

Iconostasis and their divergence in the Coptic church "Artistic Monumental Research"

Dr.Shrouk Ashour*

Introduction

The Christian church in the Coptic Egypt is still providing us with the knowledge and resources which has no end, and it still ensures that obviously it has a really felt role and an affecting role as a leader to all the eastern churches; because it is like the mother to lots of different churches. As a proof, many of the incomers whether Arabs or foreigners fled to Egypt transferring all the styles and different shapes of their churches for many reasons like commerce or searching for work or maybe escaping from political oppression or religious oppression or economic failures, etc... So by that time we found that the Orthodox church on the top of the scene as the main church which started calling for St.Mark as the prophet of Christianity in Egypt , even the pope Tawadros the second, pope of saint mark episcopate, who is considered one of the most famous popes in the saint mark episcopate 118. And follows the orthodox church, the catholic church then the protestant church, and there are also many of communities other than these which have been derived from those main three and they are

“Armenians”⁽¹⁾,

“Maronites”⁽²⁾ .

* Associate Professor of Coptic and Islamic art and archeology

Future Academy, Heliopolis

¹) Armenians: They belong to Armenia “In the east of turkey and the northern eastern part of Iran”, there were massive numbers of Armenians in Egypt through the Fatimid’s reign by the minister Badr El-Gammaly and Shagarret El-Dorr (who is Al-Salih Negm Al-Din Ayyoub’s wife) is a descendant of the Armenians But the noticeable growth in their numbers was in the Othmanic period when they were exposed to the Turkish massacre so they fled to Egypt. Many of them were noticed as influential people in the society like Noubar Basha and Baghous.

* محمود محمد سليمان – الأجانب في مصر دراسة في تاريخ مصر الاجتماعي – دار رقي – ١٩٦٦ ميلادياً.

And “Syriacs”⁽³⁾ and a lot more but these are the main three who lived in Egypt and bonded with the Egyptians and lived among them like they have grown up here doing all their duties and having all their rights. From what we have mentioned from different churches , all of them perform the religious and spiritual rituals and that gave them a really special rank between the various churches worldwide and they are also a great witness that one of the most important architectural parts which is present in all the churches is the Heikal in which the pope or the father performs the rituals⁽⁴⁾, and the very strong belief in Egypt made this part a really important part and has its privacy and its spiritual place and also that this place can’t be accessible by anyone and what happens inside is a secret of Afkharisteya gave us the element of inspiration which we are going to discuss in the paper which is “The Iconostas” with its different shapes and variety in the texture and the decorations as the Egyptian artist was an expert in these decorations whatever were his believes or the community he is following. And that stresses on the point of

²) Maronites: It is well known about the catholic their care about the public services like education and health and the building schools, almost 168 schools all over Egypt, and there are many communities derived from the catholic like the Franciscan and the Jesuit and the Maronites and they are from the churches who was originated in Lebanon and these communities are well known by their love to the Arabic language. There are many popular people who came out from such communities like Jubran Khalil Jubran and they have come to Egypt escaping from the French concurrence, and found in Egypt the safety. They have lots of churches in Egypt especially in Heliopolis and El-zaher.

* الدليل و التقويم السنوي للكنيسة القبطية الأرثوذكسية ١٩٩٢ ميلادياً.

³) Syriacs: They have fled from the Syrian and Lebanese areas to Egypt as they have been facing racism especially in the thirteen’s century. And they have many churches and many of them followed the monasticism which originated from Egypt. The best examples on that case are Maximos and Domadius who were staying at the syriacs at lady virgin’s wady El-Natroun Monastery. In spite there were many syriacs there, the place got associated with these two most and many Syriacs followed them to those monasteries

* محمود محمد سليمان – المرجع السابق.

⁴) The church rituals: They are considered from the main columns of the religion. There are three of them. The prayers of Kirolos El-Sakandary; The prayers of Basilyos El-Kebeer; The prayers of girgorious. The oldest one is that of kirolos and it was still used till the 5th century. Then basilyos was used the whole year. But Girgorious was used for the feasts.

* جودت جبره – المتحف القبطي و كنائس القاهرة القديمة.

the spiritual elements in the Coptic art and its dependence on the complete understanding of Christianity and its evolution history in Egypt.

The Iconostas definition:

It is the barrier or the insulator which limits the entrance and its main use is to insulate between the public or the attendants and what happens inside the Heikal because such a place has a very high spiritual ranks and can't be entered by anyone except for those who have very high spiritual rank. And that's why the church is always keen to hide its rituals inside the Heikal away from the praying public to have spiritual personification in showing that these secrets of his holiness can't be reached to its deepness and can't be fully understood, following god's orders to Moses when Moses was ordered to make two iconostasis ^(٥), the first between the home and Jerusalem and the second between Jerusalem and the most holy Jerusalem of all ^(٦). That's why the church have separated between what's holly and the other church parts in which the public stand by the Heikal so god's service and the rituals would be surrounded by holiness and appreciation and dedication. Then all who is qualified to be in front of the Heikal or is entrance leans in appreciation and prohibition saying with Dawoud the prophet:

(أما انا فبكثرة رحمتك أدخل بيتك و أسجد قدام هيكل قدسك بمخافتك) ^(٧)

The iconostas:

At first its purpose was just for the separation of holy and ordinary places like mentioned above but then it was called the iconostas, a Greek word which means the holder of icons, and these icons were hanged over it to be in front of the eyes of the prayers because the icon rises with its viewer's thinking from the ordinary to the spiritual thinking and it's a visual way of

^٥ (الكتاب المقدس عهد قديم - حزقيال ٢٦ .

