

The Iconography of the Angels in the Coptic Wall Paintings

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The angels are represented throughout the Bible as a body of spiritual beings intermediate between God and men.¹ They are employed by God as the ministers of His will.² The Arabic word of angel is ملاك *Malak* which is derived from the Arabic verb أَلَك *Alak* which means (who carries a message) and its derivatives are- أَلَكَا *Alkka* – أَلَوْكَه *Aloka* – أَلَوْكَ *Alokan* – مَلَكَا *Malakan* – أَلَك *Alak* – أَلَاكَه *Alkah* - أَسْتَأَلُكَ *Astalak* – أَلْمَلَك *Almalak* – ملاك *Malak*.³ The English word "angel" comes from the Greek ἀγγελος *angelus*, which means 'messenger'. In the Old Testament,⁴ along with the Hebrew word for "angel" is *malakh*, מַלְאָךְ also meaning 'messenger'.⁵ So both languages carry the same synonym of angel. Etymology suggesting a being responsible for carrying messages between the human world and God, someone who is an intermediary between 'down here' and 'up there'.

The Human Winged Aspect appeared before Christianity in ancient Egyptian art such as the winged beings that are depicted in ancient texts, hieroglyphs and tomb paintings. They are depicted often with human bodies with bird heads and wings. They are an archetype for transition of consciousness to higher realms of thought. Creational Myths most often refer to winged gods and goddesses denoting that they came from a higher realm of creations such as mythological winged beings, bird headed beings, ancient and lost civilizations gods and Goddesses and ancient Egyptians gods. But the classical form of angels was stabilized: It took always a female form which is winged like goddess Hathor.⁶ The goddess Maat of truth and justice is represented as a winged goddess who is kneeling, and the goddess of love, ceremonies, health and healing as well as immortality Isis is represented seated on the throne. There are many works of art depicting the two goddesses Isis and Nephthys⁷ with wings facing each other and standing behind Osiris for protecting the human body.⁸

Ancient Egyptian art included human winged forms like the goddesses Nut⁹, who spreads her wings concomitant and joined the movement of arms, as a kind of divine protection, as the wings were an important means for flying to the sky.¹⁰ Moreover the winged goddesses above

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¹ W. SMITH, S. CHEETHAM, *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, London, 1908, p. 83-88.

² B. DECHARNEUK, *L'ange le Devin et le Prophete*, Belgique, 1994, p. 35-43, see Psalm 8:6, Psalm 148:2, 5, Colossians 1:16-17.

³ *al-Munjid fi al-lughah wa-l-a'lam*, Beirut: dar al-sharq, 1986, p. 16.

⁴ *Mu'jam al-lahut al-kitabi*, Beirut: dar al-sharq, 1986, pp. 761-763.

⁵ M.M. COHN, *Nouveau Dictionnaire Français-Hebreu*, Paris, 1967, p. 27.

⁶ B.S. LESKO, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, N.Y, 1999, p. 82-89.

⁷ J. ASSMANN, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, London, 2001, pp. 108, 119.

⁸ R.H. WILKINSON, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, pp. 6, 160.

⁹ LESKO, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, pp. 38-44.

¹⁰ WILKINSON, *The Complete Gods*, pp. 150-151, 161-162, Painting for sculpture for the Goddess Nut (Berlin Museum 10832).

the kings' heads were almost always female form. The human winged form in the Greco-Roman art was known in the image of the child god Eros¹¹ or Cupid, the god of love. He had two small wings extracted from his back shoulders. Also God Hermes the divine messenger was usually shown with two wings to use them in flying during his mission. The goddess of dawn, "Nike"¹² was also represented in the same way also. The human winged form in the transition art (between paganism and Christianity), appeared in the figure of Eros (Cupid) that may represent the beginning of depiction the innocence of children as angelic aspect in pale Christian art (the early Christian art), which represent the two angels as two nude children like the Eros figures.¹³ The wings were the symbolic reference to victory.¹⁴

The figures of angels in Coptic wall paintings appeared since the fourth century AD in Bagawat, in the oasis of al-Kharga, in the painting of the funerary chapels.¹⁵ They were depicted on the walls inside the Christian necropolises as well as the monastic churches and secular churches. It became traditional to find their representations on the chapels, choruses, arches, and the naves. In addition to that, the other artistic materials such as, sculpture, Coptic textiles and clerical vestments, liturgical metals objects, wooden icons, and wooden domes, contained their depictions. Moreover, wooden icons and wall paintings which carry depictions of angels continue to be produced until the present time. This shows their prominent and essential function in the Christian dogma which enabled them to survive until contemporary Coptic art. Scenes of angels are wide spread in Egyptian churches, monasteries and Christian necropolis, as well as in ancient Egyptian tombs and temples which were reemployed as churches, having been redecorated with Coptic mural paintings. The wall paintings have great importance. The painting occupies grand area on the wall, which draws the attention of the visitors to scenes and prayers to link between the spiritual meaning and the themes of the scenes. Such scenes of wall painting used to narrate biblical events, and venerate the religious characters. The mural paintings played essential roles inside the Coptic architecture; first the functional role. In this sense some scenes were used to be represented inside certain parts of the church, like the chapel and choirs "apocalyptic visions", monastic fortresses "protector angel". The second role is the decorative role where scenes were employed to be comfortable vision for prayers and visitors.

