

The Camel in Coptic Art an Artistic and Archaeological Study

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Abstract

The camel is considered one of the most important desert animals. Evidence for its presence returns to the early periods but it was not widely used as other animals in Egypt. From the 1st and 2nd dynasties camels were known among the domesticated animals such as donkeys, oxen, pigs, and other cattle, then it stopped in appearance for a period. The camel's real spread in Egypt was with the Greek conquest, the Ptolemaic and Roman periods to the degree that they were used in their armies. Evidence for their presence in Egypt since the early periods were found; painted on walls or artifacts that were found formed in the shape of camels, beside the daily life utensils and toys. Moreover, pieces of *ostraca* having contracts for sales and purchases operations including its prices gave us more information about it and about the new job of the camels' shepherds. Camels were known during the Coptic period, as represented on the walls of the tombs as in Al-Bagawat tombs in Kharga oasis especially the chapel of Exodes and walls of the Monasteries and Churches. Camels were used by the artists in depicting the religious stories of the Old Testament or accompanying saints especially St. Mena and were represented during sharing in daily life works such as transporting crops from place to another. Applying descriptive and analytical methods, this research aims to indicate the type of camels, to trace the history of camel's entrance into Egypt, to uncover the the camel's scenes in Egypt during the Coptic period and to study the different appearances of camels and its development in art.

Keywords: Camel, Coptic art, St. Mena, Terracotta, Wall Painting, Lanterns.

Introduction

Since the early ages travelling by land in Egypt occurred in more than one method; firstly, the commoners used to walk or ride donkeys, while the wealthy and military chiefs used to sit on chairs or thrones carried by people. It was said that horses appeared in use directly after the invasion of Hyksos to Egypt (2nd intermediate period)¹, despite that evidences for the presence of horses in Egypt begun 200 years earlier and their use were mainly with the military chariots or ridden and not used as draught animals for transporting weights². It was also said that Ramses II owned around 2000 square meter area for his own stables³.

Oxen were the most probable early beast of heavy loads, and one of the most preferred and popular animals, having higher pulling power than carrying capacity. About 3000 B.C. these oxen were replaced by donkeys which were believed to be better adapter especially between places that still inhabitable. Moreover, the ox is a pulling animal while the donkey is qualified as pack animal⁴. It is supposed that from the Pre-Dynastic period to the Roman period oxen were the mostly used transporting animal⁵.

¹ H. Kopp, "Desert Travel and Transport in Ancient Egypt, an Overview Based on Epigraphic, Pectoral and Archeological Evidence"; *Desert Road Archaeology in Ancient Egypt*, F. Forster and H. Riemer (ed.), Koln, 2013, p. 107, 108.

² A. Ruiz, *the Spirit of Ancient Egypt*, Algora publishing, New York, 2001, p. 73.

³ See horses and their use. M. Paprocki, *Roads in the Desert of Roman Egypt, Analysis, Atlas, Commentary*, Short Run Press, London, 2019, p. 82-84.

⁴ H. Kopp, *op.cit*, p. 11, 109.

⁵ See oxen and its uses. M. Paprocki, *op.cit*, p. 79- 82.

Camels in comparison to other animals such as oxen, donkeys and horses, they are more preferable in long distances specially that they can survive longer with less food and water requirements, they are qualified to be used in waterless surroundings and carry at least twice much more than donkeys, in spite of that they didn't have the chances of being used as other beasts. It's known that Camels didn't become a significant method of transportation till the Persian invasion which was about 525B.C. it's said that they brought a large number of camels with them, despite evidences indicated that camels were known a long time before⁶.

Camels were also useful to wealthy landowners, who had greater needs for local transportation more than most farmers. Sometimes camels and donkeys were found working together in providing flexibility⁷.

Camels Appearance in Egypt:

Camel (κάμηλοι, *kameloi*) βιζάριον (*bizarion*), Latin *Camelus*, *dromas*, *dromeda*. There are two types of camels in which both of them were known in old ages which are: the single-humped dromedary camel (*Camelus dromedaries*) found in Arabia, western Asia and Africa, and the double humped one Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*) found in central Asia. The camel was known since Old ages and most of the historians mentioned it in their writings such as Herodotus and Strabo described camels and their uses in their writings, and Aristotle who was fascinated by the camel's anatomy and mentioned its types⁸.

The date of camel's appearance in Egypt is still under study, but no one can deny that their coming marked an important stage in the history of land transport. For the first time a regular trade was established by man, beside the contact across to the desert⁹. Only rare evidences were found to indicate their presence in ancient Egypt; thus, it is difficult to know whether they were used as a transporting animal or not. But what was proved is that they increased in use with the Greek conquest and the Ptolemaic and Roman periods¹⁰.

A general agreement conducting that the earliest Egyptian and Mesopotamian archaeological evidence for domestication dates as early as 4000 B.C. and some other evidences from ancient Egypt pointing to the early presence of dromedaries in the area which could have been mainly introduced directly from the Arabian lands. Its mentioned through writings that camel's domestication descended from the Arabian lands might be the allied Arab troops and appeared in Egypt only with the 7th-6th century B.C. following the Assyrian and Persian invasion. Other historians proved that camels appeared in the region of delta about 700 B.C. with Palestinians, and about 670 B.C. came into Egypt under Asarhaddan, despite the Assyrians did not normally use camels in their armies¹¹.

After the Greek conquest in 332 BC, camels (κάμηλοι, *kameloi*) were used on a larger scale and according to the opinion stating that they were brought by Alexander the Great and used them when he embarked upon his expedition to Siwa Oasis to consult the oracle of Zeus Ammon. In 46 B.C. King Juba of Namibia used camels in his fight against Julius Caesar, then Caesar after winning the battle captured several of them.

⁶ See the different cattle uses. M. Paprocki, *op.cit.*, p.76-78.

⁷ R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1991, p. 39.

