The Cross in the Visual Culture of Christian Egypt

Byzantine to Fatimid eras

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ABSTRACT

Egypt is better known for pharaohs, and their legacy, than for Christianity. Yet, in the early centuries after Christ, the Christian monastic movement grew roots and took shape in Egypt. Early adopters of the new faith in Egypt contributed to the development of Christian contemplative life. More relevant to this study, they also expressed themselves through material culture.

This thesis focuses on representations of the cross, that most fundamental symbol of the Christian faith. More specifically, it is an art historical exploration of the varied designs of the crosses of Christian Egypt, from the fourth to the twelfth century. The corpus, across the monastic landscape, is rich and diverse, reflecting the syncretistic society that commissioned and produced it. The designs are remarkable and sometimes unique. Representations occur in wall paintings, funerary sculpture, architectural features in stone and wood, and on a wide range of domestic and liturgical objects.

The study commences with a survey of monastic sites across Egypt, and the identification of significant crosses, acknowledging that the size of the corpus has been diminished by many factors including deliberate destruction, questionable excavation methods of early archaeologists and bounty hunters, ongoing infrastructure projects and the pressures of population. Nonetheless, the thesis is underpinned by a collection of around four hundred images, sourced mainly from archaeological reports and museum collections, which has allowed the designs to be analysed.

The image collection has been essential to the project. Through it a typology based on design elements has been proposed. The likely influences apparent in the images have been examined and the symbolism of the motifs accompanying the crosses have been explored. Settings and contexts in which the varied designs occur have also been analysed. Designs have been charted against a timeline, and maps showing the distribution of types have been created to support the text.
DECLARATION

I certify that the work in this thesis, *The Cross in the Visual Culture of Christian Egypt, Byzantine to Fatimid eras*, has not been previously submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of the requirement for a degree to any other university of institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that this thesis is an original piece of research and that it has been written by me. Any assistance received in my research and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. Additionally I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Date of submission: 14 February 2018

Name: Gillian L. Spalding-Stracey
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My overall interest in the design of crosses was sparked by my introduction to the crosses of South India by Dr Parry, a topic that eventually developed into my Masters research project and led me to present a paper at an international conference in India in 2014.

Dr Ghica’s class exposed me to Coptic material culture and monasticism, and my ensuing fascination with the designs of Egyptian crosses resulted in this research project. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to have worked with him for the duration of this undertaking. Dr Ghica’s enthusiasm for my venture, in-depth knowledge of the subject area, and measured approach kept my spirits buoyed through what seemed like a long and sometimes arduous journey.

Dr Ghica was my principal supervisor during the early stages of my thesis, and I thank Macquarie University, and the Department of Ancient History in particular, for permitting me to continue to work with him after he took up a position at the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo. I am also indebted to Dr Ghica for being willing to continue working with me, despite his new commitments and the challenges of distance and time zones.

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‘… it was the wood of the cross that removed the middle wall of partition which was between us and God our Father, through Jesus.’

Cyril of Jerusalem, Discourse on the Cross.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Foreword

From the fourth century onwards, the cross has been the most essential, recognisable and familiar symbol of Christianity. It occurs in varied artistic representations on a range of objects and surfaces; it appears in ecclesiastical, domestic and personal contexts and settings, and also in differing cultural expressions across the lands and peoples that embraced Christianity. Yet the symbol’s very ubiquity often means that it is relegated to a secondary position after Christian figurative art. Generally, art historians have paid less attention to the cross as a design feature in itself.

Better known for pharaonic art and artefacts than its Christian past, Egypt was an early adopter of Christianity. The focus of this thesis is on the varied designs by which the cross is represented in the visual culture of Christian Egypt, from the Byzantine to the early Fatimid periods, with necessary excursions on either side of that timeframe. The corpus of crosses in Egypt, in the period under consideration, provides a rich seam of visual expression. This project seeks to address an apparent gap in the art-historical knowledge of the design lexicon of Christian Egypt. Researchers and art historians have tended to focus their attention on broader aspects of ‘Coptic’ creative endeavour, for example, figurative paintings and textile designs, but with a few notable exceptions the large and distinctive corpus of crosses, specifically, has been overlooked.¹

A brief diversion into the choice to use ‘visual culture’ rather than ‘art’ is necessary here. ‘Art’ and ‘craft’ are often loaded words, producing discussions and dissenting views about whether something can be considered art or craft, with the former generally, and perhaps erroneously, being considered superior. In many instances the distinctions are merely semantic while in others they are ideologically irreconcilable. Collingwood managed to provide a dispassionate definition where he saw art (ars in Latin and techne in Greek) as the power to produce a preconceived result by means of a consciously controlled and directed action. This does not appear to allow for any degree of spontaneity, which would normally be considered part of artistic expression. He dismisses craft as the process by which art is created, meshing the concepts

¹ A key exception is Marguerite Rassart-Debergh who has researched and published widely on the topic
inherent in \textit{ars} and \textit{techne}, and taking into account tools, processes, materials and techniques. While this could be regarded as a practical approach, his description accords a certain mechanical quality to artistic endeavour. Certainly in the visual representations in Christian Egypt there is a considerable degree of latitude of expression, which does not speak of the control inherent in Collingwood’s definition.

Harris, writing more recently, takes a more holistic view and defines art both as a descriptive term and an evaluative concept. He suggests that art refers to artefacts, processes, skills and effects involved in the production of visual representations, within a wide variety of media and materials. He defines craft as an art historical term that refers to material practices and occupations, distinguished from art, and notes the general assumption, in art historical circles, that art is better than craft. Harris brings to the fore the ongoing debate around the concepts of art and craft and the continuing arguments about what constitutes high art and low or mass culture.

The juxtaposition of the views of these two art historians, separated by some six decades, demonstrates the loaded meaning and sometimes entrenched positions taken in regard to defining art and craft. It would appear that the jury is still out on the final verdict of a definition that has wide approval.

Given, therefore, that the terms art and craft should be treated with caution, an alternative and preferred approach, which this study relies on, is to discuss the crosses in terms of visual culture, incorporating the notions of meaning and symbolism, and the human response to ‘art’. The concept of visual culture implies the need to understand the society and place of cultural production, and the activities and identities of their producers and consumers within that culture.

Culture, while in itself hard to define, could be described as a way of thinking or behaving, specific to a group, that is shared, learned and transmitted, and acknowledges that viewers are not merely eyes but have minds, bodies, histories and personalities. Not only does each person see things differently, but on a larger scale cultural clusters also view things from a particular standpoint. This particularity is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Harris, Jonathan. 2006. \textit{Art History: The Key Concepts}. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, pp. 20, 21, 70.}
\footnote{Harris, 2006, \textit{Art History}, pp. 333–334.}
\end{footnotes}
The Cross in the Visual Culture of Christian Egypt

apparent in the Egyptian crosses, which are significantly different to representations from other Christian societies.

Studying art, and writing about it, is a process of interpretation. Everything we see is decoded, usually intuitively and personally. In that sense the viewer ‘owns’ the image he or she is seeing in as much as the producer owns his or her creation. However, we cannot assume that the viewer interprets the image in the same way as the producer intended. No two people see the same work of art in quite the same way. As Sayre suggests, the art historian must strike a balance between an image’s openness to being interpreted and its resistance to arbitrary readings. A cross in itself is not a complex motif, but while not abstract in the sense of divergence from a recognisable form in the Egyptian representations, its intent is sometimes unclear. It is relatively easy to fall into the trap of an uninformed reading based on an incomplete understanding of, for example, the particular symbolism attaching to elements of the image. Viewing and interpreting ancient art with modern eyes carries no guarantee that it was perceived by its contemporaries in the same way. The difficulty here lies in the analysis of images where the producer’s intent and intended viewer’s response can only be surmised.

Thus a consideration in the study of the design of Egypt’s crosses is whether our interpretations of the images correctly represent the producers’ intent and viewers’ response. Moreover, if we did have written records explaining purpose and reaction, we would need to bear in mind, as Adams proposes, that no quantity of words could describe an image exactly. While she suggests that this is because words are one form of communication while images are entirely another, creating therefore a need for translation; it is perhaps more salient that we each bring our cultural biases, histories and experiences into our interactions with ‘art’. Further, viewing and interpreting an image relies on the engagement of senses and skills other than literary. It could seem somewhat reductionist to distil a complex image into words.

In the case of the Egyptian crosses, there is no early writer who has provided such a ‘translation’ of the images. There are few, if any, explanations or even descriptions of

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Chapter 1 – Introduction
visual representations in the ancient sources. Therefore there is an unavoidable
degree of ambiguity, subjective interpretation and speculation involved for the
modern viewer of ancient images. The lens through which we view such images is
easily tinted with our contemporary experiences, knowledge and biases.

There are three reasons to study crosses as an expression of visual culture. First, the
cross is the fundamental symbol of Christianity and it is of interest, from an art
historical perspective, to consider its occurrence in an environment of a newly
established and developing religion, especially in a syncretistic setting such as we find
in the earlier centuries of Christian Egypt.

Secondly, as has been noted earlier, the cross motif is often overlooked by historians
of religion and art in favour of narrative and figurative visual expression. The
tendency of students of Christian Egypt has been to focus on written sources such as
literary texts and correspondence, which undoubtedly have proved illuminative in
furthering our understanding of this period in history. Documenting and analysing the
design of crosses recognises the importance of the symbol for both artist and viewer.
For the most part occurrences of the motif are not random, though we are left to
consider what motivated these expressions, what the artists and craftspeople were
attempting to convey and to what extent the meanings were culturally nuanced.

Thirdly, the corpus of crosses in Egypt is prolific, varied and unique, in part, in
relation to other early adopters of Christianity, including areas in relative proximity in
the Middle East, Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. Cultural elements are
reflected in the range of designs, as is the trade in ideas.

Therefore the key components of this thesis concern identifying, documenting and
analysing the representations of significant crosses, across the Egyptian landscape
from the Byzantine to the Fatimid eras, with a focus on design, location, dating and
context. Significant crosses can be described as those that are the central or solitary
feature in an image and, admittedly, there is an element of subjectivity in this
distinction.

An exception would be the 9th century writer al-Shābushtī’s Book of Monasteries, whose work does
not cover the relevant monasteries where crosses are attested. See Al-Shabushiti, Abu al-Hasan
Monasteries. Piscataway, US: Gorgias Press. There are some 60 monasteries listed in the book,
none of which have any bearing on the sites mentioned in this thesis.
Before proceeding further, two other clarifications are needed. The first is the decision to use the term ‘Egyptian Christian’ as distinct from the more commonly used ‘Coptic’. The term ‘Coptic’ is often loosely, and sometimes incorrectly, used to describe Egyptian Christians of all periods. Wessel noted that while scholars such as Maspero and Gayet only applied it to fifth-century Christian monuments from the Nile valley, Strzygowski began to use it to describe all late antique Egyptian art, and others followed his example. Thus it has come to be applied to the art of Egypt from the fourth to early seventh centuries, that is, until the Arab conquest. While this is the period when Egypt was predominantly Christian, in fact, Egyptian Christian art continued to flourish for some centuries beyond the arrival of Islam, and some of this later art is also loosely described as Coptic. Indeed, as Tim Vivian suggests, the word ‘Copt’ has a somewhat elastic connotation in terms of society, ethnicity and historical periods. This uncertainty and complexity surrounding the term, highlighted by Wessel, suggests a need to be cautious about the use of ‘Coptic’ as a descriptor in this study. The phrase ‘Egyptian Christian’ covers more inclusively the time span and inherent religious developments within this period of this study.