The monastery churches were extensively decorated. They have undergone various alterations and restorations, so that paintings were superimposed several times around the historical periods, only the most recent stages are now visible.¹⁶ The paintings are placed in the same buildings inside the monasteries: such as the churches (the main church of the monastery or the fortress church) common chambers, the refectory, monks' cells, oratory, dwelling room (where monks live).¹⁷ Furthermore, the research aims at demonstrating the cult background of representation of angels and linking the mural angelic scenes with the apocalyptic visions, biblical texts, commentaries, and traditional church sources. Moreover, classification of the angels' scenes according to their themes, and development of their details. In order to study

¹¹ R.E. GUILLY, *Encyclopedia of Angels*, New York, 1996, p. 58.

¹² Marble statue of Eros behind his mother goddess Aphrodite 2nd century AD, *Sidi Bishr*, Eastern Alexandria, Greco-Roman Museum, GRM 29456, Room 16 a, cf. C. KERÉNYI, *The Gods of the Greeks*, London, 1958; L.I. MARANGO, *Ancient Greek Art*, Athens, 1996; GUILLY, *Encyclopedia of Angels*, pp. 151-152.

¹³ G. GABRA, M. EATON-KRAUSS, *The Treasures of Coptic Art: In the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo*, 2007, pl. 10, the sculpture of Leda and the swan, inv. No. 7026, limestone.

¹⁴ O. El-Mallakh, "La Datation d'un Tissu Copte", in : *Le Monde Copte* 11 (1985), p. 17.

¹⁵ A. FAKHRY, *The Necropolis of Al Bagawat in Kharga Oasis*, Cairo, 1951.

¹⁶ A.S. ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 5, New York, 1991, p. 1659.

¹⁷ H. ZALOSCHER, *Die Kunst im christlichen Ägypten*, Austeria, 1974, pp. 131-135.

the angels in the Coptic Literature in early church Fathers conceptions, the different volumes of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers and post-Nicene Fathers*¹⁸ were checked then the selected bibliography was examined.

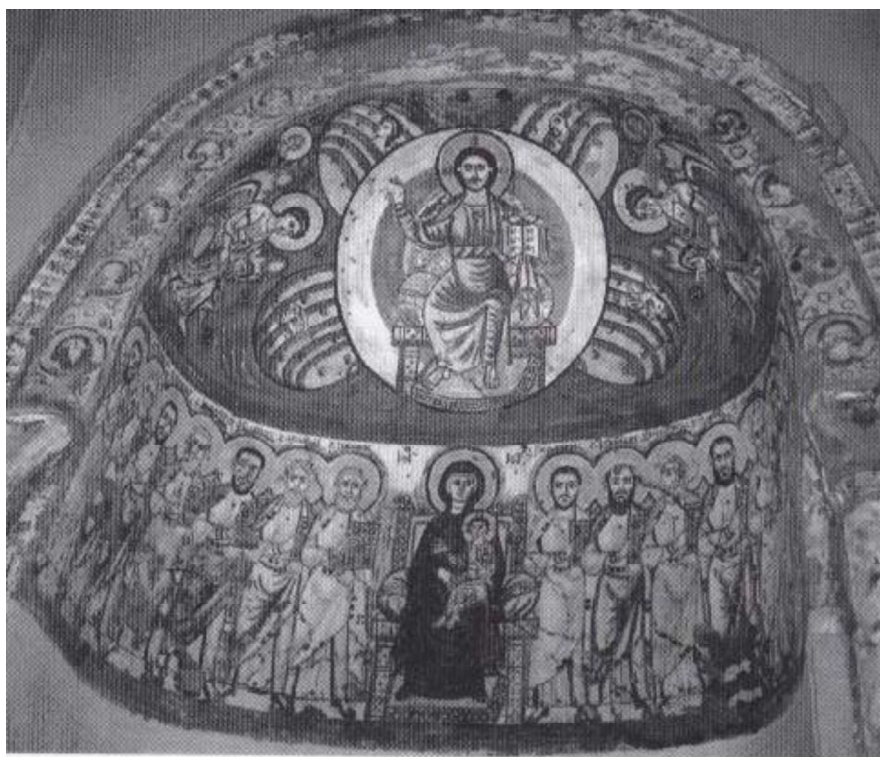
I. The Angels with Jesus Christ and Saint Mary

Angels are servants of God that help carry out His commands. Angels are real spiritual beings that are documented throughout the Bible. They are documented in both the Old and New Testaments. While God's angels carry out His commands, the Bible also tells us that there is a supreme, fallen angel who is against God (Matthew 25:41) and other angels that are evil and face God's punishment (Jude 1:6).