^٦ (الكتاب المقدس عهد قديم - العبرانيين ٩ .

^٧ (الكتاب المقدس عهد قديم - المزامير (مزمور ٥:٧)

facilitating the idea about the saints and the martyrs even if its start was just by being the barrier between the Heikal and other church parts in the eighth's century then it was so important to make fixed places for the icons and maybe that was the reflex action to the war of icons, that well known problem of the icon which threatened the soul of the Byzantene empire at that time and the east was so influenced by it and this war was up as a disapproval to the icons and this war continued for approximately a hundred and twenty years (726-813 A.D) and after that it was totally ended giving more holiness to the icons like never before. And it was considered as praying utensils. It was proven that there were many places for the icons like hanging on the iconostas other than just being distributed on the walls of the church in addition to even the moving icons which are used in the religious occasions because the icon was looked upon as the most effective way in teaching and in explaining the holy bible and also transferring the spiritual experiences , and that is actually what makes anybody remember the saints or the martyrs and encourage him/her to follow their footsteps. Not only icons were put on the iconostas but also they were put in a fixed arrangement which is considered one of the main pillars of Christian belief and specially the belief of being freed and the longing to the spiritual life because these icons take its viewer's thinking from the ordinary life to the spiritual life. Starting from up with Jesus crucified and surrounded by two thieves⁽⁸⁾ then virgin Mary on the right side accompanied by the Christ⁽⁹⁾ surrounded by two angels and the students from the sides.

The starting of the iconostas:

The church, that name was called on any Christian group whenever they are grouped then it was called on the building they meet up in for the praying and the rituals ⁽¹⁰⁾ and the ritual

⁸ (الكتاب المقدس عهد جديد - إنجيل متى (٢٥:٣٣) .

⁹ (الكتاب المقدس عهد قديم - المزمير (مزمور ٤٥) (جلست الملكة على يمين الملك) .

¹⁰ (الكتاب المقدس عهد جديد - رسائل قورانسوس (١١:١٨) .

or the secret of Afkharisteya was done before 325 A.D in front of the public then the monastery system was known and the fear of the holly secret starting in Syria and the word the holly Syriacs originally meant “Dangerous” and then according to that, at first they have put a curtain to cover the four corners one the alter and this thing was seen in the Coptic church and what proves that is that we have found curtain rings in the upper part of the altar of the Heikal of Abi Serga’s and Abi Seifin’s in old Egypt. We haven’t found any sign that this wooden partition was present before the wooden Heikal Abi Sofia’s church in the Constantine which was built in the sixth century and the iconostas was made of silver and divided into longitudinal partitions engraved on the icons of the Christ and other martyrs. But from the eight’s century the iconostas which was before something unusual started to be so mainstream and it was known that Egyptian churches was full of Hayakel and in most cases, they were three Hayakel in front of each one of them a rectangle in its middle region and the main entrance for the Heikal is known as the “royal door” and has sliding small windows and those windows and the doors are almost holding still by some kind of connections or joints. And most probably the middle door is covered with red curtain made of silk decorated by Beautiful Crosses engraved in the red curtain by Golden silk or white silk and we have in the Coptic museum the oldest sample of that illustration. For the takers, they should have got so near the Heikal for the priest to hand them the cup in the plate from the small windows and the public takers get near the windows not for the public to see what’s happening inside the Heikal but he has to be fully believing. And in most churches there is a room next to the iconostas of the Heikal is known as Bastoforia room and it is considered a part of the Heikal, and there are lamps hanging from the top of the iconostas, usually they are three, made of ostrich egg because of an old Christian belief as the feather of the ostrich symbolizes the Truth and the egg symbolizes freedom.

Wooden Partitions:

Wood is considered one of the main used element in the churches utensils at that time and many iconostasis were made of wood and it has special characteristics and there are many different types of woods which can give the iconostas more importance than another iconostasis and from these characteristics is the wood density and it can be classified to heavy, light, or medium weighed. Not only density but also the wood color differ some wood from another and we can notice that from the darkness or the lightness of the color and that is set by the place of the agriculture of the trees which were the wood took from, in addition to the wood hardness, the wood odor and taste, and the ability of sound barring ⁽¹¹⁾. It can be noticed that the Egyptian artist has took very good care in choosing all the previous characteristics to produce such good quality iconostasis and he mainly was using locally produced woods like Sycamore , Buckthorn , and Acacia ; Accompanied by some imported woods like Teak⁽¹²⁾ , Loans , and Beech.

In addition to knowing the wood characteristics well, the Coptic artists have also inherited the secrets of wood production from their ancestors, The Pharos, and they have played a great role in the preserving of the artistic and producing traditions in the field of wood production. but when can be really considered as the start of the wooden Coptic art is with the start of the 4th century A.D; Because the believing in Christianity was increasing that time and that helped the spread of the Coptic art, specially, because they were in need to make designs and symbols that will be used in the manufacture of the church's furniture. The use of wood as the main element in manufacturing anything in the church made the wood production always growing to serve the church's needs. Then they started to take good care of the different ways of production with the use of Christian symbols

¹¹) Knut: The restoration of paintings – UK pommerst. Cologne – 1999 A.D.