Clarification is also needed regarding the naming conventions used in this thesis. There are many variations in Egyptian toponymy, from ancient to modern times. For the sake of clarity and ease of reading, the conventions of the Coptic Encyclopedia have been used, though even here there are inconsistencies.

Context

Christianity came early to Egypt. It is a widely held tradition among most Coptic Christians that the Apostle Mark travelled to Alexandria not long after the Crucifixion and established Christianity there. The role of St Mark in establishing the church in Egypt lacks documentary and material proof, though it is not beyond the realms of

Wessel, 1965, *Coptic Art*. Wessel devotes several pages to the complexity of Coptic art, which will be discussed in more detail later. See pp. 48–79.
possibility. Eusebius writes that Annianus took over the parish of Alexandria from St Mark in the eighth year of Nero’s reign, which would place the event in 62 CE."

Eusebius also notes the existence of a catechetical school in Alexandria at the end of the second century, under the care of Pantaenus, and at the start of the reign of Commodus, which would place its inception in 180 CE.« By very early in the third century there were sufficient Christians in Egypt for the emperor Septimus Severus to issue an edict, forbidding people to follow the new religion, resulting in the first of several rounds of persecutions. The school and its masters were dispersed as a result.». Examples of what could be interpreted as artistic representations of Christian symbols appear, perhaps for the first time, on mummy portraits from the Severan era, and are also evidenced in documentary sources from around the same period.»

Ghica notes the existence of two records of Christian presence in the desert west of the Nile in the pre-Constantinian era. The first is a set of nine wooden tablets dated to 246–249 CE listing *hydreumata* or watering stations in proximity to the town of Hibis in the Great Oasis. The lists are preceded with the word *Eirene*, which Ghica concludes is an epistolary formula consistent with Christian practice. The second document is the ‘Letter of Psenosiris’, a papyrus from the necropolis of Dūş, datable by paleographic means to the late third or early fourth century and which confirms the existence of a Christian community at that location."

This early evidence of Christianity is supported by the representations of *ansate* crosses in the Dākhlah and Khārjāh oases, on the walls of churches and repurposed tombs. Bowen describes the small east church at Ismant al-Kharāb in the Dākhlah oasis and notes the existence of an *ansate* cross. From the ceramic finds in the nave, some of which have parallels in the third century, she concludes that the church


functioned at least as early as the fourth century. She similarly notes that the large east church and the west church can be dated to the early and mid fourth century, respectively, mostly through an analysis of the numismatic finds in the absence of written material or dated papyri.

Doresse, among others, notes the fourth century destruction of the temple of Serapis in Alexandria and the subsequent replacing of ankhs with resigndified cruces ansatae, again suggesting a relatively early, and in this instance, aggressive Christian presence.

In the centuries before Byzantine rule and until Christianity was fully established in Egypt, society was pluralistic and syncretistic. Greek, Roman, Ancient Egyptian and other Middle Eastern influences were brought to bear in varying degrees and incorporated into local designs. Some of these elements are evident in the crosses that will be discussed and analysed, and we shall see evidence of Christian and pagan motifs running in tandem until at least the sixth century.

The decision to commence this study from the Byzantine era is a reflection of the paucity of Christian art in the early centuries. As is the case with early Christian art elsewhere, there is little, if any, definite evidence in Egypt of any Christian art prior to the fourth century. There are many possible reasons for this. In an Egyptian context, persecutions and martyrdom were not infrequent until the Edict of Milan in 312 CE, and the years under the emperor Diocletian were particularly dangerous for Christians. In this climate it is possible that Christian ‘art’, if it was created, was not overtly or exclusively Christian in its appearance or symbolism. It is also possible that whatever art was created in this era was destroyed, either deliberately or through the passage of time. The reasons are unclear and speculative at best, but there are few extant examples of early Christian art in Egypt from the period prior to the fourth century. The exceptions are a few so-called mummy portraits from Shaykh Abādah

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See Snyder, Graydon F. 2003. Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press. He notes on pp. 24–25 that symbols were borrowed from Graeco-Roman culture and given new meaning. For example, the dove that earlier signified fertility and happiness, now came to mean deliverance and safety, through its association with the Holy Spirit.

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(Antinoë), which depict the deceased with one or more ansate crosses. The assumption is generally made that these depictions were suggestive of Christian belief.

Archaeological reports, cited in later chapters, provide evidence that from the fourth century onwards, monastic and liturgical spaces were the repository of artistic endeavour. We cannot assume that domestic buildings, as opposed to domestic spaces within monasteries, did not have representations of crosses, despite lack of evidence. Given the number of pendant crosses, and textiles with the cross motif, that have been retrieved from graves of lay people, it is more than likely that private dwellings had, if not intricately painted or sculpted crosses, some sort of basic representation, for apotropaic if not venerative reasons.

While there are instances of professional renditions in some formal areas of monasteries, there is evidence of both expert as well as amateur artistic expression in cells and hermitages. Crosses are also widely attested in architectural features and funerary stelae. At a more basic level, monasteries have also proved a rich seam of everyday objects, also adorned with crosses, such as lamps, utensils and storage vessels.

Christian visual culture continued to flourish well into the Islamic period, with an impressive inventory of paintings, sculpture and artefacts. Thus the choice to end this study in the Fatimid period is more a reflection of the time constraints of this project rather than of the extent of the corpus.

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The Cross in Early Christian Art

While the cross is widely regarded as a universal symbol of the Christian faith, appearing in various artistic and cultural interpretations, it was not always widely or overtly used. It is also not the exclusive preserve of Christianity as cruciform symbols were used by various cultures before the Christian era, though as Snyder notes, its pre-Christian meaning has eluded anthropologists.¹

Various reasons have been suggested for the rarity of the use of the cross as a Christian symbol prior to the fourth century. Gough’s view was that connotations of criminality and shame attached to the cross in the early years following the Crucifixion are thought to have precluded its overt use. This was a particularly cruel Roman method of execution, reserved for foreigners and slaves and is likely not to have been a detail that early Christians wanted advertised. He cited examples from the Roman catacombs where the cross was often disguised as a mast or anchor.² While this view is entirely plausible and valid, Snyder’s more recent work refutes the view that the cross was disguised as an anchor or mast, for example, prior to the fourth century. He notes that third-century popular faith did not use symbols of suffering and dying, though he proffers no explanation for this.³ He proposes that the Christian use of the cross should not be considered prior to the Constantinian era, though he concedes that the discussion around its supposed lack of use is controversial. In fact, while it is true that the occurrence of the cross is rare in artistic representations before the fourth century, it was used, at least, in scribal practice as evidenced by textual remains. Hurtado provides examples of pre-fourth century use of crosses, in the form of christograms and staurograms in correspondence and documents.⁴

That said, it is a generally held view that the widespread use of the cross as a Christian symbol did not occur until the fourth century when, just prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, the Emperor Constantine is said to have seen a vision of a luminous cross in the sky and subsequently ordered that it be used as his battle

¹ Snyder, 2003, Ante Pacem, p. 60. An example (not cited by Snyder) is an Assyrian stele with a cross-like symbol depicting the sun god, which will be discussed later. See also Denham Parsons, John. 1896. The Non-Christian Cross. 2006 Reprint. Teddington, UK. The Echo Library. Denham Parsons provides several examples of cruciform symbols across Asia, Africa and Europe and while his work might be controversial, it does provide a fairly comprehensive survey of pre-Christian use of the cross. More mainstream than Denham Parson’s work is Strzygowski, Josef. 1923. Origin of Christian Church Art, edited by O.M. Dalton and M.A. Braunholtz. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 149, who also discusses pre-Christian uses of the cross.
standard, an event that was referred to by both Eusebius and Lactantius. While various authors refer to the battle standard as a turning point in the use of the cross symbol, it would appear that the labarum in question showed a christogram rather than a cross. More relevant therefore is the subsequent Edict of Milan, which marked a turning point in the treatment of Christians, and the abolition of the practice of crucifixion in 315 CE. Doubtless the legendary discovery of the True Cross by the Empress Helena in 327 CE would have lent weight to the use of the cross in design. In a very short space of time a symbol that held suggestions of shame and criminality morphed into an imperial and soteriological motif.

Thus, from an initial reluctance to use the symbol in art and ritual, every Christian culture eventually adopted the cross as its primary symbol, but in diverse and distinct forms. From the number of representations and diversity of designs, it is clear that the importance of the cross, with its attendant themes of hope, deliverance and the promise of life beyond the grave, was beyond doubt to Egyptian Christians in the era under consideration.

This study of the varied iterations of crosses in Egypt is expected to provide insights into the culture and environment in which the designs were created. It is mainly confined to non-figural crosses, that is, those that do not bear a representation of Christ. As far as it has been possible to confirm during the course of this project, there are few representations of figural crosses in Egyptian Christian art in the period under review. Two exceptions occur at Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl (Naqlūn) in the Fayyūm and one at Kellia, which show the bust of Christ superimposed on a Latin-type cross. There is also an unusual textile fragment of unknown provenance with a face superimposed within the loop of an anasate cross, as well as a few examples of funerary stelae with faces within the loops of the anasate crosses.

In Egypt, in the period under study, the cross motif appears in a range of media including stone, wood, pigment on plaster, ceramics, textiles, parchment and metal. It

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* These examples will be elaborated upon in later chapters.
is seen on domestic objects such as utensils and lamps, and in one attested example, what could be a wooden window aperture. There are also examples of personal objects such as pendant crosses in wood and ivory, codices with leather tooled covers and fasteners in the shape of crosses. In liturgical or ceremonial objects the motif is seen on bread stamps, on bronze lamps and censers, and containers that could have been used during the celebration of the Eucharist. It is seen on elaborate frontispieces, the work of various scriptoria. There are also occurrences on tools of trade, such as jewellery moulds for pendant crosses and on a container for writing implements.

There is no single type of cross in the Egyptian repertoire. Nor is there a dominant type that could be described solely as ‘Egyptian’ or ‘Coptic’. The crux ansata is the only type that occurs solely in Egypt and, while its uniqueness makes it remarkable, it is outnumbered by quadrata crosses. The other types occur elsewhere in the Mediterranean and Byzantine world in approximately the same era. Where Egyptian crosses therefore diverge is in the accompanying embellishments, of which there are several types. Indeed, it is rare to see a cross in Egypt without some form of decorative element.

Clearly, there were many and varied influences on the producers of Egyptian crosses but it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion about the original inspirations. There are a few early twentieth-century art historians and critics, such as Der Nersessian and Zuntz, who argued that Coptic art was not inventive or imaginative, drawing on a limited range of themes and motifs, with the same combinations appearing in different media. To some extent this is true, though Du Bourguet is more generous when he reminds us that Coptic art flourished without imperial sponsorship."

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* The cross known today as the Coptic cross is barely an adequate reflection of the range of designs attested in the various Egyptian monasteries from the fourth century onwards.
Approach

The approach to this project is essentially iconographic, where the intended meaning of the image is as important as the way in which it was created. Panofsky’s albeit dated, but still relevant, study distinguishes between the subject of a work of art, which he equates with meaning, and the form it takes. While he dwells on varying levels of meaning, it is clear that form and context are equally important.