Fig. 1 A: The Christ in majesty (Pantocrator), the monastery of St. Apollo at Bawit (M. Zibawy 2003, pl. 89).

¹⁸ A. ROBERTS, J. DONALDSON (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations to 325 A.D.*, New York, 1885-1887; Ph. SCHAFF, H. WACE (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Michigan, 1953.



Pl. 1 B: Christ in majesty (*Pantocrator*), the monastery of St. Apollo at Bawit (G. Gabra 2002, pl. 85)

Date	6 th -7 th Century
Present place	The East apse of hall VI, The monastery of St. Apollo At Bawit, preserved in Coptic Museum No. 7118.
Description	<p>The upper register represented Jesus Christ enthroned in a <i>mandorla</i> carried on wheels with flames licking at its base. wearing yellow tunic under crimson cloak, he gesture the grace sign with his right hand, whereas his left hand hold the bible, and halo with cross is around his head, is surrounded by the figures of the four living creatures flying on six wings strewn with eyes. The four living creatures protrude from the lower left as ox-headed, the lion-headed, human head mounted by a simple crown which is a fine bandage around the head which surrounded with halo, and the eagle-headed. While two angels bow as a sign of veneration, they wear blue tunic and yellow cloak with red lines, their heads have a fine bandages around hair, and halo around the head, the sun and moon, personified by human faces, symbolized the eternity. While the lower register represented Saint Mary seated on a throne in the middle of The twelve apostles and two Egyptian saint who holding the codex near their chests.</p>
Text	On the opening page of the bible three times:

Bibliography

ⲁⲩⲓⲟⲥ Holy

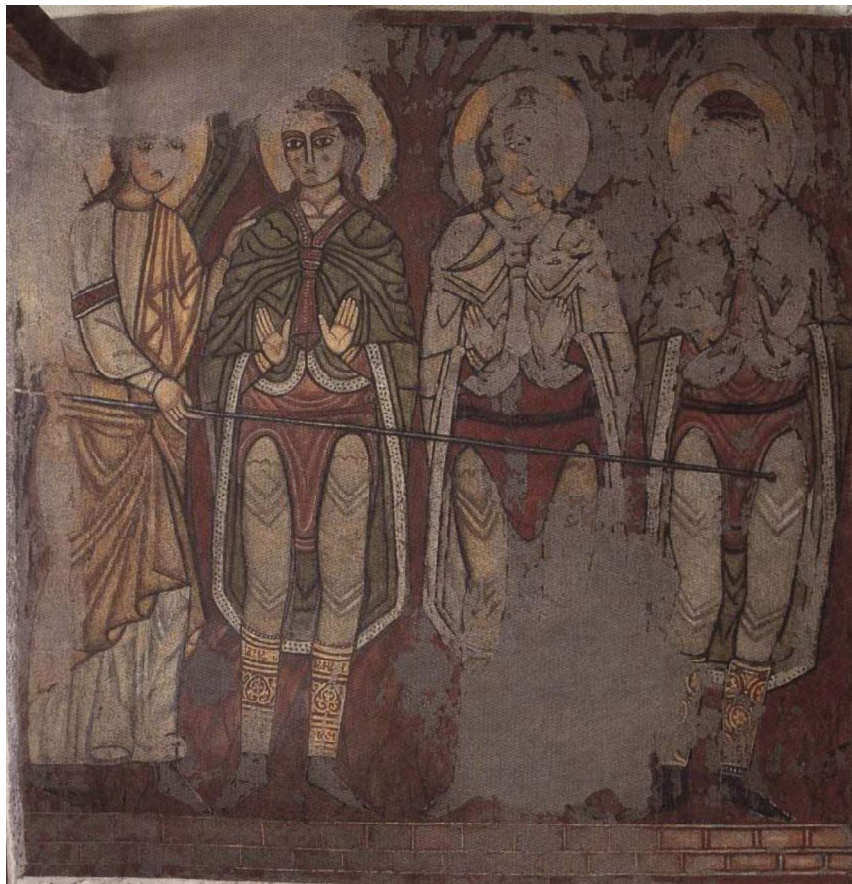
M. CAPUANI, *Christian Egypt Coptic Art and Monuments through Two Millennia* Cairo, 2002, p. 195, pl. 85.

M. ZIBAWY, *Images de l'egypte chretienne iconologie Copte*, Paris, 2003, p.80, pl. 89.

II. The Angels with the Biblical Characters, and the Liturgical Characters

Throughout the Old Testament, there are certain references to the Angel of God or Angel of the Lord. Although not exclusive, this term may refer to appearances of the reincarnate Word (Jesus Christ)! Many of those who saw Him said that they had seen God. Others fell down to worship Him.

- Angels are invisible spirit beings (Numbers 22:22-31) but can take on human form (Genesis 18:2-8).
- Angels are strong (I Chronicles 21:16; Revelation 18:21) and powerful (Psalm 103:20; II Peter 2:11; Revelation 10:1, 18:1).
- Angels are radiant from being in God's presence (Judges 13:6; Luke 2:9). They behold the face of God (Matthew 18:10).
- Angels appeared in Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching to heaven (Genesis 28:12).
- Abraham (Genesis 18:13, 22:11-16).
- Jacob (Gen 28:12, 31:11, 32:24-30; Hosea 12:4).
- Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-13).
- Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:23-28).
- Zechariah (Zechariah 1:9, 3:1-2).