⁸ K.F. Kitchell, *Animals in the Ancient World from A to Z*, Routledge, New York, 2014, p. 22; J.Cerny, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, Cambridge University, London, 1976, p. 55.

⁹ R.J. Forbes, "the Coming of the Camel"; *Studies in Ancient Technology*, Vol II, Leiden, 1955, p. 187.

¹⁰ M. Paprocki, *op.cit.*, p. 67, 68.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 68.

During the Ptolemaic dynasty (305- 30 BC.) as mentioned on some selected papyri and some of the economic texts and more other sources, camels were used as beasts of burden and transportation especially in the quarries and carried loads of the Indian cargo from the Red sea ports to the Nile valley. Furthermore, it's said that in Egypt all black Bactrian camels were entered by Ptolemy I (*Soter*) (305-282 B.C.), and during the reign of Ptolemy II (*Philadelphus*) (285-247B.C.) camels were introduced in greater numbers into Egypt and were used in his grand procession, during which he showed two sets of camels carrying loads of eastern spices and continuing their normal routine duties on the eastern desert trails. During his reign according to Strabo trade routes were established across the Eastern Desert, linking *Coptus* on the Nile with the Red Sea harbors of Berenice and *Myus Hormus* by a road and a chain of cisterns for the benefit of camel-merchants, the road that continued as a camel route for Arabian aromatics in the time of Augustus¹².

During the Roman period, the use of camels increased but they did not substitute donkeys, they entered for the first time Egypt's Roman army who used camel troops and furthermore used by merchants. When camels used in quarries as a transporting animal in the eastern desert their prices increased during that period and became the second most expensive desert pack animal after horses. The dromedary had acquired the place it has in the Egyptian trade today in southern Egypt especially in the Eastern Desert and probably in Nubia¹³. By the First and Second centuries B.C. camels were used on caravan routes to the Red sea as mentioned by historians and helped in transporting goods between the Nile valley of the city of *Coptos* and the port of the Red sea of *Myos*, and it considered the traditional source of income for nomads. Camels were used by emperors as mentioned by historians for example Claudius used them in circus games, Nero showed camels pulling a *Quadrigae*¹⁴, *Elegabalus* (*Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus*) showed camels pulling chariots on paintings¹⁵.

One of the most important sources that proves the use of camels during the Roman era are the camel sell contracts especially those returning back to the 2nd century and from which one knows the rise of camel prices during that period of time. By the 2nd-3rd century the depiction of camels on artifacts became more realistic, and with the 4th century they were widely appeared on terracotta¹⁶.

It is good to know that in later periods it was known that the nomads called Serabite on the camel's humps, as the camel's hump takes the same shape of the hill which topped by the temple of Hathor in Serabite el-Khadim¹⁷.

Archaeological Findings

Despite the few findings for camels related to the early Egyptian period, but it is enough to give an accurate proof for its presence in Egypt since the early periods. From 40,000 B.C, in the western desert of Egypt and the beginning of the modern Acholian civilization, in the region of Beir Tarafawy, remains of teeth for a huge ruminant animal, which probably a kind of camels is

¹² *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹³ H. Kopp, *op.cit*, p.110,111

¹⁴ Quadrigae is a car or chariot drawn by four animals.

¹⁵ K.F. Kitchell, *op.cit*, p. 22; R.G. Morkot, *the A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, Scarecrow press, 2003, p. 56.

¹⁶ M. Paprocki, P. 69.

¹⁷ محمد سميح عافية، التعدين في مصر قديما وحديثا، القاهرة، ١٩٨٥، ص ٩٥.

found. Between 40,000 BC. and 35,000 BC. in the Middle stone age to the western south of Beir Tarafawy, gazelles lived with the two humped camels in a semi dry environment¹⁸.

Excavations had revealed; few finds dates to the early pre-dynastic ages and more evidence from the early dynastic periods such as a camel grave that returned back to the 1st/2nd dynasties and few depictions showing ridden camels from the First dynasty (3200-2900 B.C.) beside the curved vases in the shape of camels found at *Djeda*¹⁹. Moreover, from the First dynasty a limestone ointment pot with the shape of a sitting camel was found by Moller in 1906 at Abusir-el-Melek from a cemetery of over 1000 crouched burials and now preserved in Berlin Museum. Furthermore, from Abydos W.F. Petrie found a pottery head seems certainly to be for a camel.

From the Third dynasty (2700-2615 B.C.) or late Fourth dynasty (2616-2500 B.C.) a cord made of camel hair was found by Caton-Thompson in 1934 in the Gypsum works of Um-es-Sawan in Fayum. More figures were found related to the Sixth dynasty (2350-2180 B.C.) as Schweinfurth in 1912 described an engraving from Gezire near Aswan referring to camels. No findings were found related to the periods between the end of the Sixth till the beginning of the Nineteenth dynasty (1170-1090 B.C.)²⁰. From the Nineteenth dynasty a dromedary statuette was found in the northern tomb at Deir Rifeh near Assiut, it takes the shape of a camel burdened with two jars, the water jars here is not of a form used during the Greco-roman period, thus it is impossible to assign the figure to this period, it is near to be as early as Ramisside period (fig.1)²¹. Moreover, a bowl made of the local Nile clay adorned with a likeness of a dromedary camel was found in Pi-Ramesses, pointing to the early presence of dromedaries in the region which they could directly brought from the Arabian lands.

Evidence for camel presence in Egypt from the 30th and the 31st dynasty, can be seen in the tomb of Petosiris in tuna El- Gabal, is a unique offering representation showing a small camel with a gazelle (fig.2)²². Furthermore, there are two- and three-dimensional images for camels and their riders from *Meroe*, beside the texts that proofs the extensive use of the desert routs from the Fourth Cataract during the First century²³. The Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art possesses terracotta of a camel from Egypt related to late 2nd to early 3rd century (fig.3).