¹²) Murray: Christian art and architecture – Oxford – New York – 1990 A.D.

and the starting of using the cross as the main element in the symbols and also the angels drawings and the plants' branching . That is well seen in a piece of art which was found in the hanging church and now preserved at the wooden section of the Coptic museum. Then in the 7th century continued the using of woods in every aspect in the church like substituting the metal plates and cups with wooden ones and also the metal bells was substituted with a wooden plate and a wooden hammer to knock with and till now this sample is still existing in the St.Catherine's nunnery⁽¹³⁾. Then by that time, the use of wood was numerous shown in doors, lockers, borders, and ceilings, but the best example is the iconostasis of the Hayakel and it was just made of wood. The iconostas of the largest church in the virgin Syriac's nunnery which is located at "Wadi El-Natroun" is considered as one of the oldest examples of the wooden iconostasis. The wooden iconostasis was then produced with different ways of manufacture and trappings. After that, came a really important and one of the most prosperous reigns in that time, "The Fatimid's", so the trappings of the iconostasis were mixed with the Islamic reign's art and resulted so many different shapes of the iconostasis. The Fatimids were very accepting to other beliefs like Christianity, so there was kind of harmony between them and even the literature and the Coptic art were very prosperous at that time. And the best example of that acceptance and forgiving is the generation of Cairo to be the new capital and transferring the main site of the Coptic patriarch to Cairo after it was in Alexandria. We have so many examples to the merging of arts in the iconostasis like Abi Serga's church's iconostas, Mar Yaccoub El- Mokattaa (which is a small church attached to Abi Seifin's church located at old Egypt). It was well observed that there was a development in the drilling (¹⁴) ways in the iconostasis at that time as there were new animals sculptures in the wood in

¹³) John R.Hayes: The genius of Arab civilization – New York - 1978 A.D.

¹⁴) Dimand (M.S.): AH and book of Mohammed on decoration arts – New York – 1930 ش.
A.D.

addition to the human sculptures which were found numerously in the Fatimids reign. The Islamic trappings served all the ages and all the religions; as in Christianity served the symbolism which is one of the main columns in that religion. Then there was so many ways in manufacturing the wooden iconostas; this was seen in the churches of Old Egypt. Even when there were some noticed elements of trappings in the Fatimid's reign , we must say that they were evolved and completed in the reign of the Ayyubis and the Mammlukis as what happened in the "assembly and interlock" way which resulted a really important trapping unit which is the stellar dish which have slightly started to be seen in the Fatimid's reign but the evolved and completed with studding and inlaying in the Mammluki's reign and that can be seen in the church of St. Barbara, the iconostas of Abi Seifin's church at Old Egypt, The iconostas of the Heikal in The prince Tadrous's church, Lady virgin's church in the roman alley, and many churches in the north of Egypt. The iconostasis were full of paintings ⁽¹⁵⁾ not only sculptures and trappings. The Coptic artist took very good care of making colored trappings and didn't restrict his art in drilling only, and he also made importance to making the drawings from inside the Heikal. And that gave us the advantage of analyzing the iconostasis samples as we can know the ways of production of wood, the types of drilling, the trapping's ways and design, its temporal sequence, and the evolution of production ways. These evolutions weren't restricted to the wooden Iconostasis only, but there are also samples of iconostasis made of marble like the Iconostasis of St.Mark's church in Alexandria and the one of St.Georges church which is located at Meit Damsis. And the fact that Egypt had many communities made it have many divergent types of iconostasis.

¹⁵) Savage (J.D.): profession of furniture refinishing for the amateur - New York – 1980 A.D.

The iconostasis of Abi Serga's church:

This church is named after the saints "Serguis & Wakhis", and it is considered one of the oldest churches in Cairo. It is built over a place that is said to be the place where the holy family has settled. It is located in the middle of the roman fortress with a basilica's style. It consists of a court and two wings at the eastern side of it. It has three hayakel which is closed over them the rest of the church by three iconostasis with the approximate dimensions of (20m x 4m LxH). Adjacent to the middle iconostasis, some of the oldest parts of the iconostasis; they are made of walnut and inlayed with ivory and ebony, but what surrounds the middle iconostas are pieces of pure wood of the right and the left iconostasis. These pieces consist of a collection of panels with the dimensions of (35cm x 25cm). Each iconostas of them has its separate door but both are closed. These two parts are considered the remains of the old iconostas. The trappings and the sculptures are from the Fatimid styles which are mainly consisting of human trappings of some of the saints, shapes of birds and animals, and some of them are of Stories from the bible as the blessing of the bread.

The middle iconostas:

It separates between the main heikal and the rest of the church. It is with the dimensions of (5m x 4m LxH). It is very prosperous with its material. Its trappings are consisting of a rectangular area which has an arched entrance which is closed with two doors which opens inwards. Adjacent to the entrance, there are two windows with the dimensions of (50 cm x 30 cm) sliding to the inside too. All the trappings and decorative sculptures are mainly located in the area which surrounds the door and the windows. They consist of units between which there are stellar dishes and some geometrical shapes which serves in connecting the stellar dishes together. The panels of the stellar dishes are inlayed with ivory; the ivory pieces are sculptured in a very precise way and they designs which are sculptured are of tiny botanic trappings. Then there are panels along the width of the iconostas which