Pl. 2: The angel with the three youth in the furnace, monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea. (E. S. Bolman 2002 fig. 4.24).

Date	1232/1233.
Provenance	The west Side of khurus - Old church of St.Antony – monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea.
Description	The angel is shown with halo and holds a long staff in one hand, while the other is placed on the shoulder of the nearest youth Hebrew. The angel is wearing white tunic and yellow cloak, black footwear The three Hebrews who were thrown into the furnace, are raising their hands in gesture of prayer while the angel of God stands behind them, the background is painted in fire flames, The wear a short tunics and trousers; which are common in Babylon
Remarks	There isn't a cross in the end of the angel staff as it was common in the scenes of the angels
Bibliography	<p>A. PIANKOFF, "Peintures au Monastère de Saint Antoine", <i>BSAC</i> XIV (1958), p. 151-163.</p> <p>P. VAN MOORSEL, <i>Les peintures du Monastère de Saint-Antoine près de la Mer Rouge</i>, Cairo, 1995, pp. 98-102, pl. 49-50.</p> <p>E.S. BOLMAN, <i>Monastic Visions. Wall Painting The Monastery of St. Antony At The Red Sea</i>, Cairo, 2002, fig. 4.24, pp. 57-58.</p>

III. Archangels

- The word *archangel* derives from the Greek ἀρχάγγελος *archangelos* = αρχ- *arch-* (first, primary, chief of angels) and ἄγγελος *angelos* (messenger). The word archangel is used only twice in the canonical Scripture.¹⁹
- The Archangels are usually considered the second lowest order of the Third Sphere; they act as the administrative leaders of the Heavenly beings. An archangel is usually given a task of great importance to men.²⁰
- In the magical texts, the archangels played an important role in the angelic protection for the human body, and they figure prominently as mighty beings that provide supernatural help to the persons who need their help.²¹

Their Names

- There are seven archangels, (Revelations 4:5). Merely three of them are mentioned in the Scriptures Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. The further four are Suriel, Sedakiel, Sarathiel, and Ananiel
- Once to refer to Michael the archangel and the other to refer to a being believed to be Gabriel during the return of the Lord. The New Testament rarely speaks of angels, and makes only two references to archangels: Michael in Jude 1.9 and I Thessalonians 4:16, where the "voice of an archangel" will be heard at the return of Christ.
- In later Christian tradition, however, there are three archangels: Michael, Gabriel, and usually Raphael; sometimes Uriel is given as a fourth. Eastern Orthodox tradition mentions "Seven Archangels". Uriel is included.

Enoch I (the Ethiopian Enoch), where they are given as	Michael,	Gabriel.	Raphael	Uriel	Raguel	Zerachiel	Remiel
Centuries later, Pseudo-Dionysius gives them as	Michael	Gabriel.	Raphael	Uriel	Chamuel	Jophiel	Zadkiel
Pope Gregory I lists them as	Michael	Gabriel	Raphael	Uriel	Simiel	Orifiel	Zachariel
Eastern Orthodoxy venerates ²²	Michael	Gabriel	Raphael	Uriel	Selaphiel	Jegudiel	Barachiel
Magical book of Mary	Michael,	Gabriel.	Raphael	Suriel	Asuel	Seraphuel	Abeal

¹⁹ R.F. JOHNSON, "Archangel in the Margins: Saint Michael in the Homilies of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Corpus XLI (Irish Influences on the Character of Anglo-Saxon Devotional Practice)", *Tradition: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 53, 1998, pp. 63-91.

²⁰ G. PEERS, "Apprehending the Archangel Michael: Hagiographic Methods", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996), p. 100.

²¹ M. MEYER, *The Magical book of Mary and Angels*, Heidelberg, 1996, p. 70.

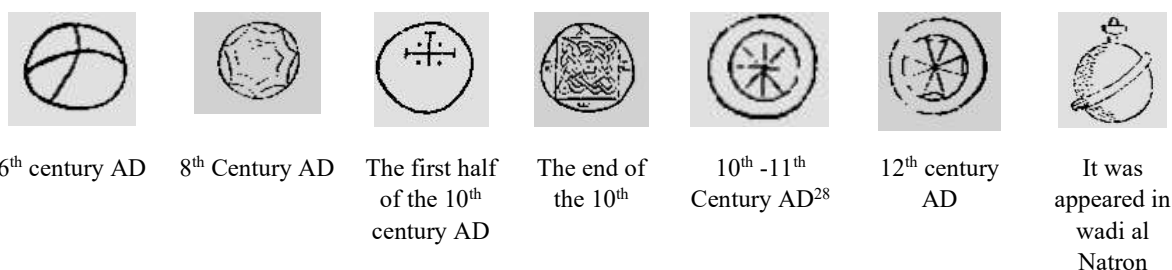
²² H.J. POLOTSKY, "Suriel der Trompeter," *le Muséon* XLIX (1936), p. 236.

