

Iconostasis at Holy Virgin Mary Church in Luxor

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Introduction

Egypt has witnessed many great civilizations, which are associated with the history of mankind ,where no one can deny how much of the work they were witness to all those civilization and great culture created by the Egyptian artist.

The Coptic history as an important period is a witness to what distinguished by the Coptic artist, from the artistic creativity was aimed at precision and magnificence through the use and employment of all kinds of raw materials, this was manifested in temples, monasteries and churches, this art is still seen on this bone which is considered to be inherited from its ancestral pharaohs ,when we mention the pharaohs ,we particularly mention the ancient Pharaonic capital(Thebes).

LUXOR lies on the eastern bank of the Nile, called Greece(YOSPOLES THE GREAT)then the Arap geographers in the Middle Ages called it the (Luxor Section),attributed to the two temples and shows the Christian influence on the place early ,the Coptic used the temples and built the churches and administered it inside ,they painted the walls with white mortar to paint portraits of the apostles ,martyrs and saints ,the impact of the construction of the High Dam on these monuments has been greatly affected.

The Egyptian Coptic artist in the Christian era ,from the quantity of sculptures that appeared in his uses ,in the manufacture of home furniture ,tools ,daily use, doors ,structures, wooden ceiling, windows, platforms, stands and icons. The Coptic artist excelled in the use of wood especially in the Coptic church. Hence i would like to mention the holder of the icons of the Church of the Virgin Mary in Luxor.

Iconostasis

The Iconostasis or Icon Stand ,represents one of the most important architectural features of the Orthodox Churches .

It is a rigid screen of wood or marble ,carrying the Icons of the Lord , His Angels ,and His Saints .It lies between the Sanctuary and the Nave.

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The original forms of Iconostasis were created very early in the Christian Churches , and they were mentioned in the writings of the early Church Fathers ,however the shape and the height of these screens varied . On the side of the sanctuary ,a curtain was fitted ,and it was opened and closed in accordance with the various stages of the services .This means that the Sanctuary is visible and inaccessible at the same time .²

Its nomenclature as veil is however inaccurate ,for the Christian Church never accepts a Veil ,similar in concept ,to that Temple of Solomon . It has been Knocked down forever through the Cross .³

The Functions of the Iconostasis :

A. The most valid motive for the introduction of the Iconostasis came as defines against Iconoclastic movement .The Church wished to confirm our relation with the Heavenly Creatures and Saints in Jesus .

B. It is also a sign of reverence towards the mystery of the altar of the mystery of Christ the Sacrifice .Although this does not mean that the people do not share in the prayers of the Eucharist .⁴

The Symbolism of The Iconostasis :

A. It reveals the reality of the Church as an Icon of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the future transfiguration of Man .It gives a heavenly atmosphere for the worshippers .

B. The Iconostasis ,with its various Icon declares the reconciliation between the heavenly world and the earthly one .

C. It acts in favor of the Church Doctrine that our Father ,who departed in the Lord are never separated from the Church ,and did not lose their love for the salvation of mankind . so we can consider the Iconostasis as a symbol for reserving the front portion of the Nave for Saints ,who are in fact ,one with their militant brothers .⁵

The Position and order of the Icons on the Iconostasis :

These follow a certain tradition :

- _ When facing the Iconostasis ,on the right side of the Royal Door , we can see
 - The Icon of the our Lord Jesus Christ holding a page from the Gospel , on which is written , "I am the Good Shepherd " because He is the unique Gate leading to the Heavenly Kingdom ,and the Good Shepherd Who opened the gates Heaven .
 - The Icon of the Forerunner ,St .John the Baptist
 - The Icon of the Patron Saint of the Church .
 - Selected Icons of Saints and Martyrs

- _ On the left side of the Royal Door ,we can see :
 - The Icon of the Holy Virgin Mary ,The tokos ,the Mother of God . She represents the whole Church ,and the Queen who sits at the right hand side of King ,Jesus Christ .
 - The Icon of the Annunciation .
 - The Icon of Archangel Michael.
 - The Icon of St .Mark the Evangelist.
 - A selection of Icons of famous Apostles.