The Camel in the Holy Bible

The Biblical texts reveal some clear clues for the use of camels, that is mentioned more than one time and for different significances and references. They mentioned in the Bible in reference to; carrying burdens as in the story of Joseph's sale by his brothers into slavery "Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt" (Gn. 37: 25). Furthermore, in (1Kgs.10:2) and (2Kgs.8:9), about wealth. In (Jb.1:3), (Gn.12:16), (Gn.30:43), in reference to the forbidden meet. In (Lev. 11:4), (Deut.14:7), mentioned by the Christ in giving examples. It's mentioned in (Matt.19:24), (Matt.23:24), said that they were used in war in (1Sm.30:17), (Judg.7: 12), mentioned as animals to be ridden (Gn.24:61). In drawing chariots in (Is. 21:7), beside the use of their hair in making clothes as mentioned in (Matt.3:4)²⁴.

¹⁸ بياتركس ميدان رينيس, عصور ما قبل التاريخ في مصر من المصريين الاوائل الي الفراغة الاوائل, ترجمة ماهر جويجاتي, القاهرة ٢٠٠٠, ص ٥١, ٦٧.

¹⁹ A. Ruiz, *op.cit*, p.73-76.

²⁰ H. Kopp, *op.cit*, p.111.

²¹ A.S. Saber, "The Camel in Ancient Egypt, Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting for Animal Production Under Arid Conditions", ISOCARD, Vol. 1, United Arab Emirates University, 1998, p. 209-212.

²² N. Cherpion, "Le tombeau de Petosiris, a Tauna el- Gebel", *IFAO*, le Caire, 2007, p. 143, 144.

²³ R.G. Morkot, *op.cit*, p. 56; M. Paprocki, *op.cit*, p.68.

²⁴ The Holy Bible, International Bible Society, (Arabic_English), London, 1999.

The Camel in Coptic Art

The Egyptian artist used to represent all types of animals (predators, domestic and aquatic), birds and insects in his art as a part of representing his daily life, as seen on the walls of the Egyptian temples, tombs or museums. Some animals had the greatest opportunity in appearance such as lions, cows, oxen, and others, while others are rarely appeared and did not even mentioned in their writings such as camels.

Camels were represented by the Coptic artists in their artwork, and their appearance during the Coptic period increased more than the previous periods; they played an important role in depicting the religious stories of the Old Testament as represented on the walls and ceilings of Al- Bagawat tombs or accompanying saints especially saint Mena who had a great opportunity in appearance with camels according to his story. Camels were also appeared in the daily life scenes; carrying and transporting crops, toys and lanterns were made in the shape of camels. The camels' different appearances will be discussed in detail through the research.

Camels on Wall Painting

Camels had a good chance in appearance on the walls of tombs and monasteries. They were used by the Coptic artist either within the Biblical stories or as a part of the daily life scenes. From Al-Bagawat Chapels Camels appeared through the depiction of the Old Testament's stories; from the chapel of Exodus, the scene that shows the Israelites following Moses; camels can be seen obviously moving with them or ridden by some of the Israelites beside other animals (fig.4)²⁵. Moreover, camels appeared in the story of the arrival of Abraham's servant to Rebecca, in which camels are carrying baskets on their backs followed by the servant (fig.5)²⁶.

Under the scene of the Seven Virgins, is the scene of a garden, despite it is in a bad state of preservation but one can see two men dragging two loaded camels pulling them through their robes (fig.6.a)²⁷, the representation of the garden here is resembling gardens in ancient Egypt?²⁸ (fig. 6.b) and the scene may represent the process of collecting olives and its transportation by camels.

From the Western Nave in the church of Saint Antony's Monastery in the Red Sea, is a colorful painting for saint Mena, showing him riding a horse and beneath the horse's feet is a beautiful representation for two camels and a man holding a stick, according to M. Jones the man is whipping the camel to the right side that refuses to rise, and appeared with opened mouth, reared its head back, giving the impression that it refuses to go and leave the place, while the camel to the left side is standing and one more small one is standing beneath its legs and is shown to be suckling from his mother (fig.7). The animals' suckling scenes are rarely appeared in Coptic art in comparison with its appearance in the ancient Egyptian art, but what is unique here is; for the first time the suckling scene to be with a camel. This iconography dates to the 13th Century AD²⁹.

²⁵ A. Fakhry, *The Necropolis of el- Bagawat in Kharga Oasis*, 1951, p.47, 50, fig. 33, 34.

²⁶ M. Zibawi, *Bagawat, Peintures Paléochrétiennes d'Égypte*, Picard, Paris, 2005, p. 109, fig. 43; احمد فخري, الصحراء المصرية, جبانة البجوات في الواحة الخارجة, 1989, ص 92 شكل 47

²⁷ A. Fakhry, op.cit, p. 26.

²⁸ The ancient Egyptian artist used to represent gardens on the walls of temples, tombs and everything, and the ancient Egyptians knew a lot about the plant science. They gardens were located at the beginning of garden making as an art, the artists were interested in creating landscape that reflected the mental images of how the world was created. A.Wilkinson, the garden in ancient Egypt, Rubican press, Michigan university, 1998.; one example of the beautifully represented gardens is the garden of Nakht, showing trees, shrubs, many types of fruits such as palms, pomegranate, grapes, vines, and lotus flowers(blue and pink) surrounding a pool. Ph. Steel, Passport to the Past Ancient Egypt, Rosen Publishing, 2009, p. 16, 17.

²⁹ M. Jones, "the Church of St. Antony painting and architecture"; *Monastic Visions Wall Paintings in the Monastery of St. Antony*, (Ed.) E.S. Bolman, American Research Center in Yale University Press, New haven, and London, 2002, fig. 4.6.