and Angels ²³							
The Heaven's Doxology Of St. Basil ²⁴ .	Michael,	Gabriel.	Raphael	Suriel	Sedakiel	Sarathiel	Ananiel

Their Depictions

The notes about their development of their appearance:

- The archangels represented holding in their left hand a circle disc, and there are some hypothetical opinions which mention in the article by OLE SKJERBÆK MADSEN²⁵, which is probably represented the oblation (offering loaf), is derived from Italian word “oblazion” which mean liturgical offering which used in the Coptic Church.
- In other hand, OLE SKJERBÆK MADSEN called it as an Orb (symbol of a high rank in heaven), is derived from Italian word “*orbe*” which mean globe, it form as a ball-like object, which carry by a king or queen on formal occasions, it used during the royal custom, and also it described by Costigan as the imperial globe²⁶
- The object during the first six centuries (Earliest Coptic art) it was shown as royal orb with cross in its central, while 7th – 13th century it was referred to the Eucharist loaf, but in 14th century it represented wheel according to Eustathius Encomium²⁷.
- Some examples for the circle disk which hold by archangels: The seven archangels’ figure in some systems of ritual magic, each archangel bearing a specific seal.



• Fig. 1 - Some examples for the circle disk which hold by archangels

²³ MEYER, *The Magical book of Mary and Angels*, p. 70.

²⁴ *The Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil*, 4th edition, Australia, 1998, p. 17.

²⁵ O.S. MADSEN, “Michael and the Oblation: towards the interpretation of the circular object in Michael’s hand, in old Egyptian or Coptic Pictorial representations”, *BSAC* XXI (1975), pp. 105-115.

²⁶ G.H. COSTIGAN, “Sculpture and Coptic Art”, *BSAC* III (1937), pp. 48-57.

²⁷ E.A.W. BUDGE, *St. Michael the Archangel, Three Encomiums by Theodosius, Archbishop of Alexandria, Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, and Eustathius, Bishop of Trake*, London, 1894, pp. 102-128.

²⁸ M. Capuani, *Christian Egypt. Coptic Art and Monuments through Two Millennia*, Cairo, 2002, p. 248; The apse of the main church inside The monastery of St. Simeon (Dier Anba Simaan, Deir Anba Hedra) at Aswan.



Pl. 3A – The archangel Michael, The Monastery of St. Antony At The Red Sea (by the researcher).



Pl. 3B – The details of the facial features of the archangel Michael (E. S. Bolman 2002 fig. 8.3).



Pl. 3C: The archangels Gabriel (by the researcher).



Pl. 3D – The archangels Michael and Gabriel, The Monastery of St. Antony At The Red Sea (E. S. Bolman 2002 fig. 17).

Date	1232 / 1233.
Provenance	The southern and northern sides of the ceiling of the archway between the khuras and nave - Old church of St. Antony – monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea.
Description	They are represented in a static and frontal position against an intensely saturated orange-red background, in his left hand; hold a white disk painted with a red cross and Coptic letters which include the phrase "Jesus Christ is victorious." In their right hand hold long, golden-colored staff surmounted with cross. They wear long dark azure tunic above red garment which appeared in the left arm, they wrapped with ornamented scarf that garnished in red and dark azure which consist square and rhombus shapes. Their wing arch is elegantly above their shoulders and sweep down almost to their feet. The facial features painted in broad through the eyes and forehead and tapering gracefully to the chin, so that the face is longer than it's wide, with dark eyebrows, slightly furrowed, they are painted in large and dark pupils. The hair is loosely braided with two small tufts of hair, and tied swathe around their hair with central something like a precious red stone. The footwear wrapped the foot with band of cloth.
Text	<p>To left and right of archangel Michael in white:</p> <p>ΟΥΑΡΧΗΑΣΤΕΛΟC archangel</p> <p>ΜΗΧΑΗΛ Michael</p> <p>within the medallion in Michael's hand, in red:</p> <p>ΙC ΥC ΝΙΚΑ Jesus the son is victorious.</p> <p>To left and right of archangel Gabriel in white:</p> <p>ΟΥΑΡΧΗΑΣΤΕΛΟC archangel</p> <p>ΣΑΒΡΗΛ Gabriel.</p> <p>within the medallion in Gabriel 's hand, in red:</p> <p>ΙC ΥC ΝΙΚΑ Jesus the son is victorious.</p>
Remarks	The planes of the face are built up with numerous thin brushstrokes pink, and the artist used a combination of white and pink shades in the forehead, cheeks, chin, and neck.
Bibliography	<p>PIANKOFF, "Peintures au Monastère de Saint Antoine", pp. 151-163.</p> <p>VAN MOORSEL, <i>Les peintures du Monastère de Saint-Antoine</i>, p. 110, pl. 55, 56, pl. 57.</p> <p>BOLMAN, <i>Monastic visions</i>, pp. 128, 231, 232, figs. 4, 8.3, 17, 8.1, 8.2.</p>