- _ Directly above the Royal Door ,the Last Supper is mounted .This signifies the office of Christ as Icon of a Priest
- _ on both sides of the above Icon ,we usually find the Icons of the twelve Disciples . This gives the apostolic feature of the Church .
- _ On the top of the Iconostasis , a cross is mounted , as it was written "..... Before whose eyes , Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth ,crucified among us ." (Galatians 3:1) .
- _ The Icon of the Virgin Mary stands on one side of the Cross
- _ The Icon of St. John the Divine stands on the other side .⁶

The Ostrich Eggs :

The main feature that distinguishes ancient Coptic and Greek Churches is the Ostrich Eggs. They are suspended before the Iconostasis between the Icons . Eggs generally held asymbolic meaning in the early church ,as a hope of resurrection , or the risen spiritual life in Christ . There is a traditional belief that Ostrich , after laying her eggs , must keep looking at them ,in order to speed up their hatching . so , when we go to the Church , we have to concentrate all our thought and attention to the Divine worship, leaving behind us all earthly worries .⁷

Iconostasis of the Church of st .Virgin Mary⁸

This iconostasis of dates back to 1935 , It situated in the east of the Church . It made of colored and gilded wood

It divided to three Haikals .

- The central haikal is for The st .Virgin Mary .⁹
- The southern haikal is for St . Beshoy .¹⁰
- The Northern haikal is for Archangel Michael .

On the right side of the Royal Door , we can see :

- The Icon of the our Lord Jesus Christ holding a page from the Gospel on which is written , "I am the Good Shepherd " because He is the unique Gate leading to the Heavenly Kingdom ,and the Good Shepherd Who opened the gates Heaven .
- The Icon of the Forerunner ,St .John the Baptist
- The Icon of the Holy Virgin Mary ,the Theotokos ,the Mother of God .
- The Icon of the Annunciation

Directly above the Royal Door ,the Icon of the Last Supper, on both sides of the Icon ,we find the Icons of the twelve Disciples .

- On the top of the Iconostasis , a cross is mounted .
- The Icon of the Virgin Mary stands on one side of the Cross .
- The Icon of St.John the Divine stands on the other side .
- Two winged snakes

-The southern haikal is for St . Beshoy we can see :

On the right side we can see The Icon of the Cross

On the left side we can see the Icon of resurrection

-The Northern haikal is for Archangel Michael .¹¹

On the right side we can see The Icon of St .Mark the Evangelist .

- On the left side we can see The Icon of Archangel Michael and Icon of The Icon of the our Lord Jesus Christ knock the door .

On the under of the Iconostasis we can see Icons of Angels .

The Iconostasis is decorated with a lot of motifs as :

floral motifs : we can see it around the Icons in the middle section and on the top of the doors of Haikals we can see the Seashell and Lilies flowers .

Geometric motifs : We can see it in the middle section which decorated with Pointed arch, Crosses and Columns .

Human and Animal motifs : Human motifs we can see the Angels on the middle section between the arches .

Animal motifs we can see the two winged Serpent on the top of Iconostasis .

Written Inscriptions : we can see it on the top of the Southern haikal and Northern haikal .It is written in the drilling line

On the Southern haikal on which is written by Arabic and Coptic language :

" السلام لهيكل الله الأب , السلام للنبيين موسى¹² وصموئيل¹³ , الذى ذهب إلى بيت يسى والمسيح
ملك إسرائيل .

أذكر يارب عبدك يسى أندراوس بشارة¹⁴ المهتم . "

Peace for the sanctuary of God the Father, Peace for the prophets Moses and Samuel ,who went to the house of Jesse and Jesus King of Israel.

X e repiervintev'; viwt

X e repiprmvhtcmwchncnepcmoh d

vhctfwe[ephincep'twhotrootic d

remember,lordyourserventjesseandrews

On the top of the door of Northern Haikal on which is written by Arabic and Coptic language :

"السلام لهيكل الله الأب , السلام لأندراوس الرسول¹⁵ .
"أذكر يارب عبدك توفيق اندراوس¹⁶ بشارة فى ملكوتك سنة 1935 م

"Peace for the sanctuary of God ,peace for the lord Andrew.

