares and rhombs, the hair is pinned up on the top of the head which is adorned with a crown decorated with precious gems, the inscription beside the head of the Virgin reads "Parthenos" or "Virgin" with letter (M) still visible, and the signature of the painter "The poor, Unworthy, Theodore" (Laferriere, 2008).  

On the arch between the nave and the khurus in the monastery of St. Antony, a mural of the thirteenth century (Pl.10), shows the two archangels Gabriel (north) and Michael (south), both of them are identical, standing frontally, wearing long belted tunics with long wide sleeves decorated with circles in the lower part and loros decorated with geometric motifs rested on the left arm. The hair is braided in a form of a crown with nimbus around the head, every archangel holds a spear topped with a cross in the right hand and a sphere inscribed with the sacred monogram of the Christ in the left (Moorsel, 1995).  

On the arch between the nave and the chapel of the four animals in the monastery of St. Antony, there is a painting of the thirteenth century, showing two archangels standing frontally, dressed in decorated tunics and loros, each one of them holds in his right hand a spear and a sphere in the left which is now almost disappeared. The sphere of the angel stands to the east was decorated with the sacred monogram of the Christ, but the sphere of the archangel stands to the west was once bearing another unique decoration contains a delicate small portrait of The Christ as a young beardless man (Pl.11), holding in his left hand a roll and blessing with the right, he wears a tunic and a pallium, with a nimbus around his head decorated with a cross (Moorsel, 2002).  

The niche in the eastern wall of the sanctuary of St. Antony in the monastery of St. Paul, is decorated with a fourteenth century depiction of the majestic Christ Pantocrator within a mandorla surrounded by the four creatures of the apocalypse and flanked by two archangels with blue wings (Pl.12), the one to the right of the Christ, who is still visible, dressed in a long tunic which comes down to the ankle, and a loros decorated with circles and squares, with a nimbus around the head, holding a yellow sphere with a sky-blue tongue in his left hand, and the right hand is rested on the chest (Moorsel, 2002).
On the south wall of the central chamber in the nave of the cave church in the Monastery of St. Paul, there is a painting of the eighteenth century (Pl.13), represents The Virgin *Hodegetria* with infant Christ, flanked by two standing Seraphim with six wings, two covering the face, two the feet, and two for flying, all of them and the body are decorated with an eye-shaped motif. Under the wings appear the hands, holding a sword by the right and a white sphere in the left, with traces of diagonal cross still appear, the sphere held by the left Seraph is smaller and in a higher position than that one held by the right Seraph, The Christ holds a roll in his left hand while pointing to the right seraph by the right (Moorsel, 2002).

In the haikal of the twenty-four priests in St. Paul Monastery, a painting of the eighteenth century on the east side of the dome (Pl.14), showing The Christ *Pantocrator* enthroned within *mandorla*, holding in his left hand the bible inscribed with the Coptic letters meaning "The Christ", surrounded by the four living creatures and the seven archangels blowing their trumpets, they could be the choir who, with the sound of the trumpets, is preaching of the Royal Kingdom of the Christ and also announcing the praise and adoration of the twenty-four priests, and this is evident by the statement mentioned in Revelation of Saint John: "and he saw the seven angels who stand before God. He was giving them seven trumpets", Rev. John 11,15.  

They are standing on coloured background, their heads are surrounded by yellow nimbi, crowned with three red triangles, above the middle one there is a big cross, they are holding in their right hands white trumpets, and spheres with diagonal cross in their left hands. All of them wear sleeveless tunics with *loros* crossed on the chest and belts decorated with black dots (Moorsel, 2002).

On the west wall of the central chamber in the nave of the cave church of St. Paul monastery, there is a painting of the eighteenth century (Pl.15), represents the three standing archangels, according to the Coptic inscription, from left to right, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael: "Michael The Archangel, Gabriel The Messenger of the Gospel, Raphael The Compassionate". They are standing, wearing *orarion* with *loros* crossed on the chest and a wide belt, lifting cross by their right hands, and holding in their left hands white spheres decorated with diagonal cross with protruding long tongues decorated with small dots, Moorsel mentioned that these tongues are hard to explain "leurs main gauche soutient une sphéra blanche, decorée d'une croix en diagonal, et d'une languette arrondie, ce que nous pouvons difficilement interpreter" (Moorsel, 2002).