The notion of meaning is especially important in the consideration of religious art, which is never simply art for art’s sake. Panofsky’s suggestion that several layers of meaning come into play in reading a work iconographically is best illustrated by Adams more recent work.*

Drawing significantly on Panofsky, Adams notes that at a pre-iconographic level the primary subject matter is understood by identifying the pure forms such as configurations of line and colour, shapes and representations of natural objects such as humans, fauna and flora. This is the relatively simple world of artistic motifs. At this basic level, therefore, a crucifix may simply be described as a man on a cross.

The secondary level is one of convention and precedent where, to correctly interpret the image, some pre-existing information would be required, even at a basic level. Here we connect artistic motifs with themes, concepts and storylines. The image of a man on a cross could therefore, with even a rudimentary knowledge about the crucifixion narrative, be described as Christ on the cross. Those without an awareness of the underlying account would only be able to view the object at a pre-iconographical level. This secondary level therefore takes into account shared meaning within a cultural context.

Panofsky’s third level is the intrinsic meaning and takes into account the prevailing cultural nuances. It considers the era, attitude and existing knowledge of a cultural group. Thus the level of interpretation is now a synthesis of information from a variety of sources including cultural themes, contemporary texts, and artistic precedents. By this definition, Adams’ pre-iconographic level ‘man on the cross’ could now be interpreted as a motif of, variously, eternal life, salvation, hope or

deliverance. In the case of the Egyptian crosses these nuances would need to take into account the relationship with the Greek, Byzantine and Islamic worlds. It would also need to recognise prevailing belief and participation in, for example, magical practice and allow that the cross could, in a number of instances, also be interpreted as a talismanic object.

Another relevant and related approach is that which Gombrich describes as iconology. This is the study of the larger program to which an image belongs. The distinction between iconography and iconology is that the latter is the reconstruction of an entire program. The image is contained within a context that includes a cultural as well as an artistic setting. By this definition we would need to know when the art was produced, its connection with contemporary events, the intended audience and the way it was financed, giving a more complete picture. Gombrich also talks about three levels of meaning: representational, the illustration of a myth (or event) and the symbolism behind the first two. He reminds us that the intent of the artist may have varied from that of the person who commissioned the art, and further by how it is viewed by modern observers. His approach is not incompatible with Panofsky’s though it does provide a wider perspective. Saliently for this project, Gombrich asks where meaning ends and decoration begins, an issue that is particularly relevant in the study of Egyptian crosses.”

In an ideal world it would be useful to adopt Gombrich’s approach, however care must be taken with this project where there is a lack of information about the intent of the producers and commissioners of the images. In such a situation emphasis must be placed on the viewer or consumer. It is the viewer’s knowledge and cultural bias, among other things, that enables him or her to interpret the image. While the ability to interpret or read the image is important, in the case of the Egyptian crosses there is no explanation of, and scant commentary on, the artistic program of any monastery. We are therefore left with having to make an educated guess about intent of the patron and artist, and the response of the viewer.

As to how the viewer might have interacted with religious art, Elsner proposes that in viewing the sacred the observer is brought into the presence of the divine, however

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* An exception, as noted earlier, would be al-Shabushti’s *Book of Monasteries*, which unfortunately does not cover any of the monasteries of interest to this project.
subjectively this may be perceived. There is, he believes, a hope of reciprocity in the
gaze, where the pilgrim has made a journey to view an image and expects it to
respond in some way, such as to provide healing or protection. The experience for
such supplicants could also be epiphanic, especially if the image is figurative. It is
easy to imagine that this would be the case when viewing images of Christ and the
saints from Bāwīt, hung as they are at eye level in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.
Whether this applies to a cross would depend on the function and setting. Arguably if
the cross was considered transfugal, it could take the place of an icon as a means to
focus one’s mind on prayer or veneration, and could be said to embody this
reciprocity. However not all crosses in Egypt have this quality, a significant
proportion being talismanic in purpose. Further, the appearance of the cross on many
ordinary items removes it from the realm of ‘high art’, if such a concept could be
applied to Egyptian oeuvre. Possibly, though, the notion of such a transactional
quality, as proposed by Elsner, could apply in the case of the several talismanic
crosses, where the viewer reveres the object not just for its intrinsic meaning but also
with the expectation that it will provide protection. Thus reciprocity is not just in the
gaze but also in viewer’s sense of ownership and expectation.

A final point on how visual culture can be approached draws on Taylor, who proposes
that our analysis of the subject matter of a work of art often ceases when we have
answered two basic questions: what is it and what is it about. These questions are
important, and focus on the subject matter, which is sometimes self-evident, but the
art historian must take the questions further. For example, a painting of a cross might
simply be described as a cross without taking it any further. Indeed for a ubiquitous
symbol such as the cross this might be the response for many. Taylor however
suggests we should think of the ‘expressive content’ rather than the subject of the
artwork. Put simply, the ‘what’ is as important as the ‘how’. In this study the cross in
its various representations is the subject, but the analysis of the images depends on an
exploration of how the subject is expressed and what feeling it evokes. The emotional
response relies on context, setting, type of representation and the accompanying
symbolism.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction
Bearing in mind the approaches outlined above, this project, focused as it is on the design of crosses, is constructed broadly from the point of view of the art historian. The approach is mainly iconographic, concentrating on the design elements of the crosses, their meaning and their surrounding context, with attendant interpretation and analysis. What is represented is as important as how the image is composed. The meaning behind the images, albeit speculative, is as relevant as the image itself.

Method

At the start of this project it was clear that no analysis of any description could be undertaken without a survey of the relevant sites and a representative collection of images. No such resource existed and had to be created expressly for this project. The survey, while not resulting in any numerical analysis, provided a measure of the scope of the corpus and has allowed the basic types and sub-types to be identified.

Thus, a vital part of the survey, and which enabled an analysis to occur, was the development of database of images of crosses,\(^1\) which commenced in the early stages of the project. The database itself, which by the end of the project consisted of around 430 images,\(^2\) was an adjunct to the thesis that relied on a representative sample of images. There are several hundred images of crosses in archaeological and scientific reports, in museum collections and commercial publications that had to be studied and imported into the database.\(^3\) The image collection proved to be the core resource for this project.

As noted earlier, a decision was taken to only include crosses that were ‘significant’, meaning those that were central to, or prominent in, a composition or those that were particularly unique or outstanding. Secondary images of crosses, such as those that

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\(^1\) The image collection is entitled “Egyptian Crosses Database” (ECD) and is presented as a non-searchable supporting document to this thesis. Images referred to in the body of the thesis are numbered according to the printed version of the database, e.g. ECD001 – ECD400.

\(^2\) The database was compiled using proprietary software and was structured to search under find site, current location, material, date range, excavation team, excavation date and bibliographic reference.

\(^3\) The archaeological and scientific reports are listed in the bibliography. The Museum collections include, but are not limited to, those of the Egyptian Museum and Coptic Museum in Cairo, British Museum, Victoria & Albert, the Ashmolean, the Petrie collection in UCL, the Fitzwilliam collection in Cambridge, the National Museum of Scotland, the State Museum in Berlin, the Pushkin and Hermitage in Russia, the Louvre and various regional museums in France including Musée des beaux-arts in Lyon, Musée départemental de l’Arles antique, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Benaki Museum in Athens and collections such as those of the Walters Art Museum, and Kelsey Museum of Archaeology.
occur on the garments of monks in certain paintings or on the codex held in the hand of Christ in Deesis images, were excluded mainly because of the time constraints of this project. There was clearly a subjective element in deciding which crosses were significant. By definition, crosses on textual material such as papyri and ostraca were generally more perfunctory than ‘artistic’ and were also excluded. A notable exception was the several frontispieces from al-Ḥāmūlī that were richly decorated with crosses.

The span of this study has also impacted on the size of the image collection, with the exclusion of images beyond the twelfth century. To that end, and as part of project planning, a chronological period had to be established. Broadly it is from the Byzantine to the early Fatimid period, from approximately the fourth to the twelfth centuries. However, this is a continuum, rather than a finite line, and there are explorations on both sides of the time span.

Given the iconographic approach, there are two broad methods of analysis; those that focus on content or subject, and those that address form. Both elements are integral to this project, which also considers other essentials such as materials, techniques and the medium itself.

In dealing with particular types of objects or artefacts, a common method is to begin with a content analysis. For example, one could count the number of occurrences of each type of cross at each location within a particular timeframe and arrive at a numerical value. In the case of this project this would pose a risk, for a number of reasons. Firstly, such an analysis would have to rely on information currently to hand and not the complete corpus that might have existed in the past. It is possible that more crosses will come to light with further excavations and study. Apart from sites and representations that have been lost, there are also likely to be images and representations of crosses in private collections, which may never be recorded and studied.

Secondly, there are problems with dating, much of which is arbitrary and which would skew the result in a quantitative exercise. There are few instances of absolute

\*The notions of ‘significance’ and ‘central’ are subjective and therefore debatable. In this instance significant and central refer to the visual dominance of the cross in a tableau.
dating; most chronological information is relative, and in some instances highly speculative.

Finally, there are also, in some instances, uncertainties with location or find site, especially in the case of stelae and textiles which have found their way into museum collections through private brokers who failed to adequately record these details. For example, many stelae are loosely attributed to Armant, just as almost all textile finds are said to come from Akhmim.

Therefore, discounting the possibility of a content analysis in these circumstances, apart from the survey and resulting image collection, the method relied on four art-historical qualitative approaches.

1. It included what Walker and Chaplin refer to as a genre analysis where artefacts are classified by iconographic elements and themes. This provided a design context by which the meaning of works could be analysed. This allowed the identification of the four basic types and eight sub-types, an examination of the design elements pertaining to each, and culminated in the development of a typology.

2. Next the project included an exploration of the symbols that accompany the crosses and their possible meaning, while noting that the intent of the producers may not be as transparent to us today as to the viewers for whom the representations were intended. This also took into account possible influences and the syncretistic nature of the representations.

3. The third element was an analysis of the crosses by geography and chronology, where this information was available or could be speculated. This is supported by maps showing the distribution of the various types across the Egyptian landscape, and timeline charts that plot the likely dating of the monasteries in relation to the designs.

4. The final analysis was one of context and function, which examined the settings in which crosses occur. In particular, the occurrences of crosses in

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Walker and Chaplin, 1997, *Visual Culture*. p. 137. They refer to this as a semiotic analysis.
The maps and charts are contained in Appendices B and C.
secular settings and sacred or sacralised spaces are compared as a point of distinction.

Fieldwork also formed part of the method. Several monasteries and churches in Egypt were visited to gain first-hand experience of the remaining ancient art in situ, and to observe modern-day Copts’ interaction with the artistic representations. This experience proved invaluable and unfortunately further travel, especially to more remote areas such as Khârijah, was not possible beyond the early stages of this project and continues to be problematic.

Museum collections were visited, mainly in Egypt, the United Kingdom and Europe. Viewing images on screen, which in some instances allows one to zoom in as well as view objects from various angles, was as useful as seeing them in museums. Unfortunately many museums with key holdings do not provide this level of digitisation.

Additionally research was conducted, in person, at the Institut français d’archéologie orientale in Cairo where many hundreds of black and white photographs from original archaeological expeditions at Isnâ and Bâwît, which are yet to be digitised, were studied.