Remember , O Lord your servant Andraus Beshara , shall rest in your kingdom.1935"

X e repiervintev'; viwt

X e repieandrew prophet

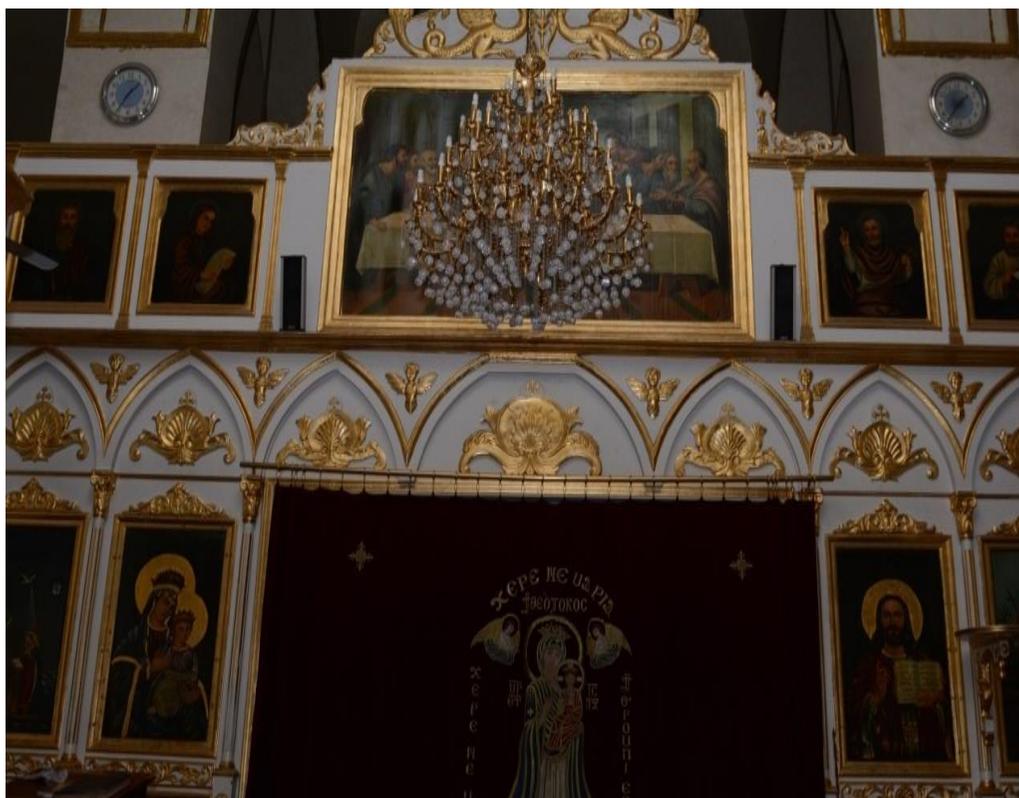
Remember,lordyour servent tawfik Andrew basha in your kingdom.



Fig.1 Luxor. Church of St. Virgin Mary
The main entrance
(Photography by researcher)

Fig.2 .Luxor .Church of St .Virgin Mary

Iconostasis of St .Virgin Mary



(Photography by researcher)

Fig 3. Luxor.Church of st.Virgin Mary
The southern Iconostasis of St.Beshoy



(Photography by researcher)



Fig .4. Luxor .Church of Virgin Mary
The inscription on top of the southern door of iconostasis of st.Beshoy
(Photography by the researcher)



Fig.5 Luxor .The Church of the Virgin Mary
The northern Iconostasis of Archangel Michael
(Photography by the researcher)



Fig.6. luxor . The church of the Holy Virgin Mary
The inscription on top of the northern door of iconostasis of Archangel Michael
(Photography by the researcher)

Reference :

- 1- Coptic Orthodox ,Diocese of the Southern United States , RIT 102,CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND PRIESTS VESTMENTS .Servants Preparation program , P.6 .
- 2- The Holy Bible " (Galatians 3:1) .
- 3- The Holy Bible "Exodus".(2:1)
- 4- The Holy Bible (Mark 1:16)
- 5- The Holy Bible (Samoul 1)(3;1)

Arabic reference

- 1- اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس, السنكسار الجامع لأخبار الأنبياء والرسل والشهداء والقديسين, مطبعة امبريال عابدين, الطبعة الثانية (منقحة ومزودة), 2013م, ج2.
- 2- كشكول مخطوط : جرجس فيلوثاوس عوض , الكنائس الحالية و كتب حوالى سنة 1911 , ص 196 .
- 3- يوحنا جرجس (القمص) وجبران أفندى نعمة الله : اللؤلؤة البهية , الطبعة الثانية 1922 , ص 680 .
- 4- لمعى المطبعي : موسوعة هذا الرجل من مصر , القاهرة , دار الشروق , 2005