At the same monastery, in the room of the four archangels, there is a detailed painting, of the eighteenth century (Pl.16), shows the four archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Souriel standing, everyone of them in a niche with nimbus around the head, wearing long tunic and *loros* crossed on the chest, wide belt with a long band descended in the middle decorated with geometric motifs.

Every one of them holds in his right hand a staff with a cross, and a sphere with diagonal cross in the left hand.


Many different opinions were offered trying to clarify the function of this spheric object held by angels.

Some scholars suggested that this object could be the mirror which is mentioned in patristic literature, popular in monastic circles in Egypt, including the work of the early church fathers like St. Clement of Alexandria and St. Athanasius, confirming that mirror may even convey a
certain degree of "magic" used by angels, as mediators between God and the human beings, to perceive the will of God, and to receive and reflect the divine grace and light (Skalova, 2000).

In an article on the subject of the archangel Michael in Coptic art, Madsen proposes a different interpretation of this circular object that is held by Michael, without referring to the other archangels, since the author links the function of the object with the oblation, referring to an illumination from the Oriental Manuscript (No.7021, fol.1a) in the British Museum (Madsen, 1971).

Madsen described this illumination, which is accompanied by a Sahidic text of a homily on the archangel Michael written by Theodosius, the archbishop of Alexandria, and dated back to 987 A.D., in which Michael appears as an intermediary between god and man, as the only one who can present oblation on behalf of all mankind (Madsen, 1971).

Michael is depicted standing, wearing a tunic lightly folded at the waist, a cloak is thrown over the tunic and clasped at the right shoulder with a fibula (Pl.17), holding a spear with a cross in the right hand, and in the left hand a sphere decorated with a square in a lattice design with a smaller square in the middle and around the square are the letters Alpha and Omega, as The Christ is the beginning and the end of life, beside the sacred monogram (Leroy, 1975).

Theodosius makes God say to Michael, when he installs him as the first Archangel, after Satan was thrown out of Heaven:

"O Michael! the whole race of Adam shall know god through thee.....Michael is the fragrance in the hour of the holy offering, Michael thou are the one who shall present the oblation on behalf of the whole race of the children of Adam". (Madsen, 1971)

In this text Michael is told to be the mediator between God and man, bringing the offering of the church to God, just as he is bringing the good works and alms given to the poor into the presence of God. Madsen added that the circular object decorated with the sacred monogram, the symbol of the Christ held by Michael, is actually the Eucharistic Loaf of the Coptic church, and this is evident by a wall painting in the church of the Red Monastery at Sohag, which depicts the image of an archangel with a sphere on which the sign ankh is inscribed as the symbol of eternal life, which in turn may be interpreted to mean that Michael is holding the bread of life, since when taking part in the Eucharist, one receives the gift of eternal life (Madsen, 1971).

However, the interpretation presented by Madsen concerning the function of the spheric object, is only restricted to the archangel Michael without referring to the other archangels and seraphim who are represented holding the same sphere with different motifs.

Besides, this opinion creates a strong liturgical connection between Michael and the rite of the offering of Eucharistic loaf in the church which leads to the fact that these representations should be depicted in special places inside the church connected with such liturgy, which is in fact doesn't appear through the previous survey of the monastic paintings that are depicted in various locations inside the church without any liturgical connection, so it is probably that the oblation mentioned in the previous text means "the prayers" of the saints or faithfuls, not the Eucharistic Loaf, which are presented to God by archangel Michael.
Moreover, the Eucharist Bread or *qorban* is usually decorated with a large cross in the middle surrounded by twelve small crosses symbolizing the twelve apostles with the Greek inscription "*Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Eternal*" surrounds the circle containing the twelve crosses (Basilios, 1991; Gabra, 2008), and the Eucharist Loaf, as representing the body of The Christ, is usually depicted with a vase full with red wine, representing His Blood and also held by saints not by angels, as depicted on the walls of the chapel XLV in Bawit (Pl.18), showing The Christ enthroned within *mandorla*, to his right stands St. Peter holding by his hands the Eucharist loaf decorated with cross, and to the left side stands St. Paul holding the vase of the red wine in his right hand (Clédat, 1999).