IV. The Seraphim

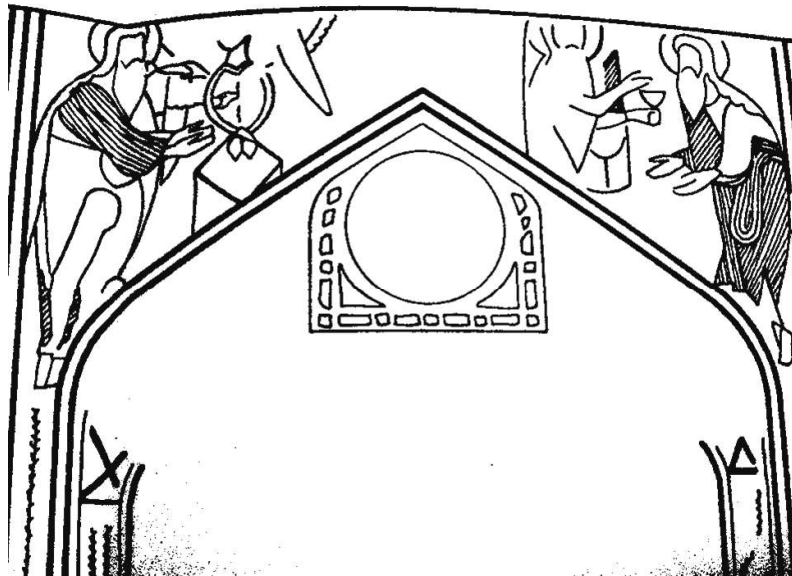


Fig.2 - The seraphim with Isaiah, the Monastery of St. Macarius at Wadi al-Natrun, (J. Leroy 1982, diagram B, fig 7).



Pl.4 - The seraphim with Isaiah, the Monastery of St. Macarius at Wadi al-Natrun, aquarelle copy (J. Leroy 1982, pl. 68).

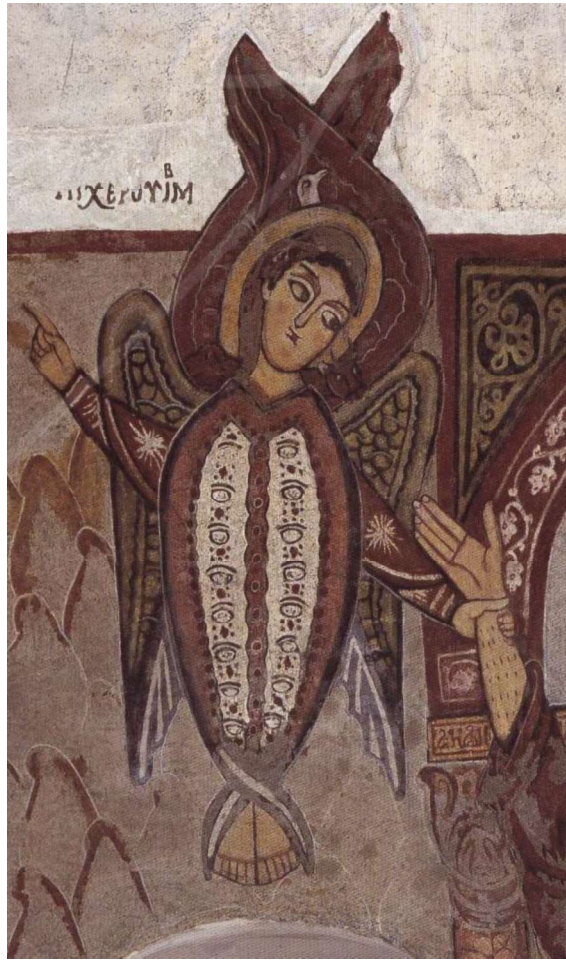


Fig.3 - The seraphim with Isaiah, the Monastery of St. Macarius at Wadi al-Natrun, aquarelle copy (J. Leroy 1982, pl. 68).

Date	The first half/middle of 12 th Century.
Provenance	Southern side of the chapel of Saint Mark - the Monastery of St. Macarius at Wadi al-Natrun
Description	The prophet Isaiah represented in old age man, crimson tunic under yellow cloak, his sleeve with woven decoration. Seraph shown in three quarter face with halo, flying on an alter, he shown with six wings dense of eyes, two wings above his head partly had been seen, two rose wings covered his body, and he spread the two other wings and he offer his right hand with nipper that hold burning coal near to Isaiah's mouth. Almost the details of the head are not clear.
Text	To the left of Isaiah, in with: ΗΣΑΙΑΣ Isaiah ΠΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ the prophet
Bibliography	J. LEROY, <i>les Peintures Des Couvents Du Ouadi Natroun</i> (le Caire, 1982),



Pl.5A: The cherubim and St. Macarius the great, the monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea (E. S. BOLMAN 2002 fig. 4.19).