make five rectangles separating between them longitudinal planes of ivory. The biggest panel is located in the middle and its trappings are mainly stellar dishes like that of the iconostas. Surrounds them, two smaller panels which have hollow overlapping botanical trappings; then two other smaller panels on their sides which have crosses in their middles and are surrounded with hollow trappings too. On the top of all the previously mentions, there are thirteen icons. In the middle, an icon of the virgin lady carrying Jesus surrounded by twelve icons of the students of Jesus. Surrounds this iconostas from the sides, two pieces of wood and they are considered as the oldest pieces present in that Heikal. The right side is approximately with dimensions of (2m x 4m LxH) and mainly consisting of plain panels with a level lower than the surface's level and existing in a way that they are horizontal and vertical respectively in horizontal rows. Next to these trappings, there is an opening with the dimensions of (0.6m x 2m LxH). This opening is closed with one door and has panels with geometrical shapes. Adjacent to this door, there are five panels. Three of which have human and animal trappings. The main idea of them is mainly about a human riding his horse and stabbing a dragon under the horse. Two of which have geometrical shapes also but these two have crosses. After this, located the right side which has a longitudinal plane with the dimensions of (0.5m x 4m LxH) and its parameter is made of a plain frame. Inside this part, there are six big crosses made of ivory and in the lower part just a plain partition with no trappings or sculptures. Then, the left side which has another plain part which is considered the oldest part of the iconostas with the same trappings like the right side , but with the dimensions of (2m x 4m LxH). But the only exception between the right side and the left side is that on the left side they are 4 panels adjacent to the door not five like the right side.

The right iconostas:

This part closes over a partition which is used as a room of Maamoudeya in the church with the dimensions of (4.5m x 4m

LxH). It has an arched opening which is surrounded by two small square windows with the dimensions of (25 cm x 25 cm) slightly sliding to the inside. The trappings are mainly of a single unit which are the crosses and surrounded by scattered pieces of stellar dishes. On the top of the door's opening arch, there is a rectangular plane which has writings made of ivory and two pieces on the sides look like a vase but made of ivory. The color of the wood of this iconostas is darker than the known color.

The left iconostas:

This part of the church is considered to have a spiritual special rank as it is the maze in which the holy family had hided. The iconostas with the dimensions of (5m x 4m LxH) closes over it. It has an arched opening with the dimensions of (0.9m x 2m LxH). The arch is decorated with Coptic writings and facing them the Arabic translation writing which states as follows:

عوض يا رب
من له تعب
السلام لهيكل الله ضابط الكل

Surrounding the door, there are two small square windows with the dimensions of (25 cm x 25 cm). These windows are surrounded with a frame which is made of ivory.

The iconostasis of Saint Barbara's church:

It is one of the churches of Old Egypt. It is located in Babillion fortress with a basilica's style. It is very similar in its style and its collectibles to Abi Serga's church. It was named after Saint Barbara who was a martyr at the age of Diklidyanos. Before mentioning the iconostasis which covers the Hayakel of the church till now, we have to talk about a piece located at the Coptic museum with the number of(778) and it is a wooden iconostas which "Butler"⁽¹⁶⁾ has mentioned. "Butler" said that this iconostas was a special one for a small church located at the upper floor and is attached to Saint Barbara's church, and this small church was named St.Georges church. This iconostas has a

¹⁶) Butler: the ancient Coptic churches of Egypt – Oxford – 1884 A.D.

Fatimid style and has forty five decorative trapping panels; human, animal, and botanical. This iconostas is with the dimensions of (268 cm x 218 cm LxH). These panels are arranged with horizontal and vertical edges. There is another iconostas which still exists in Saint Barbara's church till now. It is with the dimensions of (21m x 4m LxH), and is divided into three partitions. The main partition is in the middle and it isolates between the main Heikal and the rest of the church. It is the only one which has icons on the top of it and their number is nine icons. It has the dimensions of (6m x 4m LxH). There are two iconostasis on the sides, and separates between them and the middle iconostas walls with the dimensions of (1.8m x 4m LxH).

The middle iconostas:

It extends with the dimensions of (6m x 4m LxH). This area was divided into three main partitions; in the middle, there are two planes with the dimensions of (1m x 4m LxH) and they are similar to each other. The middle part has an arched door opening with the dimensions of (0.8m x 2m LxH). Surrounding this door, there are two small windows with the dimensions of (30 cm x 20 cm LxH) sliding to the inside. All the trappings and decorative sculptures are mainly stellar dishes inlaid with ivory and ebony and fixed with what we can call the enclosed pin.

The panels of the stellar dishes are inlaid with ivory; the ivory pieces are sculptured in a very precise way and the designs which are sculptured are of tiny botanic trappings similar to those located at Abi Serga's. Then there are panels along the top of the iconostas which make five rectangles separating between them three longitudinal planes of ivory. The biggest panel is located in the middle and its trappings are three stellar dishes. Surrounds them, two smaller panels which have hollow overlapping botanical trappings; then two other smaller panels on their sides which have crosses in their middles and are surrounded with a geometrically shaped ivory piece. On the top of all the previously mentions, there are nine icons with the dimensions of (105 cm x 90 cm LxH). In the middle, an icon of Jesus surrounded by the

virgin lady and Youhana the Baptist and two angels and then the four writers of the bible. On the top of the icons, there is a big cross which has a drawing of Jesus crucified. On the lower part, there is an icon of the secret dinner and the two longitudinal planes with the width of one meter which is divided into three panels each.

The right iconostas:

It encloses over the Maamoudeya room of the church and it is with the dimensions of (3m x 4m LxH). It has an arched opening and on the arch there are botanical trappings engraved in Naskh writings which date to (874 Martyrs – 1158 A.D). On the top of the date, there is writing as follows:

عوض يا رب
من له تعب
الدخول لهيكل الله ضابط الكل

The door opens inwards and is surrounded by two small windows slightly sliding to the inside. The area as a whole is mainly consisting of horizontal and vertical trappings which are inlaid with stripes of ivory; which are of botanical shapes.

The left iconostas:

It encloses over the Deacon room of the church and it is now looking like exhausted wood. It has the dimensions of (3 m x 4 cm LxH). It is mainly consisting of an arched door opening without any windows. The rest of this iconostas' trappings are just four panels. The trappings of these four panels consist of crosses over a botanical background.