It is obvious now that considering this angelic sphere as an oblation is not quite correct, and to analyze properly the function of this sphere held by angels, it must be investigated how the object itself relates to certain iconographic elements such as the archangel's dress and the other attributes as well as the functions of the archangels as specified in any survived inscriptions or in Old and New Testaments, and one should first also trace the history of using this shape in art. Sphere was originally appeared in art before Christianity, in ancient Greece, the shape of the sphere, as an ideal body, corresponded to the heavens surrounding the surface of the Earth (Schramm, 1958), it was associated as well with God, being the beginning and the end. As an attribute of power, it appeared on Roman coins, held in the hand of the emperor, like the coin of emperors Valens and Valentinian I (Pl.19) who are represented with equal proportions holding two similar spheres reflecting the universality of their power (Leroy, 1975).

Sometimes appears the figure of Winged Victory accompanied the images of the emperors holding a sphere, emperors Gratian and Valentinian II (375-378 A.D.) were portrayed on the reverse of Gratian coins holding a sphere which symbolizes the sharing of power (Pl.20), hovering in the background is Victory, spreading her wings above the heads of the two emperors. Over time, Victory was replaced with the image of an angel, the obverse of the coins issued during the reign of Justinian I (527 to 565 A.D.) portray a bust of the emperor, whose upraised right hand is holding a sphere crowned with a cross, the reverse of the same coin bears the standing figure of a winged angel holding the same object in his left hand (Pl.21) (Whitting, 1973).

An archangel holding a sphere often accompanies images of emperors from later periods, as in the case of the sculpted figures on the back of the ivory scepter top of Leo VI (886-912 A.D.), on which The Virgin Mary placing a crown on the head of the emperor, the archangel Gabriel dressed, like the emperor, in a *loros*, again like the emperor, Gabriel is holding a sceptre in his right hand and a sphere in his left, but larger than the emperor's and devoid of the image of the cross (Pl.22) (Corrigan, 1978).

On an Ivory diptych (Pl.23), dated back to the mid-six century, now in Staatliche Museum, Berlin, The Virgin and The Child are represented between two angels, the one stands to the right holds a sphere with diagonal cross, the spheric form of the object is very clear as the thumb of the angel presses on it, as if the artist meant to render the object three-dimensionally (Weitzmann, 1977).

A text of the Coptic encomium of Eustathius clarifies the function of the sphere as an angel's attribute (Budge, 1894):
"For no man will fulfil the behest for which any soldier has come from the Emperor; neither will he by any means receive him (the figure of the cross), unless he bear the token of the Emperor; and, moreover thus is it with the letters which the Emperor sendeth forth from his kingdom, no man believeth that they are genuine unless they be sealed with the Emperor's seal; and thus also is it with the angels who come upon the earth, for if the figure of the Cross of the King of Glory be not with them, men will not believe that they are angels, but they will flee from them [believing] them to be devils; and especially in the case of Archangel of all the angels, for how could he come upon the earth without bearing the armour of the seal of salvation of his Emperor?" (Budge, 1894).

As understood from the previous text, specially the highlighted statements, these spheres are symbolic devices, depicted with the cross, the sacred monogram, portrait of the Christ, expressing the belief in the universality of the kingdom of The Christ, resembling the actual seals sent by terrestrial emperors to officials of the state in various parts of the empire, these "seals" held by angels as ministers of God would have had the quality of a "sign" or of a conceptual picture, evoking the unseen but real presence of the Incarnate Logos (Christ) and of his salutary work among human (Gavrilović, 1970).

Moreover, this sphere is a symbol of the function that the angels perform at the Heavenly Court, this function is further emphasized by their hairstyles and dress; each is clothed in loros, that was among the clothes that were worn by Byzantine emperors and high state officials, so the artist was concerned with rendering the archangels in ceremonial robes as "L'ange en basileus" or 'The emperor's angel', and that the objects they are holding were meant to compliment this likeness (Lamy-Lasalle, 1970).