From Chapel no. 30 in the Monastery of Bawit, the representation of the lower part of this chapel shows two camels (one humped types) to the left and right side of saint Mena, who is standing in the midst of the scene. Unfortunately, the upper part of the scene that represents the saint is missing due to its bad state of preservation. In observing the painting one can find two more camels below the feet of the saint and it is considered the first time for the appearance of four camels in connection with saint Mena in the same painting (fig.8)³⁰, this painting returns to the 8th century AD.³¹.

Furthermore, from the region of Kellia is a unique piece of fresco was found painted with different geometrical, animal and plant decorations. Inside a frame of two lines, is an entrance shaped lines topped with an arch, to its right side are camels, seem to be in a state of motion (running). Towards the entrance, the camels are coming out from a tent shaped object. To the right side of the scene is another entrance with a rounded arch, amidst of it, is a cross shaped decoration and to its right side is a walking animal, seems to be a lion (fig.9)³².

From the same region of Kellia, is a hand drawing lines on a wall for a big fish and an animal that seems to be a camel, under its feet there is a writing inscription but unfortunately in a bad state of preservation (fig.10).³³

A partly damaged mural came from the region of Kom Abu Girgeh dates to the Seventh-eighth centuries? AD, and now preserved in Alexandria Museum, its upper part is damaged while the lower part shows the lower part of St. Mena's body between two camels³⁴, in which the camel to the right side is kneeling beside the saint's leg, while the one to the left side raises his head towards the saint (fig.11)³⁵.

From Abu Maqar Monastery in Wadi Al-Natron's region, a wall painting, that returns to the Seventh-eighth centuries? AD. Representing St. Mena standing with two opened hands in front of the viewer, to the left side of him is Jesus Christ standing under arched columns with crossed halo holding the decorated Gospel in his left hand and blessing by his right one. Under St. Mena's feet are two kneeling (one humped type) camels, in which the one to the left side is eating from a plate in the middle of them, in a unique representation of its type, while the other camel is looking up towards the saint (fig.12)³⁶.

³⁰ عزت زكي حامد قادوس ومحمد عبد الفتاح السيد، الاثار والفنون القبطية، الإسكندرية، ٢٠٠٠، ص ٤٧٨، شكل ١٨٥.

³¹ St. Menas was son of wealthy Christian parents from Egypt in 3rd Century A.D., his father was a high official in the Roman government service, and his family moved Asia Minor. He entered the military service and became an officer, then he was martyred under the reign of Diocletian. When he refused to deny his Christian faith. N. A. Zekry, "The Iconography of St. Menas in the Coptic Art", *Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels-University of Sadat City*, Vol. 1, Issue 2/2, December 2017, p.37. The pilgrims came from all the world to visit his sanctuary that was located at Karm Abu Mina, in the desert south of Alexandria (Abu mina). The appearance of saint Mena accompanied with the two camels, came from his story recounting that the saint body was taken to Egypt by his former army comrades who were transferred temporarily to the region of Lake Mareotis. On their return to Phrygia, the camels carrying the coffin containing Menas' relics stopped at a village called Este (?) and refused to proceed any further. At that place the emperor decided to build a basilica for pilgrims who used to take away a terracotta ampulla as a souvenir containing oil from the lamps or holy water drawn from the well there; this explain the big number of such *ampulae* that were found far away from Egypt, known as "eulogy *ampulae*". L. Torok, *Transfigurations of Hellenism Aspects of Late Antique Art in Egypt AD. 250 – 700*, Brill, Liden, Boston, 2005, p. 23; L. Torok, *Egypt after the Pharaohs: Treasures of Coptic Art from Egyptian Collections, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest*, 2005, p.303.

³² جمال هيرمينيا، تصوير المناظر الدينية والرمزية في الفن القبطي، رسالة دكتوراه، كلية الاثار جامعة القاهرة، القاهرة، ٢٠١١، ص ٢٤٩

³³ F. Dumas et A. Guillaumont, *Kellia I Kom 219, Fouilles Excutees en 1964 et 1965*, le Caire, 1969, pl. XXXVI.

³⁴D.N. Wilber, "The Coptic Frescoes of Saint Menas at Medinet Habu", *the Art Bulletin* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Jun., 1940), p. 92; N. A. Zekry, *op.cit*, p. 43.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pl. 10.

One of the unique representations for St. Mena and the camels, came from Medinet Habu, it is considered a type of mural that portrays St. Mena in a series of scenes, dates to the 8th Century AD. It starts with St. Mena in his normal prayer attitude in front of his tomb church and basilica church in Marriot Alexandria, moving to the right-side St. Mena appears giving a golden brick to the camels' shepherd. In addition, St. Mena is depicted as an equestrian saint riding a horse, and the last scene shows the people and worshipers visiting his church after his death (fig.13)³⁷.

Camels appeared on the dome of St. Paul's Monastery in the Red Sea, a representation returns to the 18th century, it is said to be painted by the monk Abd al-Saied al- Malawany. The painting represents an army of equestrian saints, their names are written in Coptic and Arabic languages beneath them. A Coptic inscription in the dome dates the building to 1713 A.D and mentioned Patriarch John as "the one who took care of his church"³⁸. What is unique in this painting, is the number of camels with the saint and not only two as their usual appearance, each two camels are moving in a different direction, two of them are beneath St. Mena's horse, and two are moving with their shepherd. All the camels are of the familiar one-humped-type that was known in Egypt (fig.14).

Camels on Coptic Icons

Camels appeared on Coptic icons in a accompany with saints especially St. Mena, most of the icons returns to the late Coptic period.

The Icon of St. Mena from the church of St. Mercurius, monastery of St. Mercurius, Old Cairo: an icon among six icons from originally ten icons for equestrian martyr saints, dates to the 13th century. The importance of this icon is considered of being one of the oldest *Tempra* icons found in Egypt, it shows St. Mena riding his horse, above two kneeling (one humped type) camels, with different colors; in which the one to the right side is light in color while the one to the left side is dark in color. The icon is egg *Tempra* painted type, priming (*Gypsum*), linen, wood (sycamore panel and cypress traverses), inscribed in Greek, Coptic on background, in Naskhi Arabic on scrolls and frame (fig. 15)³⁹.