The Iconostasis of pope shenouda's church:

It is one of the churches located at the northern side of Babillion's fortress, adjacent to Abi seifin's church and most probably its establishment occurred in the latest of the 5th century or the beginning of the 6th century A.D.⁽¹⁷⁾ This church had a

^{١٧} (مصطفى شبيحة : دراسات في العمارة و الفنون القبطية – هيئة الآثار – مشروع المائة كتاب – ١٩٨٨ ميلادياً

really big fame between churches of old Egypt. It was named after the Pope Shenouda Al-Akhmimi who was titled as the chief of archimandrites following the same footsteps of his uncle pope bigoul in the white monastery 388 A.D in Upper Egypt; he had established many monasteries and nunneries. He had a really big fame and was well known of his very strict rules which were followed in the monasteries. He wrote many manuscripts in case if the church faced collapsing or something like that; it can be rebuilt again and from the most important restorations which happened from these manuscripts was the one which happened at the reign of Al-Nasser Mohamed Ibn Kalawoun. The restorations were in a piece of wood which was located at the end of the walls of the church, That piece had some writings indicating that the patriarch Benjamin was the one on the patriarchal chair 1328 A.D. This church is considered a very rich church as it has so many wooden crafts specially the main iconostas which is extended all the width of the church other than the ambo in addition to the wooden cutters and spacers between many of the spaces of the churches. The big main iconostas which has the dimensions of (20x4.5 LxH) is divided into three partitions rich with divergent trappings which are extraordinarily beautiful. The three partitions are separated by two walls of 120cm. width surrounding the middle iconostas.

The middle iconostas:

It is the separator between the main Heikal and the rest of the church. Its dimensions are (5m x 4.5m LxH) and it is higher than the church's land level by three marble steps located at the beginning of the entrance. It is made of Beech wood inlayed with ivory and has two doors and on the sides of these two doors located two small squared windows with dimensions of (25cm x 25cm) which are not inlayed. The trappings of the iconostas are simply stellar dishes surrounded by crosses in the intersection of two stellar dishes and the crosses are surrounded by equilateral

crosses ⁽¹⁸⁾. There are seven icons, on the top of the middle iconostas. The middle icon is an icon of the virgin lady carrying Jesus; the other six icons, each contain two of the students of Jesus.

The right iconostas:

This iconostas closes the room of Maamoudeya and it is higher than the church's land level by three marble steps. Its dimensions are (5m x 4.5m LxH). It has an opening for one door, and on the sides of this door located two small windows with dimensions of (40cm x 60cm) which are inlayed with ivory and ebony. The structure of the studding is mainly scattered stellar dishes surrounded by small paneled hexagonal and triangular designs which are inlayed with ivory. The different thing about this iconostasis is instead of hanging eleven icons, they have replaced it with eleven panels of wood which have crosses over them in five and the rest six panels have more ivory studding. In the middle of the iconostas, there is a cross surrounded by sculptures of plants is what makes this iconostas very special than the others.

The left iconostas:

This iconostas is the separator between the deacon room and the rest of the church, and it is higher than the church's land level by three marble steps as the other two iconostasis. Its dimensions are (3m x 3m) and have a rectangular door with the dimensions of (1.2m x 2m LxH) and on the sides of this door located two small squared windows with dimensions of (25cm x 25cm). The decorations in these windows are mainly stellar dishes. The iconostas' decorations and studding are mainly panels laid with ivory and arranged in horizontal lines.

¹⁸) Du Bourget: Coptic encyclopedia – volume ii – p.2105

The iconostasis of Al-Damshareya lady virgin's church:

This church is considered as one of the small special churches located at the north of the Babillion fortress. It has a basilicas style and this style can be noticed from the three iconostasis which are divided by six columns. This church is originating to the 7th century A.D and was destructed several times but it was rebuilt again. One of the most important restorations of this church was in 809 A.D. It was named Al-Damshareya after one of the most abundant Coptic people of Damsheir in Menia made huge restorations in it in 1760 A.D. and that was recorded on the main iconostas. Next to it, there are three iconostasis connected and extending all the width of the church in addition to two elongated pieces of wood.

The middle iconostas:

It is extending with the dimensions of (5m x 4m LxH) on the main Heikal. It is made of wood which is studded with ivory, and it has an opening which was originally made for a door with an arch. That arch has some writings on it which indicates that:

"المجد لله في الأعالي ادخل إلي مذبح الاله
المبهج لشبابي برسم العذراء الدمشرية
اللهم تراءف علينا و باركنا عوض يا رب من له تعب
في ملكوتك ١٤٧٧ للشهداء الأبرار"

On the sides of this opening located two small squared unprecedented special windows. These windows are so special because they have arches similar to the door's one, and they have botanical decoration patters. All the patterns on the iconostas are mainly crosses and while intersecting with each other, they form smaller crosses. On the top of this iconostas, there are seven icons. The middle icon is an icon of the virgin lady carrying Jesus; the other six icons are divided from the inside, each contains two of the students of Jesus. There is a metal holder on the top of the iconostas which holds two ostrich eggs; and it was so known that time to hang them on the top of the iconostas; because the feather resembles the truth and the eggs symbolizes the loyalty. Surround this iconostas from the sides, two planes

which are made of wood. The right one with the dimensions of (1.3m x 4m LxH) and it is made of panels which are arranged vertically and horizontally repetitively and respectively. The left one with the dimensions of (0.9m x 4m LxH) looking like a fixed door at that place, its decorations and studding are consisting of stellar dishes made of ebony in addition to scattered geometrical patterns.