Being the official ministers, holy messengers, and attendants of the holy court, means that angels are always in the God's presence, surrounding Him, to listen carefully to the holy messages and instructions said by Him, and to execute His commands, embodying His name and voice and magnifying His power, and this is textually evident in Rev.1:4, "The seven spirits who are before the throne", "which are sent forth into the earth" in Rev.5:6.

These seven are the archangels, "the princes of the angelic host, glorious in appearance" (Luk.2:9, Mt.28:2), who stand near the throne of glory, praising God, and were conceived to be the only angels who are permitted to enter within the radiance, that's why the first four of them, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Suriel, who are the most common represented in Coptic art, always appear accompanying The Christ and The Virgin, confirming their high position which is textually attested (Hastings, 2004).
Michael is mentioned in the Old Testament several times in the Book of Daniel 10:12 as "one of the chief princes", he has many functions like the presentation of the prayers of the righteous before God, and acting as a psychopomp (one who welcomes the souls of the dead to heaven), the protector and the leader of the army of the God who achieved the victory over the devil, and he is the angel of the last judgement holding the balance with his hand (Esbroeck, 1991).

Gabriel, whose name means "Man of God", describes himself as one that "stands in the presence of God" (Luk. 1:19), the messenger of incarnation, his authority in heaven is shown by being placed by God at the head of 240,000 angels. His mission was to interpret for Daniel the apocalyptic vision of the ram and to clarify the messianic meaning of the prophecy of the seventy weeks. He also appears to Zechariah in the Temple to announce the birth of the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, six months later, he appears to the Virgin Mary in Nazareth and announces that she is to be the mother of the Messiah (Luk. 1:26-38), and he is also mentioned in Rev. 10:1-11 as the angel who brings a message of good tidings, appeared to Abraham to announce the birth of a son, and appeared to Adam in the waters of the Jordan to preach the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Gabriel leads the heavenly hosts with Michael as the angel of power who will, at the end of time, blow the heavenly trumpet, at the sound of which the dead will rise (Pérez, 1991).

Raphael, whose name means "God has healed", is the angel of healing, patron of medicine, and heavenly doctor, describes himself in Tobit. 12-15, "I am Raphael one of the seven angels who stand and serve before the throne of God's glory, presenting the prayers of saints, I brought the memorial of your prayers and tears before the Holy One" (Pérez, 1991). It is mentioned in Tobit also that the God doesn’t Himself hear prayers which, by their importunity or worth reach heaven, are heard by the angels of the Presence, and carried to the throne by them, and then they are commissioned to deliver the answer (Hastings, 2004), and this is evident through the depiction of spheres with tongues through which the angels speak and deliver the will of God.

Suriel is mentioned in the Coptic psalmody, and in a special doxology in honor of Suriel: "Let us venerate Suriel the fourth archangel. Great is the joy brought by Suriel, which surpasses the joys of the vanishing world, the joys that pass away, while Suriel's joy lasts forever". The Synaxarion adds that "Suriel is he that brought the good news of salvation to Adam, the one that saved Joseph from the snares of the Egyptian woman. He is also the comforter of hearts, the intercessor on behalf of sinners" (Gregorius, 1991).

These Heavenly job is also attested to the Seraphim, who are represented holding spheres, they are celestial creatures occupying the highest order of angels, apparently human in form, have faces, hands, and feet, each of them has three pairs of wings, standing or hovering above The Christ as He sits upon His throne, proclaiming His holiness in antiphonal chant, they are the guardians of the Christ's holiness, who keep the profane and unclean at a distance, and purge from defilement that is to be taken into The Christ's service (Hastings, 2004).

The seraphim are mentioned in Isaiah 6:2-7, where he saw in a vision several seraphim standing before the throne of God and ceaselessly praising Him acting as attendants of the heavenly court, ministers and nobles of the ideal sanctuary (Basilios, 1991).

It can be concluded that the sphere is an important angelic attribute, widely represented in Coptic art held by angels to symbolize the universality of Kingdom of Christ, emphasizing their position as God's ministers, assistants at the Heavenly Court, and the messengers who are responsible of delivering the holy messages of the God, evoking the presence of God Incarnate, and honouring the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven.
This decorated sphere is considered as part of their formal uniform, acting as their identity cards or tokens, especially when being in the presence of The Virgin and The Christ, representing the protectors through their position and weapons held by them. These spheres were decorated at first with simple motifs like cross, but over time, the whole angelic uniform, including the sphere and the dress, was over ornamented, specially there was increasing artistic trend towards richer forms.