Ivory

Ivory was considered one of the most common materials known in Egypt since the Pre-historic period and continued in use during the Coptic and the late antiquity periods, and Alexandria famed by its production at that time. From the Coptic period many pieces of ivory artifacts depicting scenes from the daily life were left beside those depicting religious topics especially that started to appear from the fourth century⁴⁰.

Camels on Ivory *Pyxis* with Scenes from Saint Mena's Life: This oval ivory *pyxis* is considered one of many *pyxis* found in Egypt and many other regions around the world. This small *pyx* has reliefs representing scenes from martyrdom and sanctuary of St. Mena, in which saint Mena is considered one of the most common saints to be represented on ivory⁴¹. On one side he stands in front of a Roman officer who is sitting as a judge upon a stool with cushion, his feet resting on a footstool, in another scene he is fallen on one of his knees while an executioner grasps him by the hair and about to cut his neck by his raised sward, while an angel flying down as if to receive the

³⁷ D.N. "Wilber, op.cit, p. 89.

³⁸ G. Gabra and G.J.V. loon, *The Churches of Egypt from the Journey of the Holy Family to the Present Day*, the American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2007, P. 22.

³⁹ Z. Skalova, and G. Gabra, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, Egyptian International Publishing Company, Egypt, 2006., p. 184.

⁴⁰ S.M. Halim, *the Arts in Egypt in the Early Byzantine Era*", master Thesis, Cairo, 2014, P. 57.

⁴¹ O.M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East*, in the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum, London, 1901, p.54, no. 298.

soul of the saint, then finally he stands beneath an arch supported by two twisted columns in a prayer attitude with two raised hands flanked by two recumbent (one humped type) camels raising their necks as they are looking towards the saint with accurate details. This piece is now preserved in the British Museum, London, dates back to the 6th century, probably made in Alexandria, formerly in the Collection of Mr. Nesbitt, and a lot of art historians associate this box with the style of Maximianus throne (fig. 16)⁴².

Camels on Ivory Panel Accompanying St. Mena: An ivory panel of St. Mena from the Eastern Mediterranean region or Egypt, dates back to the 8th Century A.D, was discovered in 1910, and now preserved in Milano Museum of Archaeology, it represents saint Mena in a prayer attitude inside his sanctuary in Egypt, flanked by two camels⁴³. These two (one humped type) camels are unique in their style with recess of hair on their hump, they are kneeling on the ground in a state of submission to the standing saint (fig.17)⁴⁴.

Terracotta

Terracotta is a type of fired clay, typically of a brownish-red color and unglazed, it was known in Egypt since the Pre-dynastic periods and continued in use during Egypt's different ages⁴⁵.

Camels on Terracotta Flasks: A circular flat terracotta flask used to be filled with sacred oil or water from the spring at Abu Mena region. They have in almost inscription on one of its faces and on the other face is the scene of St. Mena in his normal appearance standing with outstretched arms in a prayer attitude between two kneeling camels. These terracotta flasks spread widely all over the world, especially the eastern Mediterranean during the 4th/5th century, Maryut was one of the places of its production (fig.18)⁴⁶.

Most surviving Mena's flasks show the saint as an orant intercessor flanked by a pair of camels. The Camels flanking St. Mena on these terracotta flasks appeared in different styles and sizes: sometimes putting their heads near the feet of the saint, and in other times sitting with raised necks towards the saint or rotating necks⁴⁷.

Earthenware

The earthenware is a pottery that made of clay fired to a porous state that can be made impervious to liquids using a glaze.

A Small Decorated Earthenware Statue of a Camel: Among the few excavations for camels as an earthenware returns to the 5th century, is a small, decorated statue of a camel found in Egypt, and now preserved in Louvre Museum, E27426. This type of statues was found in many places such as Alexandria, Caranis, Edfu and others, to be found in temples, houses accompanied with another statues for gods such as Isis, Herberates, Aphrodite, Min , serapes and Bes. There is an opinion stating that if these gods were worshiped in houses, so a connection can be made with other animals such as camels, dogs, pigs, and horses which they found accompanying gods⁴⁸. In

⁴² F. Carbol, *DACL*, fig. 271, p. 1116; The British Museum *Catalogue of the Ivory Carvings of the Christian Era*, pl. vii; D. Wilber, "The Coptic Frescoes of Saint Menas at Medinet Habu", *the Art Bulletin* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Jun., 1940), p. 92.

⁴³ F. Carbol, *op.cit*, fig. 270.

⁴⁴ D. Wilber, D., "The Coptic Frescoes of Saint Menas at Medinet Habu", *the Art Bulletin* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Jun. 1940), fig. 7.

⁴⁵ S.M. Halim, *op.cit*, 59,60.

⁴⁶ A. Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archeology, the Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to Middle Ages*, Mit Press, Cambridge, Massachusette, London and England, 1978, fig. 5.52.

⁴⁷ G. Vikan, *Byzantine pilgrimage art*, Dumbarton oaks, trutees for Harvard University, Washington, 1982, p. 16.

⁴⁸ دومينيك بينازيث, الفن القبطي في مصر ٢٠٠٠ عام من المسيحية, شكل, ٢٢٠.

the other hand these animals might have been used as a symbol of cattle and property kept under the protection of these gods and this theory is more near to truth (fig.19).

Camels on Metals

Camels were represented on different daily life utensils made of metal, such as lanterns, statues, and different vessels, despite the metal objects that came from the early Coptic period are rare⁴⁹.