The right iconostas:

It is extending in front of the Heikal which is called the Heikal of Youhana El-Habib. Extending with the dimensions of (3m x 4m LxH) and not studded or patterned at all except for the arch of the door, it is studded and inlaid with ivory and the door is with the dimensions of (0.9m x 1.6m LxH) and on the sides of this door located two small squared windows with dimensions of (20cm x 20cm). The decorations in this iconostas are mainly of octagonal shapes. On the top of this iconostas, there are five icons. The middle icon is an icon of the virgin lady carrying Jesus; the other four are of Paul, Peter, Angel Raphael, and Angel Suriel respectively.

The left iconostas:

It is extending in front of the Heikal which is called the Heikal of virgin lady and Saint Barbara. It extends with the dimensions of (3m x 4m LxH). It is made of wood inlaid with ebony only. It has an opening for an arched door with the dimensions of (0.9m x 1.2m LxH) and on the sides of this door located two small windows which are the only things inlaid with ivory and in the middle of each located a cross. The sculptures and trappings on the iconostas are mainly big stellar dishes and hemispherical stellar dishes; all these dishes units are made of ebony. At the end of the iconostas, there is a fixed door as a continuity of the iconostas which is so different in the color of wood and in the way of studding with ivory. The trappings of this door are mainly a cross in the middle which is made of four planes of wood with half a star. On the top of this iconostas, there are five icons with

the dimensions of (65 cm x 45cm LxH); which all are for the virgin lady and Jesus but all with different shapes and pauses.

The Roman orthodox church of Saint George:

It is built on one of the towers of the Greek roman fortress, and was exposed to being on fire in 1900 A.D., but it was reconstructed and it is still working till today. This iconostas is different from those of the churches' of the Coptic orthodox. It consists of a wooden barrier with the dimensions of (5m x 9m LxH) and on its sides, merging two big columns. There is a big prominent balcony surrounding these columns and it has a collection of small icons in each column. This barrier is consisting of a big door opening and has a small door at lower part like most of the doors of the roman churches. It also has a sculptured arch and an eye drawing on the top of it. The door is surrounded by two small arches and under these arches, there are plain areas. The top of the arches is mainly consisting of two large icons of the virgin lady and Jesus. Over the two icons, there is a wooden plane which has an icon for the secret dinner; which is crowned by a framework with geometrical shapes. It is very noticeable that the colors that have been used in this partition are the brown and the blue, in addition to many gliding.

The cathedral of Saint Nicholas El-Hamzawy:

It was built in 1798 A.D. and it is considered as one of the biggest communities' churches in Egypt. This iconostas is considered as one of the biggest and most prosperous iconostasis in Egypt; because it has all the ways of the decorations, studding, and trapping from gliding, coloring, studding, and sculpturing. It extends with the dimensions of (25m x 7m LxH). Not even a single partition of this iconostas is empty of gliding or coloring. It was divided into several partitions; in the middle, the arched entrance in which the arch is lobular. The door is located at the middle lower part of the opening with the dimensions of (2m x 3m LxH). There are two entrances on the two sides which don't have doors but red amaranth covers were enough to cover these openings. The whole iconostas is higher than the land level with

one marble step, but in front of each entrance; there are three marble steps. The iconostas is divided from down around the doors with nine planar rectangular wooden shapes which are colored with dirty white and blue. All the trappings and the prominent crosses are glided. On the top of each one of the nine rectangular wooden shapes, there is an icon of the virgin lady and Jesus followed by many icons of stories from the bible. Then prominent glided trappings and thirty small icons about stories from the bible are found. In the middle of the iconostas, there is a huge cross with a drawing of Jesus crucified.

The church of Saint Nicholas in Heliopolis:

This iconostas is considered as the only one in all the community churches in which we can see the simplicity and the use of wood and it is really proportionally suitable with the building it is allocated in. It consists of a wooden barrier which is divided vertically into five partitions. In the middle, an arched entrance with a small door. This door leads to the inside of the Heikal, and the higher part of it is decorated with two icons of the virgin lade and Jesus, but the lower part is a piece of a bigger frame of all the iconostas. The frame is mainly glided in which there is a prominent glided cross. On the top of the door opening, there is an icon of the secret dinner, and on the top of it there is a cross, and it is also surrounded by two smaller icons. The door opening is surrounded by two partitions; the right partition has an icon of Jesus and on the top of it allocated six icons of six of his students, but under it the glided frame which has the prominent cross; the left partition has an icon also and on the top of it allocated six icons of the other six of Jesus' students, but under it the glided frame which has the prominent cross also.

The roman orthodox church (known as the Greek Church) in Salah Al-Din square, Heliopolis:

This iconostas has the dimensions of (20m x 6m LxH). In the middle, there is an arched door opening and has a small door in the lower part, but in the upper part the trappings of the arch have an eye drawing. The door is surrounded by four arched openings

in which each one has a large icon inside. The icons are of the virgin lady, Jesus, Saint Joseph and the infant, Baptist John respectively. These icons are on the same level of the wooden door which is closed over the Heikal. And under them, there are four planar rectangular wooden shapes which have marble trappings. Adjacent to these planar rectangular wooden shapes, there are two small doors which lead to the deacon rooms. These two entrances are surrounded by two icons of two angels and there are another two icons adjacent to them. The entire previously mentioned have a glazed frame made of bunches of grapes from their top. On the top of that frame, there are thirty small icons of stories from the bible and in the middle there is a cross on which there is a drawing of Jesus crucified.