References


Notes

2- The archaeological site of Bawit is located on the western bank of the Nile about three hundred and twenty kilometers south of Cairo , it is consisted of many small monasteries with cells and a little church , all protected by an enclosure and most of them are destroyed, Gabra,Coptic Monasteries,pp.116-117.

3- The Monastery of St.Shenute, known as the White Monastery, is located on the edge of the cultivation in the Libyan desert, about eight kilometers to the west of the city of Sohag. It is very close to the ancient village of Atripe, where Christianity existed long before Shenute.The hermits knew the mountain of Atripe prior to the beginning of the fourth century, but it was under the leadership of St.Shenute that the monastery grew considerably. The church of the monastery is the most important Christian monument in Upper Egypt,dated back to the middle of the fifth century,Gabra,Coptic Monasteries,pp.94-95.

4- Christ Pantocrator :A specific depiction of The Christ holding the Gospel in his left hand, and makes the gesture of blessing with his right,Ouspensky L.(1982) The Meaning of Icons,Boston,p.73.


6- The Four Creatures of Apocalypse or Cherubim are calss of Heavenly beings described in Ezekiel's vision of the Heavenly chariot,they are the God's throne bearers ;lion,an ox,man, and an eagle,Basilios A.(1991)"Cherubim and Seraphim",In Coptic Encyclopedia,V.2,p.518, New York,edited by Aziz A.Atiya;Gara G.(2002) Coptic Monasteries,p.119.

7- Monastery of El-Shuhada (Monastery of Martyrs) is situated about five kilometers to the southwest of Esna,also called the Monastery of St.Ammonios,its foundation date is unknown, but the tradition says that Bishop Ammonios of Esna built the monastery on the spot where governor Arianus massacred the inhabitants of Esna, the monastery has two churches ,old and new, the old one consists of two churches ,the north is dedicated to St.Ammonios,and the south church dedicated to the martyrs ,both of them are dated back to the twelfth century,Loon G.J.M.(2010)"The Esna Monasteries:Dayr Al-Shuhada and Dayr Al Fakhuri",in Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt,V.2,Nag-Hammadi and Esna,edited by Gawdat Gabra,Cairo,p.226.

8- Loros:A long narrow scarf wrapped around the torso and draped over the left hand ,was one of the most important and distinctive parts of the most formal and ceremonial type of imperial Byzantine costume,worn by the imperial family and a few of the most senior officials,Condra J.(2008) The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Clothing through World History,V.1,United States,p.139.
9- **Al Fakhuri Monastery** is situated about nine kilometers north of Esna, near the village of Asfun, the name Al-Fakhuri (the potter) is obscure, it is dedicated to St. Matthew the poor, the oldest part of its church is dated back to the eighth century, but the other parts are dated back to the twelfth century, Loon G.J.M. (2010) "The Esna Monasteries: Dayr Al-Shuhada and Dayr Al Fakhuri", in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt, V.2, Nag-Hammadi and Esna*, edited by Gawdat Gabra, Cairo, p. 233.

10- **Monastery of St. Simon** is situated about one thousand two hundred meters from the west bank of the Nile at the latitude south of the island of Elephantine, Coptic and Arabic sources call it Anba Hatre (Hidria), but later it was given the name of St. Simon by archaeologists, St. Hatra was an anchorite who was consecrated as a bishop of Aswan, died in the time of Theodosius I, although most of its parts is ruined, but it is of a great architectural interest, as its church, which dated back to the eleventh century, provides the most important example of the domed oblong church in Egypt, Gabra G. (2002) *Coptic Monasteries*, Cairo, pp. 108-110; The square nimbus indicates that the person was living at the time the painting was executed, Gabra G., *Coptic Monasteries*, P. 107.

11- **The Monastery of Saint Macarius** (Anpa Maqar or Abu Maqar), named after its patron saint Macarius the Great, is the southernmost monastery in Wadi al-Natrun, contains the Old Church of St. Macarius which has two sanctuaries, the southern is dedicated to St. Benjamin, and the northern to St. Mark, Gabra G., *Coptic Monasteries*, p. 56.