Correspondence was undertaken with selected museum curators to gain a deeper understanding of certain objects, for example with the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A case in point is a curious cross-shaped window aperture from the monastery of St. Epiphanius in Thebes, for which no explanation as yet has been forthcoming.

*The sites visited included the Wâdî al-Naṭrûn monasteries of D. al-Baramûs, D. Anbâ Bishôî, D. Anbâ Maqûr and D. al-Suryân; the Red Sea monasteries of D. Anbû Antunîyûs and D. Anbû Bulû, D. al-Malûk Ghubriyûl (Naqlûn) in the Fayûm, and the modern site of St. Mari Mînû. Several churches in Old Cairo were visited including St. Shenoute the Archimandrite, Sitt Barbarba, St Mercurius (Abû Sayfûn), the Hanging Church (al- Mu ‘allaqa), and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. The site of Kellia, so important to this study, barely exists and could not be visited. So also with Saqqârah, whose remains are housed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.
*The issue of museum collections will be expanded on later.
Significance of this study

Western Christian art is widely recorded and studied. The art of Eastern Christianity is, even today, less well documented perhaps because of the ongoing euro-centric view of the religion, though the situation continues to improve. Karel Innemée noted in a keynote address in 2003 that the same ignorance of art in a western context would be shocking and unacceptable and that there was a long way to go in the understanding of early Christian art in Egypt. Indeed, Egypt is better known for its pharaohs than its contributions to Christian monasticism and art. We should not need to remind ourselves that Christianity was born in the Middle Eastern world and that monasticism, which is now widely practiced in the west, had its origins there. The Pachomian rule is still relevant to western Christian monasticism and St Antony’s life was a template for St Augustine." 

A review of the relevant art historical sources showed that a clear gap existed in the survey and analysis of the cross as a Christian symbol in Egypt. My intention is that this study of the visual language of early Christianity will contribute to the depth and breadth of knowledge about Christian Egypt that otherwise mainly draws on a literary corpus, supported by reports from various archaeological and scientific teams. In particular the examination of the corpus offers, for the first time, a broad view and classification of the considerable compendium of cross designs documented in Egypt. The systematic organisation of the corpus, contained in the image database, allows for a typology based on design and date to be established. The geographical spread of the various types throws light on regional trends within an overall Egyptian homogeneity. Mapping the types of crosses also provides a basis for examining possible lines of transmission into and across Egypt. The chronological picture is necessarily less accurate but still provides a view of the timespan of certain types.

This study additionally addresses complex matters such as of the origin of the ansate cross, the symbolism of two types of draped crosses and evolution of the design of braided crosses in particular.

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Beyond the study’s relevance to art historians, it is also a potentially useful tool for archaeologists, iconographers, students of design and historians of religion.

Research goals

The early years of the Christian era were marked with theological debate, development and schism. Monasticism grew out of this environment and took hold in the Egyptian landscape. Bākhūm established rules to ensure monks led an immaculate life for the benefit of their souls, setting in place a framework of behavior in the fledgling monastic movement. Shinūdah also set out rigorous rules of behaviour for monks in what was a new and complex social structure, where recruits had to learn to conform. Directives, contained in canons, discourses and letters, prescribed instructions in great detail for gatherings, meals and the consumption of food, living and sleeping arrangements as well as for praying and signing the cross.

From beyond the walls of monastic complexes came threats from various forces including Bedouins, Persians, Arabs as well as other Christian factions. Monasteries were built, populated and occasionally destroyed. In some instances they were rebuilt and repopulated; in others they disappeared altogether.

Persecution and martyrdom was intermittent and spasmodic until the Edict of Milan. Constantine’s toleration of Christianity brought validation and a greater openness. Islam arrived early in Egypt and was originally a benign force for the, by then, majority Christian population.

It is in this context of a changing cultural and social landscape that the research goals are framed.

1. Survey, image collection and typology

A survey and classification of crosses of Christian Egypt has not previously been undertaken. The initial goal was to complete the survey of monastic sites and museum collections and gather sufficient images of crosses. The resulting image collection

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drew, in some instances, on non-monastic locations and enabled a taxonomic analysis of the designs in the context of chronology and geography.

2. Design analyses

Christianity brought its own iconography into Egypt. The composite designs, with flora, fauna and other decorative elements, are analysed taking into account possible influences and symbolism. The influences include, *inter alia*, Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome as well as more contemporaneous cultures such as Byzantine, Syrian, Persian and Islamic.

3. Relationship with the motif

An artefact as fundamental to the Christian faith as a cross is a reflection of three relationships: with the commissioner, producer and viewer. It is often this connection between human and object that imbues the object with meaning. Without such an affiliation the object is merely a design, without any spiritual underpinnings.

Egypt’s crosses fulfilled several functions; as aids to prayer and contemplation, as objects of veneration, as incorporating themes of commemoration especially in funerary contexts, and as talismanic devices. Here the research question relates to how the cross was manifested in the prevailing visual culture. This includes studying where in monasteries and elsewhere the crosses appear, and analysing their occurrence in various contexts.

Limitations

As with any study there are limitations. The primary limitation of this project relates to problems of dating artefacts, especially those found or removed from their contexts, as is apparent in most museum collections. This is a reflection of the manner in which museum acquisitions were obtained, often without detailed information about the find site or location of the find within a monastery. This lack of absolute dating is an issue that is hard to resolve.

A related issue is the manner in which excavations were conducted. Briefly, early excavators were often more interested in pharaonic material and in the quest for such
finds damaged or destroyed potentially valuable Christian layers. Thus much
Christian material was lost or not properly recorded. It is also likely that items of
interest fell into the hands of private collectors, which generally therefore excludes
them from study and analysis.

Another drawback relates to the disappearance of sites that potentially housed
material evidence of crosses. Unfortunately, this degradation and loss of sites
continues in the current era in the guise of development for agricultural and
infrastructure purposes. For example, the site of Kellia, which was studied as recently
as the 1990s, has fallen prey to the pressures of road and rail construction. More
recently the site of Dayr Abū Daraj has been destroyed in the construction of a new
road. The landscape of Wādī al-Naṭrūn today shows the effects of population growth
and attendant topographical changes.

Thus the corpus was more limited than it potentially could have been and this results
in a cautionary note for the drawing of conclusions. For example, superficially it
would appear that there are no examples of ansate crosses from the Nile delta.
However, it would be risky to assert that they did not ever exist in that area, as most
ancient sites in the delta no longer exist. Nonetheless, objects of unclear provenance
are also included in the survey and image collection with a view to presenting as total
a picture as possible.

Structure

The thesis is presented in seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion.
Appendices containing timeline charts and maps showing the distribution of different
types of crosses across Egypt are included. An image collection, numbering around
four hundred slides, is provided as a supporting document. Appendix A contains
selected images that are specifically referred to in the following chapters.

The first two chapters following the introduction can be labelled as descriptive.
Chapter 2 contains the survey of sites, based on limited ancient sources that refer to
the art of the monasteries, archaeological reports and the Coptic Encyclopedia, which
lists and describes monastic sites in varying levels of detail. The geographic spread of the survey was from delta in the north to around Aswan in the south, and from the Red Sea coast in the east to the Western Desert/Libyan border in the west. In a number of instances, especially in the Nile Delta, there were literary references to monasteries that are no longer extant. Most artefacts therefore exist physically in museum collections or in photographic records as part of archaeological reports. The survey included a search for archaeological and other information concerning the monasteries to ensure that the study is as comprehensive as possible. In the case of extant monasteries, archaeological reports, both early and more recent, were extensively consulted and images extracted with the relevant contextual information. A limitation with a number of images in the reports is that they are presented as black and white photographs, or as line drawings, the latter being the case in deteriorated images that would be hard to photograph. In some notable exceptions colour imagery is available.

Chapter 3 is also descriptive, briefly examining materials and techniques used in the production of the crosses. The corpus is especially rich in wall paintings, funerary stelae and architectural features. Perhaps less well known, but no less interesting, are more humble objects in terracotta and wood that also display crosses.

The next three chapters comprise the analytical component of the thesis. The first of these, Chapter 4, used the image collection to identify the four basic types and the core decorative elements. This highlighted the relevance of symbolism, which was reviewed and explored in an Egyptian context. It also raised the issue of influence, which has exercised the minds of historians of Christian art in Egypt and who, variously, saw elements of Ancient Egyptian, Hellenic and Byzantine worlds. Experts on specific aspects of Ancient Egyptian art were consulted, and the texts on Coptic art and design influences studied. A typology, based on the design elements, had begun to emerge, and resulted in being able to distinguish eight distinct sub-types, overlaid on the four basic categories.

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*Several works proved instructive. Mircea Eliade and Jean Daniéou are cited specifically.*

*These are referenced in Chapter 3.*

*For example, Dr. Linda Evans, Macquarie University, was consulted on faunal representations, especially where these were ambiguous.*

*For example, Josef Strzygowski, Klaus Wessel, Pierre Du Bourguet and others.*

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Chapter 1 – Introduction
The next stage, captured in Chapter 5, was to look at where in the landscape particular designs occurred, and at what possible links existed between similar designs in geographically remote areas. Concurrently, the chronology of the designs was examined with a view to determining an evolutionary pattern, keeping in mind the relative nature of the available dating. The typology, based on the eight identified sub-types, was further distilled and categorised by distinguishing auxiliary levels of variation. This more extensive design typology was placed in the context of date and location. The analysis resulted in the creation of maps showing the distribution of the various types. Charts were also created to support the analysis. These show the timespan of the monasteries and therefore the likely dating of the art at those sites. These timelines are mapped against a master chart, which shows other notable events occurring both inside and outside Egypt at the same time as the art was being developed. The maps and timeline charts are contained at Appendices B and C.

A remaining part of the design analysis was the investigation of context and setting, and is contained in Chapter 6. This examined where in buildings and spaces the crosses were placed and the possible meaning that could be attributed to these placements. For example, crosses occurred in various parts of churches, hermitages, monastic cells and shared spaces such as refectories. Apart from context and setting, this chapter also explored function and intended purpose of the crosses. For example, there were crosses that were clearly funerary in context, some that were domestic, even mundane in use, others that were liturgical in function and some that were talismanic. A limitation here was that in many instances, especially with those artefacts in museum collections, the context is simply not known. In other instances, even where items could be clearly located within a particular monastic complex, the exact location of the piece in situ is not known, largely because pieces have been moved by excavators, fellahin or bounty hunters. However, the study brought into play both Gombrich and Panofsky’s approaches.

The thread running through the chapters is design, both in form and function. The first two chapters identify the visual representations and explore how they were created, the next two consider form, and function is an integral part of Chapter 6. However this was not about static design; there is an evolution apparent in this study, not simply in the motifs, but also in complexity, and in the use of particular motifs.
The concluding chapter pulls together these design threads and lists the key findings of the project. The scope and time constraints of this study have not allowed for some themes to be explored in as much depth as one would like, and these areas for expanded study are also highlighted in the concluding chapter.
Chapter 2 – Survey of crosses, Byzantine to Fatimid era

The project commences with a survey of crosses, gleaned from various sources. It highlights sites where significant crosses are attested. The scope of the chapter does not allow for more than a potted history of the sites. While the focus has been on monasteries, the survey has included other crosses of interest.