Pl.5B: The details of the cherubim and St. Macarius the great, the monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea (E. S. BOLMAN 2002 fig. 4.20).

diagram B, fig 7, pl. 65-68.

G. GABRA, *Coptic Monasteries* (Cairo, 2002), p. 56 – 63.

V. The cherubim

Date	1232/1233.
Provenance	The north side of the nave - Old church of St. Antony – monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea.
Description	The cherub holding St. Macarius's right wrist, the cherub shown with six wings, two crimson wings above his head, two wings dense of eyes covered his body, and he starches the two other wings, also around his head is surrounded by three

	heads of the four living creatures, from the right the ox-headed while to the left the lion-headed, and the eagle upon the face of the cherub.
Text	<p>To left and right of St.Macarius, in white:</p> <p>ⲁⲃⲃⲁ Abba</p> <p>ⲙⲁⲕ(ⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ) Macarius</p> <p>in the plaster above the painting, to left of cherub and right of St.Macarius, in black:</p> <p>ⲡⲓⲭⲉⲣⲟⲩⲃⲓⲙ. The cherubim.</p> <p>(ⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲓⲛⲓⲱ) (Macarius the) great.</p>
Remarks	Therefore the four living creatures are represented in cherub figuration, so they shown the human face of the cherub himself as the forth member of the four living creatures.
Bibliography	<p>PIANKOFF, "Peintures au Monastère de Saint Antoine", pp. 151-163.</p> <p>VAN MOORSEL, <i>Les peintures du Monastère de Saint-Antoine</i>, pp. 145-147, pl. 81, 83.</p> <p>BOLMAN, <i>Monastic Vsions</i>, figs. 4.19, 4.20, pp. 50-51, 228.</p>

Conclusion

The research addressed various scenes on the wall paintings. It should be mentioned here that the mural paintings are too numerous to be gathered. Therefore, the research tried to collect scenes showing characteristic and remarkable depictions of the angels, thus reaching the following results:

1. Angels were a fruitful source of inspiration to the Coptic painter and sculptors. Therefore the scriptural teaching concerning angels would emanate the interest in their depictions in accordance with the scriptural description. As early as the first three centuries, the Christian church had developed a deep belief in the existence of angels. Because of the scriptural influence of their representations, their divine achievements and celestial beauty have been a rich inspiration in Coptic wall paintings. Then Angels were held the prominent place, especially as it was the only element of splendor which could be introduced in the scenes. As usual painted, illustrative of a combination of scriptural teaching was the imaginative suggestions of the Coptic painters on the religious subject, for examples scenes which represent The Christ in majesty (*pantocrator*) almighty and the painter depended in the biblical resources (Isaiah 6: 1-7, Ezekiel 1: 4-28, Revelation of St. John 4: 6-9, 8: 1-5), in addition to while the ecclesial resources like the synaxarion (the book of saints' stories) such as the angel led St. Samuel the flight Angel with Equestrian scenes. Unless the painter was one of the clergy members, he might have been provided with enough details and explanation about the angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim, by the clerical persons depending on how they comprehended the biblical text, or the illustrations of the early church fathers, or

some parts of the liturgical book (synaxarion, doxology, and the three principal liturgies of the Coptic church).

2. The angelic themes was found in the alter room, *Khuras*, a few in the nave and gates of the churches. It became clear that images of the angels play an essential role in the Coptic conception. Those painted in a well-defined place because of a direct connection between the subject and the function or symbolism of the architecture, as a result the alter room (haykal) symbolizes at once the “sanctuary” of the tabernacle. In this state, they were representing the holiness of the sanctuary as the heavenly place. This confirms their role in biblical texts. The most evident example of this is of course the apse-composition: a Christ in Majesty, with or without the four apocalyptic creatures and the Virgin, surrounded by the apostles in a lower zone, is the obvious theme for the decoration of apses in the Coptic churches.²⁹

3. Angels fulfill different functions in the Bible. The scripture references include the following categories: Guardians, Messengers, and Servants. These designations are viewed as scriptural authority. It may be that the text and context describe these three roles. In some cases, an angel could perform two or more roles which are reflected in the Coptic wall paintings. So the angels have several clearly defined roles in the canonical Bible³⁰, which include: 1) The role of angels as Guardians, 2) The role of angels as Messengers, and 3) The role of angels as Servants, Attendants or worshippers of God.

4. Several roles were attested to the angels which were completely consecrated for glorify the Christ and St. Mary. Their main functions, as it was indicated through their texts and attitudes can be concluded in: Protecting the Saints, prophets; accompanying them in their life and supplying them with all signs of victory (crowns, swords, crosses).

5. The Archangels have been painted at the entrances of churches as door-keepers. Good examples of this are the angels flanking the entrance to the narthex in Faras cathedral in Nubia. A much greater percentage of Nubian wall-paintings is devoted to representations of archangels.