Copper Lantern in the Shape of Camel: A unique copper lantern in the shape of camel, returns back to the Byzantine period, purchased from Luxor 1925, and now preserved in Louvre Museum E11865⁵⁰. This lantern takes the shape of a camel, in which the camel's body is the place where the oil is placed, it holds the lantern's cover by its mouth, carrying on its back four baskets, in the same time they are considered the four gabs for placing the lantern's oil. The lantern can stand on a flat surface as its organized legs give stability, and it can be hanged from the chain attached to its head and back (fig. 20.a)⁵¹.

Lanterns taking the shape of animals, were known in Roman and Byzantine Egypt especially those taking the shape of pigeons and dolphins. But lanterns taking the shape of camels are rarely found in Nubia, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, on the way of that animals which became important for the economy of this region.

Among the metal work objects that were found in Egypt, is a bronze camel shaped Lamp that is similar to the previous copper lantern, in which the body of the camel is the oil container itself with a small round in his back (fig. 20.b)⁵². A unique yellow Bronze ladle in the shape of camel was found in Egypt (fig. 20.c)⁵³.

Camels on Stone

Different types of stones were used by the Egyptian artists and continued till nowadays such as Limestone, Granite, Basalt, Sandstone, Alabaster, and more. Selected examples for the appearance of camels on stones will be explained in detail⁵⁴.

The Camel in the Journey of Joseph to the Land of Egypt: A piece of limestone dates to the 5th-6th century, and now preserved in the Coptic Museum no.8001. This piece is probably illustrating the story of Joseph to the land of Egypt. It represents the Arabic horseman leading the camel on which young Joseph probably rides. It seems to have been a Bedouin habit and can be seen in other few sources, including one wall-painting from *Transoxania* at least which was made around the time of the Arab entrance (Fig. 21)⁵⁵.

Camels on St. Mena's Relief: A 5th/ 6th century relief of saint Mena. The saint is represented in his usual prayer attitude, flanked by two small camels, the prototype can be dated back to the 5th century. The camels are well observed even the weak proud expression of their faces⁵⁶. This style of representation flourished in many other places and not restricted on Egypt (fig. 22).

Camel on a Stamp: A double-sided colored stamp from Egypt. On one side saint Mena is represented *orant* (prayer attitude) as usual, wearing a nimbus and a long unstrapped skirt, with only one camel beside him, and it's considered the first time to appear with only one camel and

⁴⁹ A detailed explanation for the use of metals during the Coptic period. S.M. Halim, *op.cit*, p. 54- 57.

⁵⁰ V. Essen, *Koptische Kunst Christentum am Nil*, Gemeinnütziger Verein Villa Hügel, 1963, P. 277, fig 188.

⁵¹ د. بينازيت, شكل ٢١٩.

⁵² J. Strzygowski, *op.cit*, abb 324: 9143; F. Carbol, H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, vol. 3, Paris, 1907, fig. 2453.

⁵³ J. Strzygowski, pl. 28, no. 9063; F. Carbol, H. Leclercq, *op.cit*, 2452.

⁵⁴ A detailed explanation for the use of stones during the Egyptian till Coptic periods. S.M. Halim, *op.cit*, p. 32-36.

⁵⁵ This piece is measuring 83x 48 cm. D. Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009, p.27.

⁵⁶ K. Wessel, *Coptic art*, London, 1965, p. 18, fig. 13; V. Essen, *op.cit*, p.277, kat 93.

not two as usual in most of his representations. On the other side of the stamp there is a deeply carved cross (fig. 23)⁵⁷.

Camels in Daily Life Work (Grape Gathering Process) on a Limestone Frieze: A unique collection of its type for a limestone frieze carved in relief from Bahnasa (*Oxyrhynchos*), dates to the 4th/5th century, preserved in the Coptic Museum. The frieze is for someone called Sarabium and his job was collecting the crops and its transportation by camels. The process of grape gathering⁵⁸, starting with a musical party and a man blowing a flute and ending with transporting grapes on the back of camels⁵⁹.

This piece is considered among the rare examples that shows us the role of camels during the early Byzantine period in the daily life work especially the process of grape gathering and its transportation. The camel here is clearly represented in accurate detail, it appears to be the well-known one humped type, following his shepherd, and carrying the baskets of grapes on his back (fig. 24)⁶⁰.

Two Parching Camels with St. Mena on a Marble Plaque stone: Camels appeared on a marble relief accompanying saint Mena. St. Mena is represented in his usual appearance standing as an *orant* flanked by two parching camels from each side. St. Mena is wearing the Roman soldier's costume and putting cloak on his Shoulders. This piece dates to the 5th century, now preserved in the Greco- Roman Museum, found not far from Mex outside of Alexandria and associated with the monastery of St. Thecla at Ennaton near Alexandria⁶¹ (fig.25).

Camels on Wood

wood was used by the Egyptian artists in large scale since the early periods till today and many examples are flourished in museums⁶². Rare examples for the appearance of camels on wood, despite that the Coptic artist represented all the animals in his woodwork.

Camels on a panel from St. Barbara's door: Among the 45 wood panels forming the famous door of St. Barbara's church in Old Cairo which are decorated with predicated animals, birds, gazelles, hunting scenes, with some Persian effects, is a panel decorated with two opposite (one humped type) camels surrounded by different decorations. The door is made of sycamore wood, returns to the Fatimid period, 10th century, and now preserved in the Coptic Museum no. 738 (fig. 26)⁶³.

Conclusion:

- Despite the rare references that were left giving information about the presence of camels during the early Egyptian times, and one couldn't trace any mention on the Egyptian monuments, and no ancient Egyptian word for the camel in the ancient Egyptian language

⁴⁹ F. Carbol, H. Leclercq, *op.cit.*, p. 164, 165, fig. 2451; V. Essen, *op.cit.*, pl. 22, no. 8991.