The approach to this survey has been to work, generally, from the north, i.e. Lower Egypt to the south, Upper Egypt. The survey commences in the Nile Delta and ends at Lake Nasser. It takes in the monasteries of the Eastern and Western Deserts including the oases. Broadly the monasteries follow the path of the Nile, though in some instances they are located some distance from the river settlements, notably those on the Red Sea and in the Western Desert. While the northern, eastern and western boundaries are clear, the southern boundary both of Ancient Egypt and therefore this study, is more ambiguous. Modern day Egypt in its southern part includes what was known as Nubia. For the purposes of this study the area up to Aswan, once regarded as Nubia, has been included.

This survey is limited, by necessity, to those monasteries that have, or had, sufficiently observable art at the time of excavation and those that have continued to exist with remnants of ancient art. The survey is also, to some extent, limited by material that various scientific teams have chosen to publish.

The notion of ‘significant’ crosses was touched on earlier. To elaborate, for the purposes of this survey it can be taken to mean: the dominance of the cross as a motif at a particular site, the dominance of a particular type of cross at a site, the apparent uniqueness of an image, or a striking design similarity with another site in Egypt or elsewhere.

The survey comprises three steps. The first was to identify those monasteries that either still have, or once had, representations of crosses as part of their iconographical program. Reliance has been placed on original archaeological and scientific reports, which span a number of years, though occasionally later reports from the same site
often contradict earlier information. Reports from conservation teams also proved useful. Further, while noting the limitations in the use of museum collections, usually relating to the lack of provenance, these catalogues and collections have also been a useful resource, providing a number of quality images. The increasing number of catalogues, both online and in print, also enables us to examine artefacts that are not on public display. The Coptic Encyclopedia has also been an important, if basic, resource. One of the limitations in its use is that it has not been fully updated since its publication in 1991.

Next, images of crosses from the sources noted above were compiled into a searchable database. Unfortunately, in many instances crosses (and other iconographical elements) are merely described in various reports, without images being provided. In other instances we are fortunate to have some photographs, usually in black and white. Occasionally there are sketches, usually in monochrome, but sometimes in full colour. Bolman’s books are unsurpassed for colour representations, displaying the chromatic range in use in early Christian Egypt.

Wherever possible, contextual information from the archaeological reports has been included in the image collection. In some instances this information is lacking about the crosses, as writers focus on what they perceive to be more important artistic representations, for example, narrative or figurative paintings or architectural features. The ubiquity of crosses in religious buildings often precludes their inclusion in reports

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1 See for example: Grossman, Peter. 1991. “Dayr Anba Antuniyus: General Layout of the Monastery.” In The Coptic Encyclopedia, Volume 3, edited by Aziz S. Atiya. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, p. 725. Grossman states that the small chapel adjoining the Church of St Antony was built after the main church, therefore dating to thirteenth century. This was based on inscriptions that noted that the painter Theodore worked there in 1232/1233. However, Gabra notes that a much older painting was uncovered on the soffit of the arch to the parekklesion, and that the scene of Christ with the Four Living Creatures might well date to the seventh century. See Bolman, 2002, Monastic Visions, pp. 75-77.


3 van Loon alludes to this, and it has certainly been the experience over the duration of this project that an increasing number of digitised images have been made available during the course of this project. See van Loon, Gertrud J. M. 2016. “Christian Art in Egypt (2008-2012).” In Coptic Society, Literature and Religion from Late Antiquity to Modern Times. Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Rome, September 17-22, 2012, and Plenary Reports of the Ninth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Cairo, edited by Paola Buzi, Alberto Camplani, and Federico Contardi, 597–635. Leuven: Peeters.

4 For example, Cappozzo, Mario. 2007. Il cristianesimo nel Medio Egitto. Todi: Tau Editrice.

and publications. Also, while some monasteries have or had numerous representations of crosses where the motif forms an important design element in the iconographical program, there are other monasteries where the design focus is more on figurative representations. In short, not all extant monasteries have significant representations of crosses.

The third element of the approach has comprised the identification of a typology of the crosses in Christian Egypt. This has proved vital to the analysis of representations of crosses and is expanded on later.

Context

In the intervening years since late antiquity, when monasticism arose and monasteries were built and adorned with early Christian art, much has been lost to the art historian and critic. Monasteries that once flourished have either disappeared or have been rebuilt in more modern forms. In some instances ancient buildings have been incorporated into newer structures, retaining some of the old artistic elements. In others the old decorative features have disappeared along with the buildings that housed them.

Wilkinson, writing in 1928, not long after the flurry of nineteenth century archaeologists took an interest in Egypt, already mentions the loss of sites and makes mention of mud brick buildings not standing the tests of time, though we know that building methods and materials and the encroaching desert are only one reason for the loss of buildings and related art. The haphazard nature of Egyptian archaeology during that period is well known. In several instances excavations were not systematic or well recorded. For example, Severin is critical of Jean Clédat’s methods in the excavation of Dayr Apa Apollo at Bāwīṭ: However, it must be noted that Clédat was

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1. The typology is elaborated on in Chapters 4 and 5.
progressive in some of his methods, for example in the use of photography which was new in his time.

In some instances sites were plundered. Further, in response to the demands of the international art market, a trade in fakes emerged: Thus a critical eye needs to be cast on many so-called ‘Coptic’ artefacts."

Since the efforts of early archaeologists in the early years of the twentieth century, including Walter Crum, Hugh Evelyn White, and James Quibell, at Wāḍī al-Naṭrūn, Bāwīt and Saqqārah, major finds have been made and documented. For example, the site of Kellia was located and excavated over a period of years by Guillaume, and Kasser. Islān was the subject of investigations by Sauneron and Jacquet. More recently The University of Warsaw’s archaeological team have been involved in excavations at al-Naqlūn, conservation, excavation work by Leiden University continues at Wāḍī al-Naṭrūn, and the Yale University’s team continue to work at Dayr Anbā Shinūdah. The reports of these individuals and teams, supported by other documentation produced by those who were privileged to have a first-hand view of the art in situ, are some of the primary sources in the study of Egyptian Christian visual culture.

Sadly, some of the sites described by early archaeologists no longer exist. The Coptic Encyclopedia lists several monastic sites that are no longer extant. Further, Wipszycka would not be alone in noting that while the number of Christian sites

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2. See chapter on Materials and Techniques.


between the third and seventh centuries was considerable, the condition of many that
remain are far from satisfactory.\(^\ast\) For example, the site of Kellia, which was located
and excavated in the 1960s,\(^\ast\) and well documented most recently in Weidman’s
publication,\(^\ast\) no longer exists, having succumbed to the pressures of development.

Where they are no buildings or ruins to study, many monasteries exist only in the
written record of various early literary sources.\(^\ast\) This is especially the case in the Nile
delta where many sites, mentioned in early sources, have succumbed to rising water
levels, salinization and agricultural practices including irrigation. Such development
has come in tandem with an increase in population, placing even greater pressure on
ancient sites. The landscape of Scetis, which in late antiquity was mainly desert, now
resembles an oasis in parts. Fields, villages and roads have been allowed to encroach
on ancient sites. A similar situation exists in the Fayyûm oasis. Elsewhere the desert
landscape has also taken its toll, with dunes encroaching on and eventually covering
some sites. In some instances the exact location of the original monasteries is
speculative as there is little or no evidence of their actual existence other than the
occasional literary reference. An example is Palladius, born in the mid fourth century,
who travelled to Egypt and visited Nitria, Kellia and later lived in the Thebaid. Like
many early writers his ‘history’ is a colorful account of saints and miracle workers
with little in the way of hard evidence of locations and monastic sites.\(^\ast\) In other
instances monasteries have been deliberately destroyed or have been abandoned and
have fallen into disuse. In yet other instances ancient sites have been encroached upon
by villages but might still retain churches, though these are often rebuilt or otherwise
modernised with an attendant loss of ancient art. In some instances where there has
been an ongoing presence at a monastery, there have been alterations made to the
decorative program, including plastering over and repainting surfaces with newer


\(^{\ast}\) Kasser, Rodolphe. 1965. Kellia 1965: Topographie générale, mensurations et fouilles aux Qouçour
l’Université.

Peeters.

\(^{\ast}\) A well-cited source is the so-called Abū Ṣāliḥ the Armenian whose name was inscribed on a codex.
The anonymous author was well travelled throughout Egypt in the thirteenth century and has
been identified as a priest of the Coptic Church called Abū Al-Makārim. See Evett’s translation:
Abu Salih. The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries,
documented their travels included J.M. Vansleb, a German Orientalist, in the 17th century.

\(^{\ast}\) See Palladius, The Lausiac History, translated by W.K. Lowther Clarke, The Lausiac History of
Palladius. 1918. London: SPCK. Lowther’s introduction, pp. 15–17, provides a potted account of
Palladius’ travels ahead of the History itself.

Thus, the degradations are not simply due to the ravages of time; humans continue to play a part either knowingly or not. Various invaders and marauders over the centuries had an impact but more recently, within the past two hundred years that we are aware of, local farmers have destroyed sites, either plundering them for financial gain or through working the land for agricultural purposes. This, combined with ongoing economic development continues to affect remaining locations.

Conversely, many ancient Christian sites have been redeveloped and continue to thrive today as pilgrim centres, such as the modern monastic complex of St. Mari Mena, built adjacent to the old ruined site of Dayr Abū Mīnā.

Those that have survived as pilgrim centres, such as Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs and Dayr Anbā Bula near the Red Sea, and the cluster of monasteries in Wādī al-Naṭrūn, are faced with the double-edged sword of a great number of visitors, who on the one hand enjoy the ability to be part of a continuing tradition, but who also cause damage to the buildings, architectural features and paintings. Graffiti continue to be etched on ancient walls and paintings by enthusiastic pilgrims, and it is not uncommon for pieces of plaster, ivory and timber to be removed as souvenirs. This, of course, is not a uniquely Egyptian problem.
The Survey

Lower Egypt – Nile Delta to Cairo/Fustat

Lower Egypt takes in the important sites of Kellia and the thriving monasteries of Wādī al-Natrūn. Palladius noted the number of monasteries in Nitria in the fourth century. Most have disappeared with development and topographical changes. Numbers diminished quickly as the lands around were occupied and cultivated. The assumption is made that by 645/6 CE, when Patriarch Benjamin went from Alexandria to Wādī al-Natrūn, bypassing Nitria, that it was no longer inhabited. In his 1932 report, Evelyn White notes that there was much conjecture as to the location of Nitria, suggesting that no remains or ruins were extant at the time. It is possible that the site was close to the modern village of al-Barnuji. Derwas Chitty also makes reference to this, drawing significantly on Evelyn White’s work.

Dayr Abū Mīnā
Little remains of the ancient monastery of Abū Mīnā, which exists only in ruins with no extant images. The large new monastery of St Mari Mīnā has been built alongside and hosts a thriving community of monks and lay people. As was the case with the original monastery, the new site continues as an important pilgrim centre. Several international museums hold a common item that originated in the ancient Abū Mīnā site. These are pilgrim flasks or ampullae which pilgrims purchased as souvenirs and as such they were found at various locations in and around Egypt. The flasks were made of moulded terracotta with an image of Abū Mīnā and the legendary camels on the flat obverse surface. In some instances a cross was shown on the reverse. The crosses on such pilgrim flasks are generally quite simply expressed, being Latin or Greek type with bifurcated terminals and shown within a circle, or in the case of the example in the image collection, [ECD014], a cross pattée within a circle and surrounded by what could be a laurel wreath.