12- **Saint Antony Monastery**, in the second half of the fourth century a monastic community seems to have grown up around the site where the saint Antony lived in the Eastern Desert near the Red Sea, the recent Monastery possesses a number of churches, the most important one is the Old Church or the Great Church of Saint Antony that has many impressive preserved paintings, Gabra G., *Coptic Monasteries*, pp. 73-75.

13- **Virgin Hodegetria** (She who shows the way) is The Virgin who are holding The Christ and pointing to Him with her right hand as the source of salvation of mankind, Evans H.C. (1997) *The Glory of Byzantium Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261*, New York, p. 138.

14- **The Monastery of St. Paul “Dayr Anba Bula“** is located about thirty-nine kilometers southwest of the Red Sea lighthouse station of Za’farana. It bears the name of its patron, Saint Paul, presumably Paul of Thebes, who withdrew into the Eastern Desert in about 250 A.D. to escape the persecution of the Emperor Decius. He lived in an underground cave for almost ninety years shortly before his death, about 340/341 St. Antony visited him, and after his death, the cave became a pilgrimage site and developed gradually into a monastery, Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, p. 88.


16- **The orarion** is a strip of silk or cotton material measuring about 10 feet (3 m) by 6 inches (15 cm) and embroidered with crosses or IC (the first two letters of the name of Jesus Christ). It is worn by deacons over the sticharion. The center section of the strip is held under the right arm and passed upward to the left shoulder across the breast and then allowed to hang down loosely to the feet in front and the back, Basilios A. (1991) "Liturgical Vestments", In *Coptic Encyclopedia*, V. 5, p. 1475, New York, edited by Aziz A. Atiya.

17- **The Book of Tobit or The Book of Tobias** is a book of scripture that is part of the Catholic and Orthodox biblical canon, telling the story of Tobit who was righteous, devout, and charitable

**الملخص العربي**

هناك اعتقاد سائد أن الملائكة كائنات روحاوية يمكن أن تظهر للبشر الورعين. وقد انعكس ذلك على تصويرها في الفن القبطي على الأيقونات والجداريات والمنحوتات الحجرية، حيث تظهر الملائكة غالباً مع السيدة العذراء والسيد المسيح ممسكة ببعضها وشكل كروي مزخرف بعضاً عناصر، يرمز إلى عالمية مملكة السيد المسيح ويؤكد على وظيفتهم كوزراء ومساعدين في البلات السماوى وكسفراء مستقلين عن توصيل الرسائل الإلهية للبشر مما يتحضر الوجود الآلهي، وبذلك أصبح هذا الشكل الكروي جزءاً هاماً من الزي الرسمي للملائكة وبماة بطاقة اثبات وعلامة لشخصياتهم الملائكية.

**Plates**

Pl.1: A limestone relief of The Virgin and The Christ child with two archangels


Pl.2: A double-sided icon of St. Theodore, the General and the archangel Gabriel

Pl.3: Painting on the central conch of the church in the White Monastery
Above: The complete scene shows The Christ *Pantocrator* enthroned within a *mandorla*
Below: Right and left: The Two Archangels holding staff and sphere with decorations


Pl.4: Painting on the southern apse of the northern church in Deir Al-Shuhada, Esna
Above: The Complete Scene shows The Christ *Pantocrator* and The Virgin
Below: Detailed section of the lower register shows The Virgin between two angels holding spheres
Pl. 5: The painting on the northern chapel in Deir Al-Shuhada shows an archangel holding a sphere with flower decoration.


Pl. 6: A wall painting in Al-Fakhory Monastery, eastern arch of the church shows an archangel holding a sphere with a cross.