6. The angels were essential characters since their early mention in the biblical Texts. They were represented on various monuments through the different periods. Their depictions figured on the sculpture between the second and third century, they were mentioned in the liturgical Texts. Then they started to be represented on the wall painting, starting from the fourth century AD in Bagawat, in the oasis of al-Kharga, in the painting of the funerary chapels³¹. They were depicted on the walls inside the Christian necropolises as well as the monastic churches, fortress, Christian necropolises and secular churches. It became traditional to find their representations on the chapels, choruses, arches, and the naves, therefore the scenes express the symbolic meaning of the ritual intention. As a result, the angelic scenes, symbolic meaning and function are closely related to each other. Although the basic angel image, a winged human figure, has undergone the transmutations and changes of culture, context, language, religion, literature, through the human history, the visual effect of this conception remains consistent through time. The winged human figures continues to have the

²⁹ P. VAN MOORSEL, “The Coptic apse-composition and its Living Creatures”, *Etudes Nubiennes* (1978), pp. 325-333.

³⁰ GUILLY, *Encyclopedia of Angels*, pp. 154-155.

³¹ A. FAKHRY, *The Necropolis of Al Bagawat in Kharga Oasis*, Cairo, 1951.

power of create wonder and inspiration³², which is an extraordinary and valuable testament to the universal and timeless appeal and power in the art.

7. In addition to that there are some rare scenes which were not common in the depictions of the Coptic art, such as The Prophet Ezekiel in scene of Christ in majesty, the Angels in Jacob's dream. The flight angel saves St. John the Baptism, The Angel in Joseph's dream. The Angel with the three mourning women, the angel led St. Samuel; and the Equestrian Angel.

8. Concerning the characteristic human facial features of the angels in the Coptic style, they include the following elements: The human face is formalized in geometrical shapes, with vertical, horizontal and semicircular lines repeated as often as possible – the nose, for example, provides a strong, vertical division, the eyes and the eyebrows are groups of semicircles – and no attempt was made to give a realistic representation of a real person.” “Details such as ears and mouth are painted in an ornamental and unnatural way, with the hair framing the head in rigid curls or ringlets. The human figure is rendered in outline only, without attempt made to suggest movement in the body or to indicate differences in light and shade. The Coptic artist abhorred a vacuum, and filled up every available space with jeweler, ornaments, trees, plants or animals. (Egyptian, Byzantine, Arabic, Syrian, Nubian).the scenes of angels are characterized by less than elegant renditions of the human figure, in sharp contrast to the conventions of ancient Egyptian art: huge, staring eyes; long, attenuated torsos; and, most of all, a marked frontality, Figures are stylized and frontally posed, often with wide, staring eyes. Colors tend to be flat.

9. The position of the angels appeared as they used to have winged human form either standing or flying. They were also depicted standing in the moving attitude. It was recognized that in many cases the figures of Cherubim and Seraphim were swapped between them, since the twelfth century. The Bible doesn't say that all angels have wings. But it does describe the Seraphim and Cherubim as having wings. However (Isaiah 6:2 and Rev 4:6). (Ezekiel 1:4, 10:3-22) describes them as having: a face, hands, and wings (no halos); angels are neither male nor female. They are totally asexual! Furthermore the wings were considered as the symbolic reference of the victory³³.

10. The wings of angels are represented similar to the eagle's wings (by comparing the relief with eagles flanking garland of laurel, Coptic Museum Inv. 4619) which offer protection in psalm 102:5, further, the eagle's ability to fly high and approach the sun enables it in popular imagination to be a messenger between earth and heaven, even as to signify the main rule of angels as intermediate between the God and the mankind.

11. The representation of angels can in many cases be identified as 'representative', in the sense that it functions as a substitute for the presence of the one depicted. In the case of representations of angels an important purpose is the veneration of these images as a sign of respect to the one represented. Those in which scene is primarily depicted for devotional reasons, without any direct connection to the architecture. And as in the case of an icon, the veneration is an interaction between believer and the angel, not depending on a specific place. Apart from these subjects, it finds another category of 'representative' paintings. A second category include scenes of angels in which an event or action is represented. It would be too simple to use the term 'narrative', since the purpose of the representation can be more than

³² GUILLY, *Encyclopedia of Angels*, p. 199.

³³ El-Mallakh, "La Datation d'un Tissu Copte", p. 17; GUILLY, *Encyclopedia of Angels*, p. 197.

just illustrating or narrating an event. Such images are rather scarce in Nubian painting. A number of representations of the Nativity and the Youths in the fiery furnace are known.

Finally, The Monasteries are the major source of this Coptic wall painting. Most of the buildings were made of mud-brick, and the murals were applied to the plastered wall - they are extremely fragile, and conservation requires training of the very highest level. Conservators of Coptic wall paintings are rare in Egypt. Consequently, the heritage is being lost through lack of adequate documentation, inadequate protection, and want of professional conservators.”

For the most of Coptic archaic scenes are already in a very bad state, the documentation of such threatened scenes will be a great help for the preservation of the national heritage, Future generations should have the chance to see what once has been the life of their ancestors. The documentary parts are an outline meant to be an impetus to further research.

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