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* The type is also thought to appear on pilgrim souvenirs from the Holy Land, leading to the view that it was generic and not particular to Egypt.
* See Appendix A for images.
**Kellia**

It is unfortunate that Kellia, perhaps the richest repository of crosses, now has to be included in the sites no longer in existence. The original site, in the west of the delta, in the area that was once the Nitria desert, is the largest complex of hermitages discovered. It is thought to have been established in 335 CE and was identified as recently as 1964. Antoine Guillaumont, professor at the College de France identified the site during an expedition led by Rudolphe Kasser of the University of Geneva. A French team, led by Guillaumont in association with the French Archaeological Institute of Cairo (IFAO), conducted several seasons of excavations between 1965-69 and 1979-84. They found more than 1500 hermitages and a few churches. The Swiss team with Kasser continued their work until 1990. The loss of this site is seriously detrimental to the study and preservation of the visual culture of Christian Egypt. The survey of Kellia’s crosses derives from the various archaeological and scientific reports.

At the time Kellia was excavated and investigated, there were four main areas that held crosses in their repertoire. These were Quṣūr al-Rubā’īyyāt, Quṣūr al-‘Izaylah, Quṣūr al-Ḥijaylah and Quṣūr ’Isā. The dating of most of the crosses is approximately late sixth or seventh century.

The structure of Kellia was a *laura*, where monastic cells or small dwellings were spread over an extended area. A monk and an acolyte would have occupied a small, enclosed compound made up of a courtyard and two small apartments. The two apartments were connected through the kitchen and were generally on the western side of the enclosed area. The largest room in the complex was the oratory, whose east-facing prayer niches were of particular importance. The cross motif appears on the walls of the buildings, including in private cells and oratories. It is in the oratory niches where most representations of crosses were observed. The walls themselves

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* Of particular note is the work of Marguerite Rassart-Debergh in various publications between 1989 and 2013, contained in the bibliography.
appear quite richly painted with columns and arches. Artistic expression occurs in the domestic as well as public spaces."

The cross is the dominant motif in Kellia, which in itself is remarkable because this preeminence of the subject is not witnessed to such an extent in other monasteries, the exceptions being, to some extent, Isnâ and the necropolis of al-Bagawât. Of course, we cannot know what iconographical programs existed at monasteries that have fallen into ruin or indeed if the so-called unique designs at Kellia were replicated or copied from other now extinct sites.

The dominance of the cross as a design motif in the monasteries of Kellia ensures that it is one of the most important sites for the study of crosses in early Christian art.

There are several apparently unique examples of crosses at Kellia. Rassart-Debergh notes that most buildings in Kellia had paintings and depending on the size and importance of the space, the paintings were either simple or complex. However, as will be noted later, there are also what appear to be simple cells with elaborately painted crosses. Rassart-Debergh describes many of the recurring floriated and braided patterns in shades of red, yellow, green, grey and black, using a wider palette than seen at al-Naqîtûn in the Fayûm, though not dissimilar to the palette at the Wâdī al-Naṭrûn monasteries which are in relatively close proximity to Kellia. Indeed Karel Innemée suggests that the same painters decorated both Kellia and the Wâdī al-Naṭrûn monasteries, through this is hard to prove definitively. Some of the simpler representations of crosses at Kellia could as likely have been the work of resident monks as that of professional painters; indeed there is a strong variation between rudimentary and sophisticated renditions.

Rassart-Debergh also notes that, as in the contemporary monasteries at Saqqârah, Bâwît and Isnâ, it is in the prayer spaces that the walls are the most richly decorated. The crosses appear in and over the places they are called upon to protect, that is, in oratory prayer niches and generally on walls.

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The crosses of Kellia are distinctive and while there is a large variation in the depictions, it is hard to confuse Kellia’s artistic repository with anywhere else, suggesting a continuity of artistic endeavour at this monastic complex, by several painters using a similar design vocabulary and palette. Rassart-Debergh also remarks on the extremely varied and abundant flora and fauna that also decorate the walls, often in proximity to the crosses. The crosses range from simple to complicated braided designs, those adorned with lozenges painted to resemble gem-studded crosses strung with bells, and those enwreathed with foliage and framed by birds. As she notes, almost all the crosses have one point in common, the staff upon which they rise, which she describes as processional. The representations include an unusual cross, composed entirely of palm leaves. [ECD148] Yet others have patterns of concentric circles.

Particularly notable at Kellia is the great latitude and exuberance of expression in the variety of designs present. There appear to be only two examples of plain, Latin-type crosses, the others being elaborate. Of course, it is possible that the archaeologists and others working here only took note of the ‘better’ designs.

There are few extant examples of pattée crosses, one of which appears on the reverse of a terracotta plate, and another painted on a wall. The plate itself is thought to have been imported from Cyprus, therefore it is not surprising that it does not follow the dominant typology of Kellia. It also suggests that there were several more similarly decorated utensils. Conversely, at Wādī al-Naṭrūn there are several examples of the cross pattée, similar to the wall painted example at Kellia, so it is possible to surmise that the design was used at the time but not apparently widely used in the representations observed and recorded at Kellia.

Almost all of Kellia’s crosses appear to be of the Latin type, with serifs or bars at the end of each terminal. In some instances it is hard to determine if the design at the end of the terminal is a bar or an extended serif. These ‘bars’ are sometimes flared and are further decorated with roundels. In a few instances the bars are decorated with triangular designs. Some appear to rise from the ground or be planted in the ground,

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2 Coptic Museum, Cairo, inventory number #12549.
with foliage similar to vines rising on two sides to encircle the crosses. However, many of the photographs show deteriorated images and some crosses could also be of the Greek type. Denis Weidmann’s report contains an example of a cross, composed of glass tessellation, which does not follow the pattern of anything seen elsewhere in Kellia, though that is not to say it did not occur. In this case we have a simple Greek type staurogram within a wreath of leaves. The wreath has two candlesticks with candles on either side and the whole is bordered in a frame of square tiles. [ECD017].

Some of Kellia’s crosses have birds flanking them. One pair of birds is especially ambiguous and at first glance appear to be a conflation of ducks and either doves or quails. In another example the word *perdix* (partridge) has been inscribed close to a painted bird, suggesting perhaps that even early viewers were confused about the representations.

Of the extensive corpus of crosses at Kellia none remain *in situ*. As has been noted earlier, one is on display in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Another, a gemmed cross, is preserved in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria.¹ The loss of this significant body of work is nothing short of tragic.

**Wādī al-Natrūn**

Leroy notes that Wādī al-Natrūn is a long depression, oriented in a south-easterly direction from the Libyan desert. The wadi takes its name from several lakes where the waters were laden with natron. Its location, known since pharaonic times as being on a caravan route between the Nile delta and the oases in the Western Desert, gave it an ideal location for the establishment of monastic communities.¹ Wādī al-Natrūn was an agricultural and trading centre from ancient times, with the names of two monasteries denoting foreign influence – Dayr al-Suryān and Dayr al-Baramūs, a reference to Syrians and Romans respectively.¹ The area was also known as Scetis. There are five monasteries in this cluster. Apart from the two named above, the others

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are Dayr Anbā Bishōi, Dayr Abū Maqār, and the Monastery of John the Little. The monasteries of al-Suryān, Anbā Bishōi, al-Baramūs and Abū Maqār have not only survived from antiquity but are thriving centres with new buildings and churches that draw many pilgrims and visitors today.

Evelyn White, who commented that the ‘histories’ written by Palladius and others were more numerous than useful, suggested that there was positive evidence of a community in existence in Wādī al-Naṭrūn before 340 CE.

Dayr al-Baramūs
Dayr al-Baramūs is the farthest to the north-west of the four monasteries. It is thought to have been established between 330 and 340 CE. The name is a reference to Romans, though there is little to validate the actual existence of Romans here.

The history of Dayr al-Baramūs is not documented but the general history of Scetis/Wādī al-Naṭrūn monasteries is relevant. It suffered times of destruction by various marauders, followed by periods of reconstruction.

Dayr al-Baramūs is surrounded by a high wall that makes a rectangle in an east-west direction. The main entrance is to the north. The inner area retains old buildings and character. The main church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and dates to the era of Patriarch Damianos, that is, the sixth to seventh century, though the khūrus was added in the eighth or early ninth century, and is the oldest preserved church in Wādī al-Naṭrūn.

In 1986 large fragments of wall paintings were discovered by the resident monks. A France-Netherlands mission started work in 1988/89. Three layers of paint have been discovered with paintings of the Virgin and Apostles and Old Testament themes such as Isaac and Abraham. On one of the columns on the southern part of the nave is a

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depiction of the Archangel Michael and a large Latin-type cross, painted over different layers. Paul van Moorsel suggested that the dating of these might be after the fourteenth century when the church underwent reconstruction."

In addition to the painted cross, there are also crosses embedded in walls and ceilings and red-painted cross pattée designs, though dating of these is not clear.

Photographs of finds from more recent excavations are included in the database. These show marble and limestone crosses, generally pattée in design, sometimes with roundels at both ends of the flared terminals, occasionally within wreaths, and occasionally with birds in the lower quadrants. Dating is not known and these images have not been formally published.

Dayr Anbā Bishōi
Dayr Anbā Bishōi is another of the surviving monasteries of Wādī al-Natrūn. There is no reliable information about its foundation but we can surmise that it grew from a settlement or laura. It was founded between 535 and 580 CE and the enclosure walls were fortified before the end of the ninth century. In 1088 it is reported that there were forty resident monks. By 1330 the buildings were on the verge of collapse because of termite damage. It was reconstructed but the oldest buildings are after the mid ninth century."

Dayr Anbā Maqār
Dayr Anbā Maqār was originally the most remote and least accessible of the Wādī al-Natrūn monasteries and at one point housed a large collection of manuscripts. Leroy notes that it is unclear when Anbā Maqār took up residence here but speculates that it was towards 384/5 CE. The monastery was subject to several raids during the first half of the fifth century, with the most devastating attack occurring in 444 CE when forty-nine monks were martyred. Lucy-Anne Hunt notes that building phases for this monastery occurred in the seventh, eighth, ninth and eleventh centuries with the first

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Leroy, 1982, Ouadi Natroun, p. 3.
phase occurring during the patriarchate of Benjamin between 641 and 660 CE. In 819 CE there was another devastating attack on the monastery and the churches were burned. The sanctuary of Benjamin was rebuilt after 815 CE. The high walls were built around 870 CE but the monastery continued to be invaded and finally went into decline after the fourteenth century.

The original monastery buildings would possibly have been well endowed with crosses, but none of these original renditions remain in situ. Whatever crosses appear, including a stylized cross in wrought metal over the entrance to the Church of the Forty-Nine Martyrs, are from a much later period.

Hunt sees parallels with the motifs at Dayr Anbā Maqār and the vegetal roundels of the late seventh-century Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. She notes a similarity to other Umayyad and Sassanian designs, as well as those of Kellia’s Quṣūr ‘Isā whose paintings date to the second half of the seventh to the early eighth century.