⁵⁸ The grape gathering scene is considered one of the daily life scenes in old Egypt, and they used to celebrate during its collection and pressing with its gods especially Osiris furthermore during the Greek conquest and the Roman period. A contract was found dates to 21/12/ 260 A.D, for a man called Serabium making grape ceremony with the workers. G. Gabra and M.E. Krause, *the Illustrated Guide to the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo*, New York, 2008, p. 120, 121, no. 68; G. Gabra, *Cairo the Coptic Museum and Old Churches*, Cairo, 1994, p. 66, 67.

⁵⁹ G. Gabra and M. krause, *op.cit.*, p. 120, 121, no. 68..٧٩٦٢ رقم , لوحة ١٦, ١٩٨٩, المتحف القبطي بالقاهرة.

⁶⁰ N.S. Atalla, *Coptic Art, l'art copte, Sculpture- Architecture*, Vol II, Lenhart and Landrock, Cairo, 1989, p. 113.

⁶¹ G. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, New York, 1970, p. 68, fig. 51; N.S. Atalla, *Coptic icon II*, 1989, p. 143; K. Wessel, *op.cit.*, fig. 12; *Alexandria Greco- Roman Museum a Thematic Guide*, (ed.) Hassan (F.) National Centre for Documentation of Cultural and National Heritage, the Supreme Council of Antiquities Archeology Museum, p. 196; D. Wilber, *op.cit.*, Fig. 8.

⁶² S.M. Halim, *op.cit.*, p. 60, 61.

⁶³ مرقس سمكة باشا، دليل المتحف القبطي اهم الكنائس والاديرة الاثرية، الجزء الأول، القاهرة ١٩٣٠، ص ١٤٧-١٥٥.

despite they used to record all their life sides on the monuments. But these rare evidences left are enough to indicate only their presence since the prehistoric period and their increase with the New Kingdom at least, despite its unobvious whether and to what extent they were used specially on traveling by desert.

- Camels can be said that they didn't play a critical role during the Pharaonic times, especially they were not represented either in religious subjects or in domestic scenes and even it had no rule in the sacrifices, and their absence during the ancient Egyptian periods must be for a reason that is still un accurate to be confirmed till now.
- Among the rare evidences that were left, is that the camel was among the domesticated animals during the first and second dynasty with the donkey, goat, pig, cattle, oxen, and there is a period of time it doesn't appear, but some scientists refer to the mythical animal of god set to be the camel's head.
- On a greater scale foreign invaders (Assyrians, Persians, Greeks especially Alexander the Great and the Ptolemaic brought Camels to Egypt and increased during the Roman Period to the extent that they were used in the Roman army and with the merchants and appeared the camel's shepherd as a new job as mentioned on the *Ostraca*.
- The *Ostraca* played a great role in giving more information about the presence of camels in Egypt especially during the Coptic period. These *Ostraca* gave information about their prices and their actual role during this period (fig.27).
- Travel in ancient Egypt differs from nowadays, before the only purpose of travel was economical in which they preferred to travel by boats and the travel across the desert was rare according to the textual and archaeological evidences may be it is one of the reasons explaining the rare use of camels since ancient Egyptian times.
- Two species of camels were known which are the two humped camel (*Bacterian*) and the Arabian one-humped camel or dromedary (*camelus dromedarius*). The dromedary one, is the common one in Arabia and Africa in all especially Egypt, and it's the one that was represented by the Coptic artist on all the monuments found that related to the Coptic period.
- During the Coptic period camels were represented by the Coptic artists through the different branches of art, they were represented working in daily work (carrying crops) as seen in (Fig. 24), they appeared in the Old testaments stories as a part of the story, and moreover accompanying saints especially saint Mena.
- Different positions depicted for the camel by the Coptic artist such as standing, kneeling, walking, running working, eating, and suckling. Moreover, different colors of camels represented by the Coptic artist.

Table representing different positions for camels during the Coptic period.

Walking camels and working: Fig. 4, 5, 6, 10, 14, 21, 24, 26.	
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Suckling from his mother: Fig.7	
Running: Fig.9	
Eating: Fig. 12	
Staying: fig. 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21,21	

The largest depiction for camels during the Coptic period were in its sitting state and their most appearance were on the wall paintings beside their appearance on the terracotta with St. Mena.

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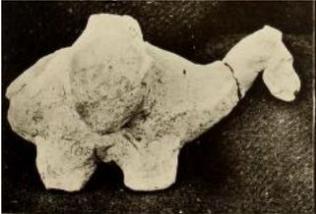
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Figures

Fig.1: a pottery figure of a camel with water jars, was found in a tomb from XIX dynasty in the northern cemetery



After: W.F. Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh*, London, 1907, PL. 27.

Fig.2: a small camel in offering scene from the tomb of Pt-Osiris in Tuna el Gebel, on the eastern side of the first salle, related to the 31st dynasty and the beginning of the Ptolemaic period.



After: N. Cherpion, J.P. Cartegiani, *op.cit*, p. 143, 144, fig. 93.

Fig.3: Terracotta figurine of a camel carrying transport amphorae late 2nd-early 3rd century A.D, from Egypt, Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art no. 89.2.2093, was a gift of Joseph W. Drexel 1898.



After: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/245523>

Fig.4: Different camel's depiction from the scene of the Israelites following Moses, chapel of Exodus.

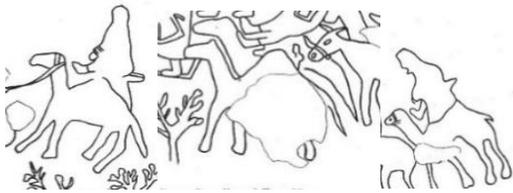
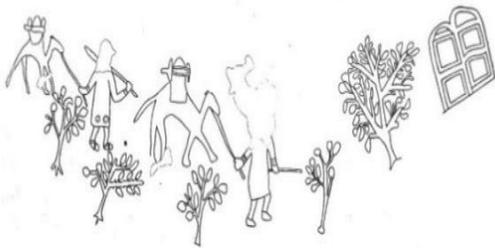


Fig.6.a: The garden scene showing two men and their camels



After: A. Fakhry, *op.cit*, p. 65, fig 58, pl. xv

Fig.7: Wall painting of saint Mena on the western wall of the monastery of saint Antony



Fig.5: The arrival to Rebecca's house the chapel of Exodus, al-Bagawat.