Pl.7: The wall painting on the eastern semidome of the sanctuary in the Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simon)

Above: The complete scene shows The Christ enthroned within the mandorla
Below: Detailed section shows the archangel holding a sphere decorated with seven lines intersected in the middle

After, Leroy J. (1975) "Les Peintures des Couvents Désert D'Esna", MIFAO. XCIV, pl. IX

Pl.8: Painting of Archangel Michael on the northern wall of the church in Abu Maqar Monastery

Pl. 9: Painting on the apse of the eastern wall of the haikal, Monastery of Saint Antony
Upper register shows Christ Pantocrator
Lower register The Virgin Hodegetria enthroned between two archangels holding spheres decorated with cross


Pl. 10: Painting on the arch between the nave and the khurus in the Monastery of St. Antony
Above: The complete scene on the arch shows Gabriel and Michael
Below: The archangel Michael holding a sphere decorated with the sacred monogram

After Moorsel Paul, V. (1995) “Le Monastère de Saint-Antoine”, MIFAO, CXII, Fig. 30, P. 111
Pl.11: Painting on the arch between the nave and the chapel of the four animals in the Monastery of St. Antony

Left: The archangel stands to the west holding a sphere

Right: A detailed section of the sphere decorated with a delicate small portrait of the Christ

After, Moorsel, Paul, V. (1995) "Le Monastère de Saint-Antoine", MIFAO CXII, pl.58, fig.31, p.113

Pl.12: The Painting on eastern wall of the sanctuary of St. Antony, Monastery of St. Paul

Above: The Complete scene of The Christ Pantocrator enthroned within a mandorla

Below: Detailed section shows the archangel holding a yellow sphere decorated with blue tongue
After, Moorsel, Paul, V. (2002) "Le Monastère de Saint-Paul". *MIFAO* 120, fig. 7, p. 27, fig. 17, p. 31

Pl. 13: Painting On the south wall of the central chamber in the cave church of St. Paul Monastery shows The Virgin between two Seraphim holding spheres.

After, Moorsel, Paul, V. (2002) "Le Monastère de Saint-Paul". *MIFAO* 120, pl. 31, p. 52

Pl. 14: Painting in the Haikal of the Twenty-Four Priests, Monastery of St. Paul

Above: The complete scene shows The Christ *Pantocrator* and The Seven Archangels blowing their trumpets.

Below: A detailed section of two archangels holding spheres decorated with diagonal cross.
After, Moorsel, Paul, V. (2002) "Le Monastère de Saint-Paul", MIFAO 120, fig. 22, p. 68, fig. 43, p. 71

Pl. 15: Painting on the west wall of the central chamber in the church of St. Paul Monastery shows the three archangels holding spheres with diagonal cross and long tongue.

After, Moorsel, Paul, V. (2002) "Le Monastère de Saint-Paul", MIFAO 120, fig. 32, p. 55

Pl. 16: Painting in the room of the four archangels, Saint Paul Monastery

Above: Complete scene of the four archangels

Below: A detailed section of Michael holding a sphere with diagonal cross.
After, Moorsel, Paul, V. (2002) "Le Monastère de Saint-Paul", *MIFAO* 120, fig. 26, p. 83, pl. 56, p. 85

Pl. 17: Illumination from the Oriental Manuscript (No. 7021, fol. 1a) in the British Museum shows archangel Michael holding a sphere decorated with a square with Alpha and Omega

After, Budge A. (1915) *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in The Dialect of Upper Egypt*, AMS press, pl. XXIII
Pl. 18: Painting on the walls of the chapel XLV in Bawit shows St. Peter holding Eucharist Loaf (left) and St. Paul holds the vase of red wine (right).

After, Clédat J. (1999) "Le Monastère et la Néceopole de Baouit", *MIFAO* 111, pls. 82-83, p. 86

Pl. 19: Roman coin of Valens and Valentinian I holding two similar spheres

Pl.20: Coin of Gratian and Valentinian II holding a sphere with Victory hovering in the background


Pl. 21: Roman Coin of Justinian I (527 to 565 A.D.)

Above: The obverse depicted with the bust of the emperor holding a sphere crowned with a cross

Below: Reverse depicted with standing figure of a winged angel holding a sphere crowned with a cross

After, Whitting P.D. (1973) *Monnaies Byzantines*, Fribourg, pl. 15
Pl.22: An ivory scepter top of Leo VI (886-912 A.D.) showing The Virgin placing a crown on the head of the emperor and Gabriel is holding a sceptre and a sphere.


Pl.23: An ivory diptych represents The Virgin and The Christ child between two angels, the one stands to the right holds a sphere with diagonal cross.