The church of Saint Constantine and Saint Helena in Al-Galaa Street:

This iconostas extends with the dimensions of (12m x 9m LxH) but its height is divided into two levels. In the middle, there is a door opening which is identically similar to the door of any iconostas in any church of the Christian communities in Egypt. There is a descended arched opening from the lower part of the iconostas which has two doors. On each door, there is a small icon drawing. This opening divided the lower part of the iconostas into two parts, and this opening is surrounded by two icons; of Jesus and the virgin lady with the same arch like the one of the door. In the middle, the upper part has a prominent balcony which has three icons over it. This balcony is surrounded by two rows of icons each of eight icons and separated by small column like shapes. There is also a big cross which has Jesus' crucified drawing and is surrounded by two small icons.

The conclusion

- The orthodox's church in Egypt is considered the mother church to all the churches and after it are the catholic's church then the protestant's church and then many of the communities who are actually staying and effective in Egypt.

- There is a really big architectural fortune and rank for the different worship houses which are scattered all over Egypt from the Far East till we reach the end of the west, though, their center was in Cairo and Alexandria.
- Same religion; same rituals; same prohibition in all the churches, and the place which is assigned for praying is the same in all churches which is the eastern side of the *heikal*.
- The confidentiality of the rituals made the element of the “iconostas” very abundant in the churches either it was made of wood, metal, marble, or stone.
- This element of “Iconostas” has been evolving since the 6th century till the 19th century A.D. but the Islamic reigns in Egypt is considered one of the main timings that has seen the prosperity of evolution.
- The Fatimid reign is considered one of the most reigns which had prosperity in all the monuments, specially, the wooden monuments. Very good evidence about that is Saint Barbara’s church’s monument which is in the Coptic museum, St. Jacob’s church which is attached to Abi Seifin’s church, and Abi Serga’s church.
- The churches’ prosperity with many ways of inducting made the workers in that field call the churches’ handcrafts and sculpturing a unique and separate name away from the usual name which is “The Coptic sculpturing”.
- The cross as a concentric truth in Christianity which resembles the strength of Jesus when crucified; the cross is a very important element in all the trappings of churches which can’t be not used in any iconostas whether it was wooden or not.
- The extending of the iconostas along the width of the church, either it was on the *hayakel* or what’s adjacent to them whether deacon rooms or *Ma3moodeya*. The icons aren’t hanged up in the arrangement of the virgin lady carrying Jesus and then the students except on the *hayakel* which have alters in them.

- The Fatimid reign was followed by very prosperous reigns and the inlaying and the studding styles started in a very simple way as stripes in the iconostases of Abi Serga's and Saint Barbara's churches which still exist there till now. These styles were made in the 11th and the 12th century.
- Not only the studding and inlaying styles have evolved in a very noticeable way, but also there were sculptures and trappings on the studding material itself since the 13th century; the best example on that style is Pope Shenouda's church.
- The evolution didn't stop with the studding and inlaying styles. We see in Abi Seifin's church at the 14th and the 15th century the using of the writings with the studding. Not only we can see Arabic writings next to the Greek and Coptic letters, but also we can see the evolution in the writing styles and in the different handwritings types.
- During the 16th and the 17th century, the evolution brought the studding and inlaying is elements of building up the whole iconostas as in Al-Damshareya lady virgin's church. There is an iconostas in that church in which the whole iconostas is made of ebony studding in addition to full panels of ivory.
- In the 18th and the 19th century, the foreign communities increased with a very noticeable rate in Egypt; in response to that cultural change, came a new way of decorating which was increasing the sculptures and the trappings in addition to using many colorful patterns on the woods. The gilding was also a very noticeable evolution, but it was also very noticeable to see the change in some parts of the iconostas, specially, the opening that had become shorter which had two moveable doors. These doors in most of the cases had two drawings of Joachim and Anne (The virgin lady's parents) and they were drawn with natural scale with the help of metallic parts used on the hands or the halos.

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The middle iconostas of Abi Serga's church.



The top icons of Abi Serga's church.



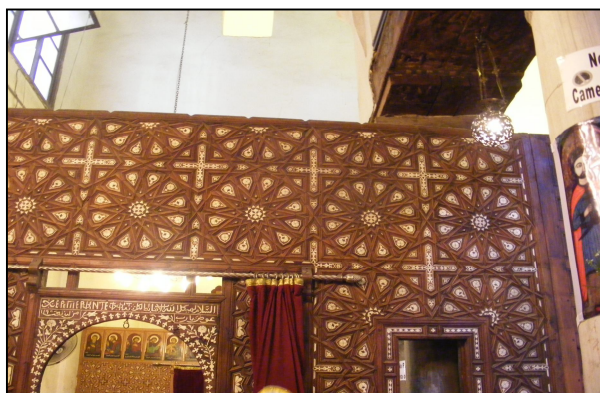
The old partition with the Fatimid style of Abi



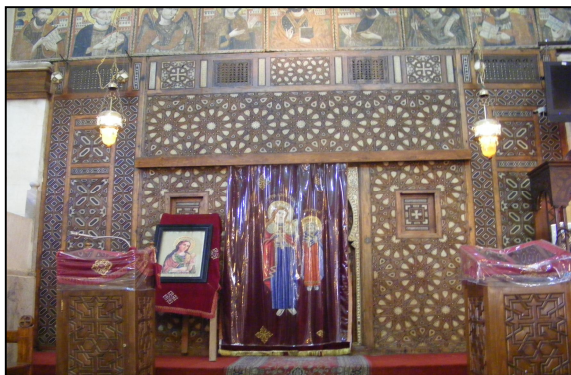
Details of the human trappings of Abi Segra's



The right iconostas of Abi Serga's church.