¹¹- Coptic Orthodox ,Diocese of the Southern United States , RIT 102,CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND PRIESTS VESTMENTS .Servants Preparation program , P.6

²-Ibid

³ -Ibid ,p 7

⁴ -Ibid

⁵ -Ibid,p 7

⁶ -Ibid .p8

⁷ -Ibid

⁸- The Church of Virgin Mary

November 1910\month Hatour 1627

The Coptic of luxor began in the building of the Church of the Virgin Mary on the current street Karnak north (EL –Nasr) school on the land of (khawaga Basele Basha Beshara)

And wrote about it Jerges Philotheus Awad at the time and said;he looked at the building of the church in luxor in the month Hatour and collected the necessary funds

at 19 November 1919.

The Church of the Virgin Mary was inaugurated in the city of Luxor by St.Mark Bishop of Luxor ,Esna and Aswan.

كشكول مخطوط : جرجس فيلوثاوس عوض , الكنائس الحالية و كتب حوالى سنة 1911 , ص 196 , يوحنا جرجس (القمص) وجبران أفندى نعمة الله : اللؤلؤة البهية , الطبعة الثانية 1922 , ص 680

⁹ -The Virgin Mary: she was the mother of Jesus Christ; she died in 48 A.D, and lived for fifteen years after the ascension of Christ to heaven and lived for sixty years. See

اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس, السنكسار الجامع لأخبار الأنبياء والرسل والشهداء والقديسين, مطبعة امبريال بعابدين, الطبعة الثانية (منقحة ومزيدة) , 2013م, ج1, 411.

¹⁰ -The coptic Orthodox church celebrates on 15 July of the Gregorian calendar the commemoration of the visit of the great Saint Bishoy, he was born in Shensa ,avillage in Menoufia in 320 AD,who is one of the founders of the monastic order in the wildernessof Chehit ا

اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس, السنكسار الجامع لأخبار الأنبياء والرسل والشهداء والقديسين, مطبعة امبريال بعابدين, الطبعة الثانية (منقحة ومزيدة), 2013م, ج1, 450,

¹¹ -Archangel Michael : In the new Tesment Michael leads Gods armies against Satan's forces, where during the war in heaven he defeats Satan. At twelfth day of Paonah, the church celebrates the commemoration of the angel Michael, the Archangel, the intercessor of the human race. The one who appeared to Joshua the son of Nun, encouraged him, and told him, "Nay, but as captain of the hosts of the Lord am I now come." He made the city of Jericho to fall into his hands, and he stopped the sun for him. And the Copts of Egypt celebrate annually with the festival of Archangel Michael at twelfth day of Abib month. See: - Book of Revelation (12:7-9). –

اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس, السنكسار الجامع لأخبار الأنبياء والرسل والشهداء والقديسين, مطبعة امبريال بعابدين, الطبعة الثانية (منقحة ومزيدة), 2013م, ج2, 317 – 318.

¹² -Moses his mother from the house of Levi, where his mother hid him in basket of papyrus and covered it with pit ,and placed him in the river, then Mousa peace be upon him talk with God. Exodus.(2:1).

¹³ -Samoul ,son of Hanah ,who lived in the sanctuary and became the Prophet of God (Samoul 1)(3;1)

¹⁴ -Yessa Andraus Bashara ,is the brother of Tawficq Andraus,the owner of the largest palace in Luxor ,adjacent to Luxor Temple.

لمعى المطيعى :موسوعة هذا الرجل من مصر , القاهرة ,دار الشروق , 2005 ,ص 270.

¹⁵ -Andrew is one of the disciples of Christ (Mark 1:16)

¹⁶ - National leader Andraus Pasha was born in 1893 AD in the city of Qus south of Luxor ,in order to reconcile national position ,the most important being his reception of leader Saad Zaghloul in 1921 ,He died in 1935 AD .

لمعى المطيعى :موسوعة هذا الرجل من مصر , القاهرة ,دار الشروق , 2005 ,ص 256.