The main church in unusual in that it is wider than it is long. The interior of the church is relatively unadorned with the exception of incised and painted crosses in the barrel vault of the ceiling and in the walls. These mostly follow the cross pattée design and are relatively unremarkable. Dating of these crosses is unclear.

Evelyn White recorded a frontispiece from an apocryphal or biblical fragment with a Latin type cross potent on a stepped base, for which dating is also unclear. His expedition also uncovered a marble pattée cross with two birds in the lower quadrant, very similar to one at the neighbouring Dayr al-Baramūs.

Dayr al-Suryān

Dayr al-Suryān (the monastery of the Syrians) is perhaps the most interesting, artistically, of the four functioning monasteries in Wādī al-Naṭrūn. Records of its

- Hunt, Lucy-Anne. 2009. “Art in the Wadi Al-Natrun: An Assessment of the Earliest Wallpaintings in the Church of Abu Makar, Dayr Abu Makar.” In Christianity and Monasticism in Wadi Al-
- Evelyn White, 1920, Wadi Natrun, Pl. XVI, and p. 58.
early period were largely destroyed in the devastation of the monasteries around 817 CE. It is not one of the original monasteries of Scetis. It was established for the monks of the nearby Dayr Anbâ Bishōi who were partisans of Severus of Antioch. Around 710 CE the monastery was bought from the Copts and converted to a Syrian monastery. The massive fortifying walls date to the ninth century. The most memorable abbot was Moses of Nisibis who, during the tenth century, had a significant influence on the iconographical program as we will see.

According to Grossman, the al-ʿAdhrā church was dated by al-Makrizi to the time of Patriarch Benjamin in the seventh century, and is the earliest example of a fully integrated khūrus."

Dayr al-Suryān is a very short distance from Dayr Anbâ Bishōi. The most important church is al-ʿAdhrā, which is almost completely preserved. The frescoes in the khūrus, in particular, are stunning in their richness and variety. Karel Innemée also believes that the church was first constructed in the seventh century and notes the several layers of paintings. The problem of dating the paintings has been well explained in his keynote address at the University of Minnesota in 2003. He suggests that the first layer was completed in the early seventh century concurrent with the building of the church. Judging from fragments found, this layer contained very simple paintings. The second layer was completed at the end of the seventh century in the encaustic technique. This is thought to have been completed before 800 CE. Around 900 CE a third layer was added, some of which covered the second layer, and some of it adding to the images on the second layer. The fourth layer was painted in the thirteenth century when the church was fully renovated. The final layer was painted in 1782 and at that point only the thirteenth century paintings in the three half domes in the south, west and north of the church were left visible. Since 1995 a team under the auspices of Leiden University has been working on uncovering and restoring the mural paintings. Innemée believes that the tenth century paintings are

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part of an iconographical program inspired by Moses of Nisibis. He also believes that there is a similarity between the earlier representations of crosses here and at Kellia."

The first layer of painting has random Latin and pattée type crosses, which are not part of a narrative or cohesive program. The later crosses, including ones that are incidental to the frescoes in the *khūrus* date to later periods, possibly as part of the Nisibis-led iconographical program of the tenth century.

Notable at this monastery are the *haikal* and *khūrus* doors, which are composed of panels of cypress and paduk timber with ivory inlay. Among the many geometric designs are also those which incorporate crosses. The overall impression is intricate and sophisticated. The crosses are of Greek or Latin design, simple in themselves but complex in their composition with other geometric elements. These two sets of doors, one of which has been restored, can be accurately dated through documentary evidence to the time of Moses of Nisibis. The *haikal* doors, subsequently restored in 2010, were mentioned in a 1911 report as dating to 913/914 CE. The *khūrus* doors date to 926/927 CE, and were in original condition when observed in 2015. The crosses seen on the *khūrus* doors are Greek type crosses with bars at the end of each terminal. They are composed of ivory inlay, with small crosses in each of the quadrants. These are similar in design to the iconostasis screens seen in several churches both in Old Cairo and at various monasteries.

The dominant cross on the walls of al-ʿAdhrāʾ church is a Latin-type cross which each arm divided lengthwise into two strips of colour, red and green. The ends of each terminal are bifurcated into a slight flare. The colours of the pigment are vibrant. These red and green crosses belong to the original layer, which was subsequently plastered over. These crosses are similar to those on the first layer of painting at Dayr Anbā Antunīyūs. The second and subsequent layers contain sophisticated figurative and narrative art, and it is only in restoration that we are able to view the original layer. Notably on the south side of the *khūrus*, high up on the south wall, is a draped cross that is similar to one of the crosses at Dayr Abū Fānāh.

In summary the crosses at Dayr al-Suryān encompass a varied typology. There are Latin-type crosses with bifurcated terminals in two dominant colours, seemingly

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painted at random on the church walls. This appears to be the first layer. There are crosses in the subsequent layer, which appear as part of a narrative or decorative painting. For example there are two crosses in the painting of the medical saint Colluthus with his patient where the crosses are in the lower register and form part of the tableau. Innemée believes that these representations, which appear to be the work of professional artists, were done as commissions. He notes the stylistic differences and suggests that each tableau was painted by a different hand.\(^*\) It is clear that they are more professionally composed and executed compared to some of the crosses at Kellia, for example.

\textit{Cairo and Environs (Churches)}

The monasteries that did exist outside Cairo are no longer extant, having been overtaken by development and growth of the city.\(^*\) Of interest are a few extant items with crosses from churches.

While the churches of Old Cairo are architecturally and historically interesting, they are better known for their architecture and icons than specifically for representations of crosses. Moreover some items of note have been removed to the Coptic Museum including a fifth century pine altar with carved crosses from the church of Saints Sergius (Abū Sarjah) and Bacchus. The altar is composed of columns with modified Corinthian capitals. The spandrels feature a shell with a central Latin-type cross. There are other Greek-type crosses surrounded by wreaths. It is thought to be the earliest wooden altar to have survived from early Christian Egypt.\(^*\)

A similar grouping of designs, namely columns, shell and a Greek-type cross within a wreath can also be seen on a marble panel of the \textit{ambon} in al-Mu'allaqah, the so-called Hanging Church, in Old Cairo. The church was destroyed and rebuilt over centuries, but the marble panels of the \textit{ambon} are thought to be older than the tenth to thirteenth century pillars upon which it rests.\(^*\)

\(^*\) Innemée, 2003, “Mural Painting”, p. 3.
To summarise, the crosses found in Lower Egypt are mainly of Latin typology, often gemmed or with floral or vegetal elements. The second most common type is the pattée cross. Dayr al-Suryân has the best preserved early art while Kellia had the most impressive corpus of crosses.
Middle Egypt – Saqqārah, Fayyūm and south to Asyūṭ

Middle Egypt is a somewhat elastic term, depending on the writer and era. For the purposes of this project it is taken to mean from the area south of Cairo, that is, from Saqqārah and Fayyūm, to Asyūṭ.

Doresse remarks on the number of extraordinary Christian sites in Middle Egypt, including the sculpted and painted churches of Bāwīt and the paintings of Abū Ḥinnis.† Certainly, Bāwīt is rich in figurative paintings but not in representations of crosses, while such ‘art’ as there was at Abū Ḥinnis is now greatly deteriorated.

Saqqārah – Dayr Apa Jeremiah

Saqqārah, better known today for its pyramids, is also the location of the ruins of Dayr Apa Jeremiah, though it is not known if the monastery was founded by Apa Jeremiah.‡ Quibell puts the foundation date at around 470 CE,§ and noted that the monastery was mentioned by the monk Theodosius in his ‘Itinerary’ in the early sixth century.‖ The foundation date is unclear but the monastery did not exist beyond the tenth century.

Dayr Apa Jeremiah is located at the western edge of the site of the ruins of Saqqārah which was the old necropolis of Memphis. It was used as a necropolis until the late Roman period. None of the extant remains are older than the mid sixth century. The earliest resident monks are said to have established themselves in the intact but disused mausoleums of the necropolis and only later built new structures. In the seventh century building activity sprang up and most edifices date from the seventh and eighth century. Dated tombstones belong to the second half of the eighth century. After this period decline sets in.¶

Walters, writing in 1974, made the claim that most painted Coptic material was from Bāwīt and Saqqārah, with the exception of the Wāḍī al-Naṭrūn and Dayr Anbā

§ Quibell, 1912, Saqqara, p. 3.
Antuniyûs monasteries. The rest of the Coptic corpus he dismissed as fragmentary and with a limited repertoire. Clearly his focus was on figurative art, as he made almost no references to crosses other than in passing and was possibly unaware of the corpus at Kellia or Isnâ. Conversely Paul van Moorsel, in the same decade, wrote of a plethora of painted and sculpted crosses at this monastery.

Dayr Apa Jeremiah is one of the few archaeological examples of a coenobitic monastery where monks lived communally, each possessing a cell which was entered from a common antechamber. Meals were taken in a common dining space or refectory. Van Moorsel noted that while crosses did not appear in the apses of churches, they were featured in cells, alongside portrayals of other themes of devotion. These he described as varied, with Greek, Latin and ‘Maltese’ (pattée) types appearing in painting and sculpture. He also noted the appearance of what he described as St. Andrew’s cross, which can be taken to mean the Saltire, though he might well have been referring to the Greek letter X, which is often used in lieu of a cross. From his description, the crosses at this monastery were gemmed, wreathed, decorated with bells or placed on an estrade; he drew an interesting connection to tree of life designs from the many floral and vegetal representations. Like other writers, he made special note of the triple representation of the cross in cell 709. It was clear to van Moorsel that the cross played a part in the devotional sphere of this monastery. Presumably this last assumption is because the crosses appear in devotional spaces.

However, it is from Rassart-Debergh that we have the best description, including a sketch, of the celebrated cell 709. Her sketch gives us the placement of the crosses to the left of the niche, which is adorned with an image of Christ in Majesty. Quibell recorded that there were two crosses on the east wall of the cell, but Rassart-Debergh showed that there were three. The three crosses, of which only two were visible, appear in the upper register of the east wall. They are all gemmed, with garlands of small bells, and appear to be separated from each other by some vegetal decoration such as small trees or shrubs. Beneath the crosses is a braided border and in the lower register below the crosses are two birds, probably peacocks. Rassart-Debergh’s

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Walters, C. C. *Monastic Archaeology in Egypt*. 1974. Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, pp. 120-158. Walters’ work is a case in point for the overlooking of the cross as an artistic device and the almost total focus on “Coptic” figurative art.


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Chapter 2 – Survey
detailed description supports van Moorsel’s view that the crosses had a devotional function in that they are not incidental to the chamber’s decoration.

Much has disappeared since the time of Quibell, who excavated Dayr Apa Jeremiah around a century ago, with surviving artefacts now housed in various museum collections. Most sculptural finds from Dayr Apa Jeremiah are in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, and date to the fifth and early sixth century. The general impression from the architectural decoration is that it is full of character and well executed. The building and decorations can be dated to the fifth century, though there is evidence of their reuse in the seventh century church.«

Rassart-Debergh notes that too few of the paintings have survived to attempt a stylistic study, though she does remark that the cross motif appears several times in paintings and more often in sculpture. In paintings the cross is often used as a decorative or incidental element and in stone it is used for other purposes such as epitaphs.» Other recurring images include the Virgin, archangels and Christ enthroned. The walls were sometimes painted in a red monochrome background, but generally there were elaborate floral and geometric patterns covering the walls like draperies. However, as so few paintings have survived it is not possible to provide precise dating, though she suggests it could be between sixth and eighth centuries.»