After: M. Zibawi, *op.cit*, p. 109, fig. 43.

Fig.6.b: the beautiful garden of Nakht.



After: Ph. Steel, *Passport to the Past Ancient Egypt*, Rosen Publishing, 2009, p. 16.

Fig.8: The lower part of Saint Menas wall painting from Bawit, 8th century.



After: 227 كتيب الأحمر، كتيب
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Fig.9: A piece of frescure from Kellia with different plant, animal and geometrical decorations



After: جمال هيرمينيا، المرجع السابق، ص ٢٤٩.

Fig.12: Wall painting from Abu Maqar Monastery



After: N. A. Zekry, *op.cit*, p. 43, pl.10.

Fig.14.b: a detailed photo from the dome of St. Paul Monastery



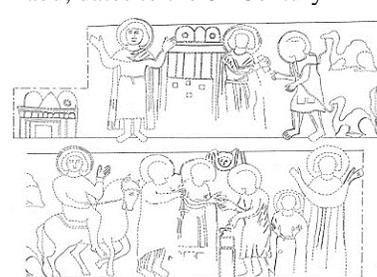
Fig.17: Ivory Plaque for the sanctuary of saint Mena,

Fig.10: Camel from a hand drawing lines on a wall from Kellia.



After: F. Daumas et A. Guillaumont, *op.cit*, pl. XXXVI.

Fig.13: A series of scenes from Medinet Habu, dates to the 8th Century AD



After: D.N. Wilber, "The Coptic Frescoes of Saint Menas at Medinet Habu", p.89

Fig.15: Icon of St. Mena with two different colored camels, egg tempera, St. Mercurius church, Old Cairo, 13th century



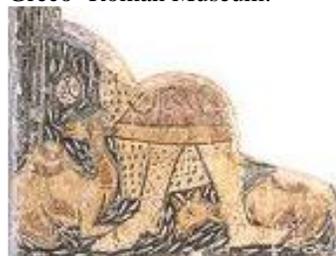
After: Z. Skalova, and G. Gabra, *op.cit*, p. 184.

Fig.18: Different flasks of Saint Mena.



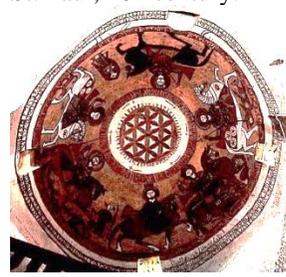
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Fig.11: A partly damaged wall painting for Saint Mena between two camels, from Kom Abu Gerga, Greco- Roman Museum.



After: N. A. Zekry, "The Iconography of St. Menas in the Coptic Art", p. 43

Fig.14.a: The dome of the monastery of St. Paul, 18th century.



After: G. Gabra and G.J.Van. Ioon, *the Churches of Egypt*. p.22.

Fig.16: A small ivory pyx with scenes from saint Mena's life, probably made in Alexandria, British Museum, 1879, 1220.1



After: The British Museum Catalogue of the Ivory Carvings of the Christian era, p. II, pl. vii.

flanked by two camels, Milan Museo of Archaeologico



After: V. Kaufmann, *Die Menasstadt*, p. 65, abb 21

Fig.19: A small decorated earthenware statue of a camel



After: د. بيناريتش, الحياة اليومية, شكل ٢٢٠

Fig.21: a piece of limestone, representing the journey of Joseph to the land of Egypt, Coptic Museum no.8001



After: D. Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests*, p.27, EH – 071.

Fig.24: transporting grapes by camels on a limestone frieze, Coptic Museum Nr. 7962.



After: N.S. Atalla, *Coptic Art, l'art copte*, p. 113.

Fig.26: Two opposite camels, from the door of St. Barbara, Old Cairo.



After: W. Gruneisen, *Art chretien primitif du haut et du bas Moyen age*, Paris, 1930, fig. 41; J. Strzygowski, *op.cit*, p. 288; Skalova, *op.cit*, p.23.

Fig.20: Copper Lantern in the shape of a camel



After: F. Carbol and H. Leclercq, *DACL*, vol. 3, 1913, Paris, p. 164, 165, fig. 2453; J. Strzygowski, *op.cit*, p. 293, fig. 324.

Fig.20.b: Bronze camel shaped Lamp.



After: F. Carbol and H. Leclercq, *op.cit*, p. 164, 165, fig 2452; J. Strzygowski, *op.cit*, pl.28, no. 9063.

Fig.22: A 5th/ 6th century relief of saint Mena



After: K. Wessel, *Coptic art*, p. 18, fig. 13.

Fig.23: camel accompanying St. Mena on a stamp



After: F. Carbol and H. Leclercq, *op.cit*, p. 164, 165, fig. 2451; J. Strzygowski, *op.cit*, pl.22, n. 8991.

Fig.25: A marble plaque of St. Mena, dates to the 5th century, from the ruins of St. Thekla's monastery in Dekhala, Greco Roman Museum 13860, Room I.



After: V. Kaufmann, *op.cit*, p. 65, abb. 20u

Fig.27: Coptic ostraca, with inscription that translated as following 'account of what was sent. To the town, 200 (of wine), 9 expended, 6 for the camels



بعد: نادر الفي ذكرى, بعض الملاحظات على خشوات خشبية بمنطقة مصر القديمة,
ص ١

and ... for the ..., the remainder being 22.
After: W.E. Crum, *Coptic Ostraca*, 1902, London,
p.46, no.509;



[https://search2.ucl.ac.uk/s/search.html?query=camel
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