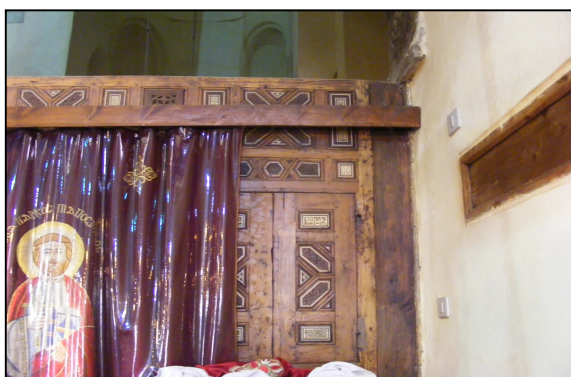
The left iconostas of Abi Serga's church. (The



The middle iconostas of Saint Barbara's church.



The arrangement of the icons and the cross of



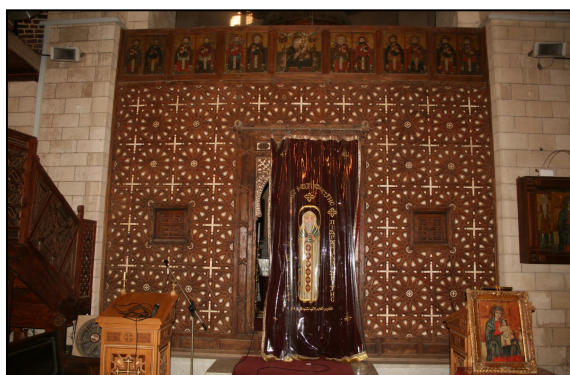
The right iconostas of Saint Barbara's church.



Details of the ivory trappings of Saint Barbara's



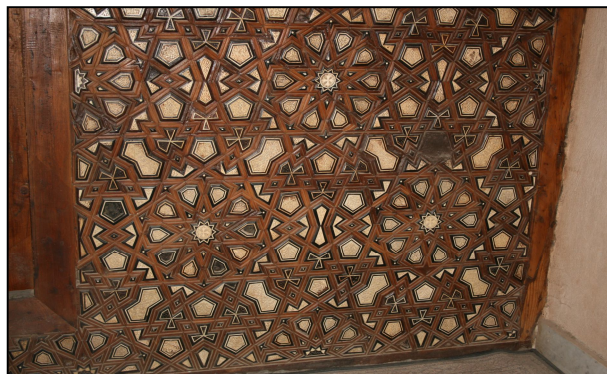
The left iconostas of Saint Barbara's church.



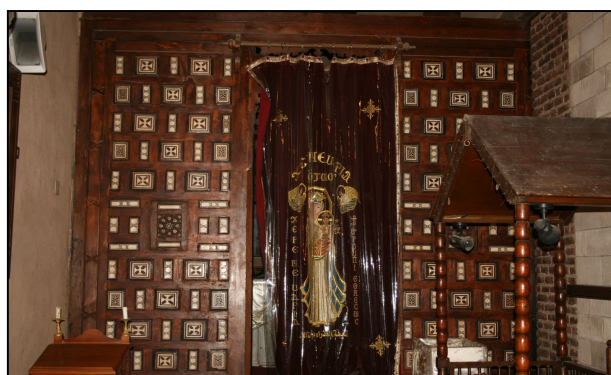
The middle iconostas of Pope Shenouda's



The right iconostas of Pope Shenouda's church.



The geometrical trappings of Pope Shenouda's



The left iconostas of Pope Shenouda's church.



Details of trappings of the ivory of Pope Shenouda's



The middle iconostas of Al-Damshareya lady



Illustration of the window of Al-Damshareya lady



The right iconostas of Al-Damshareya lady



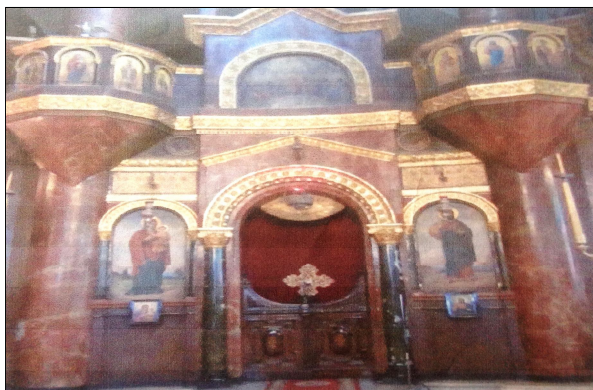
The left iconostas of Al-Damshareya lady virgin's



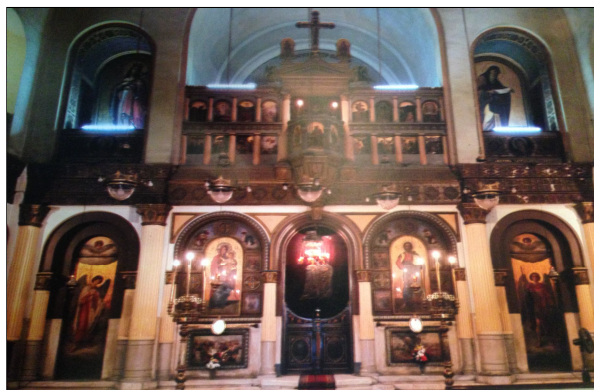
The church of Saint Nicholas Al-Hamzawy.



The roman orthodox church (known as the Greek



The Roman orthodox church of Saint George.



The church of Saint Constantine and Saint Helena