Generally, though, it would appear that painted crosses, when they appear, are a secondary theme. Conversely there are several example of dominant cross motifs carved on tombstones and lintels. Quibell’s 1906 report provides examples of tombstones with finely carved pattyé crosses, with concave arms within concentric circles. In some instances the concentric circles are replaced by wreaths. From Quibell’s 1907-8 report is an example of an elaborate Greek-type cross within a wreath, with flowers in the interstices of the arms.» The whole design is surrounded by acanthus leaves. There are similar Greek-type crosses with round medallions and floral designs between the arms.» From what can be seen, both pattyé and Greek-type

» Quibell, 1909, Saqqara, Pl. XXXIII.
» Quibell, 1908, Saqqara, Pl. XXXVIII.
crosses are prevalent in sculpture at Dayr Apa Jeremiah. In contrast to these skillfully wrought artefacts there is an interesting rudimentary cross from Quibell’s 1912 report, which is a rough rendition of a Latin-type cross, composed entirely of circular designs. Quibell suggests that it represents a metal cross as seen at St Agnello at Ravenna. This would seem unlikely as the similarity is not strong.

Monasteries of the Fayyūm and environs

The Fayyūm oasis is between Cairo and Beni Suef. Like Wādī al-Naṭrūn it is today populated by villages and farms, which have encroached on and sometimes obliterated former monastic sites. It is an ancient area, linked in popular memory with Joseph of the Old Testament according to al-Makarim’s account. Drawing on the History of the Patriarchs he also notes that there were thirty-three monasteries in the area."

Nabia Abbott remarks on the prosperity of the Fayyūm, and suggests that Christianity found its way to this oasis not long after it was attested in the delta. She notes that there was traffic between the Fayyūm and locations in Upper and Lower Egypt. The prosperity of the area diminished in the Middle Ages, which she suggests as a reason for the decline in the number of monasteries. However at the time she was writing she also felt that the monasteries of this area had been under-researched.° Most of the monasteries are no longer in existence. Godlewski notes that a couple of hermitages date from the end of the fifth to the first half of the sixth century.°

Dayr al-Malāk Mīkhā’il

Coquin and Martin, writing for the Coptic Encyclopedia in 1991, noted that the ruins of Dayr al-Malāk Mikha’il were visible in the west of Fayyūm, near the village of al-

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° All the crosses mentioned here can be viewed in the image collection supporting this thesis.
° Abū Salih, Churches and Monasteries, p. 50–53.
Hāmūlī. It is not possible to confirm if the ruins remain visible today as the area has considerably more traffic and agricultural development since that time.

The existence of Dayr al-Malāk Mīkhāʾīl was a chance discovery in 1910, as a consequence of digging by fellahin, rather than as a result of a systematic excavation. The resulting finds from the ruins of the monastery include what is known as the al-Hāmūlī codices in the Pierpont Morgan collection. As Depuydt notes, it is remarkable that so many codices remained together, unlike other fragmented collections. Other characteristics that make this collection notable are the number of illuminations on the relatively well-preserved frontispieces, sixteen of which have ornate crosses. In addition to the retention of ancient bindings there are dated colophons, many of which provide the name of the copyist, date and place of copying, names of other copyists and donors. The codices span the ninth and tenth centuries, with the earliest dated to 822/823 CE.

Most of these illuminated crosses, which are collated in the image collection, follow a particular typology conforming to a Latin type, with or without serifs, and generally on an arrangement of steps or a platform. The interiors of the crosses are elaborately decorated with braided and hatched designs and while there is a latitude of expression present in the depictions of foliage and other elements, there is also a continuity of design apparent of the crosses on these frontispieces.

Dayr al-Naqlūn (Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl)

Dayr al-Naqlūn, the laura also known as Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl, still exists. By the mid-third century Christianity was well established in Fayyūm. It is widely believed that several hundred people were martyred here during the time of Diocletian. From fourth to sixth centuries Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl was the leading monastery of the area, but by the ninth century only one monk inhabited the monastery. There was a renaissance in the tenth century and decline after the fifteenth. In 1672 Vansleb found

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it in ruins though the church of the Archangel Gabriel was still adorned with paintings depicting biblical scenes. The church was rebuilt in the early twentieth century.

Caves, purposely hollowed out, around the site were occupied by hermits, but have been abandoned for the most part and a necropolis exists in the vicinity of the monastery. Only parts of the old walls and church remain today. Godlewski dates the church of the Archangel Gabriel to the ninth or even early tenth century because a fire destroyed most of the monastery before that time. He believes the church decorations date to the eleventh century because of the similarity with some paintings at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. Grossman, however, dated the church to the seventh or eighth century, which demonstrates one of the issues in arriving at a definite chronology.

The images in the church of the Archangel Gabriel at Naqlūn, seen first-hand, are in a poor state of repair despite the ongoing restoration work by the Polish team led by Włodzimierz Godlewski since 1991. Thanks to them, some of the images are now more decipherable than they would have been prior to restoration. A fragment of a Latin-type cross is similar to those at Isnā with a braided design and bells suspended from ‘lines’ linking the vertical and horizontal axes. There are possibly two more Latin-type crosses flanking the image of Christ in the eastern niche of the sanctuary. One is almost totally obliterated and only a hint of the image remains. The other is partially visible, but it is possible to speculate from the remnants of the images that these crosses were Latin-type processional crosses. Their location in the sanctuary would lend weight to this view.

Also of note at the church of the Archangel Gabriel are two depictions of figurative crosses. Both, in a poor state of repair, appear to incorporate the bust of an open-eyed, beardless Christ. One is in the central niche of the main haikal. It was revealed following the careful removal of a later image of the Virgin and Child. Calaforra-Rzepka remarks that almost a third of the composition is missing, and is poorly

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preserved as it was deliberately pitted to allow for the subsequent layer of plaster to be affixed. The image is hard to decipher below the bust of Christ, to the extent that it is easy to miss the cross in this composition. The bust is thought to have been painted over the original cross.\(^\text{v}\) Godlewski notes the complexity of the painting and suggests a provisional ninth century dating. He comments on the excellent quality of artistry of the painted bust and remarks on the similarities to Byzantine images of the same era.\(^\text{v}\)

The second figural cross is high on the western wall of the narthex. A bust of Christ is super-imposed on what Godlewski called a cosmic cross. It is dated to the second half of the tenth century or eleventh century.\(^\text{v}\) The fragmentary image shows what appears to be a Greek type cross within a banded circle with finely executed dots.

It is also at this monastery that a complete codex of the Gospel of St John was found, with a cross on the frontispiece and on the front and back of the leather bindings. Jacques van der Vliet describes the binding as blind-tooled with a representation of a large cross in a frame.\(^\text{v}\) The codex itself measures 19.2 x 12.8 cms. Additionally the frontispiece has a more elaborate Latin-type cross with serifs, estraded, and with an arrangement of petals in the interstices. The entire cross is filled with elaborate braiding. Van der Vliet believes the codex dates to around 1100 CE. Godlewski explains how the codex was found in a mausoleum and is presumed to have been owned by a man called Boutros.\(^\text{v}\) Its similarity to the almost contemporaneous al-Ḥāmūli frontispieces would suggest that scriptoria in the Fayyūm continued to produce these designs into the twelfth century, at least.

There have also been some small personal crosses found in the necropolis of Naqlūn. One is a tenth century wooden pendant cross, found with other domestic objects on the western periphery of the complex.\(^\text{v}\) Two ivory crosses were found in a woman’s tomb, one of which was published by Godlewski.\(^\text{v}\)

Another notable feature of Dayr al-Naqlûn is the moulded plaster crosses above doorways. These small Greek-type crosses, arranged in orderly rows above the entrance to the church, are modern but identical to the potentially fifth or sixth century designs photographed by Sauneron and Jacquet at Isnâ.\footnote{Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, \textit{Esna: Vol 1}, p. 64.}

Karanis (city and cemetery)
Van Minnen noted that Karanis, on the edge of the Fayûm, was founded by the Ptolemies in the third century BCE, and that dateable remains come to an abrupt end by the end of the fifth century CE.\footnote{van Minnen, P. 1995. “Deserted Villages: Two Late-Antique Townsites in Egypt.” \textit{Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists} 32: 41–56, pp. 41, 45, 46.} Hodak substantiates these dates and adds that the majority of finds from Karanis are grave goods.\footnote{Hodak, Suzana. 2005. “Deserted Villages: Two Late-Antique Townsites in Egypt.” \textit{Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists} 32: 41–56, pp. 41, 45, 46.} Buzi draws our attention to very unusual mud-brick funerary stelae at this site. The small trapezoid (or flattened pyramidal) structures appear in staggered rows and feature roughly inscribed ansate crosses.\footnote{Buzi, Paola. 2015. “Early Christianity in the Fayûm: The New Contribution of Archaeology.” \textit{Vicino Oriente} 19: 85–96, pp. 89, 95.} This type of stele is not attested elsewhere in Egypt and the inclusion of the ansate cross would be consistent with a fifth, or at latest, sixth century date. At this stage this is the northern most attestation of the ansate cross and is proof that the design was attested in the Fayûm, though to what further extent is conjecture.

\textit{Bâwît, Dayr Apa Apollo}
The village of Bâwît is located between Dayrût and Asyût. Coquin and Martin note that the site had not been fully excavated as late as the 1990s, though there was sufficient evidence to suggest it was Pachomian in character. The monastery appears to have been a common meeting place for the occupants of the scattered hermitages.\footnote{Coquin, René-Georges, and Maurice Martin. 1991. “Bawit: History.” In \textit{The Coptic Encyclopedia, Volume 2}, edited by Aziz S. Atiya, 362–63. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.} Hadji-Minaglou notes that Rufinus’ \textit{Historia Monachorum} states that the monastery was founded by Apa Apollo in the fourth century, possibly around 386-388 CE. However she notes that there is no archaeological evidence to support this dating and that the oldest remains are from the sixth century. Dayr Apa Apollo was at its peak...
between the seventh and eighth century and was in existence until the tenth century. The most ancient remains, those of the south church and main basilica, date to the start of the seventh century. Construction in the north area belongs to the seventh century. Hadji-Minaglou also notes, as recently as 2015, that only a small percentage of this site has been excavated."

Bāwīt was originally excavated by Jean Clédat, and his colleagues, in the early 1900s, though Severin has provided a less than glowing account of their work. He states that the south church was destroyed when architectural sculptures were removed from the site. A selection of wall paintings from this church was also removed. Much of this material is now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo and the Louvre Museum in Paris."

Du Bourguet notes that Bāwīt’s pictorial décor is distinctive and diverse with narrative themes, similar to those seen in other locations. He suggests that the cross does not appear as a theme and cites examples of the cross appearing without symbolic overtones though he proffers no explanation for this opinion. He mentions the use of the cross on the vestments of the various figures in the figurative paintings."
Clédat’s 1904 report has an image of a fragment of a gemmed ansate cross from the west wall of Chapel 27 [ECD208].""

Rutschowscaya describes wooden items from Bāwīt in the Louvre Museum’s collection and notes the problems of contextualising and dating the finds. These are either architectural elements or small portable items that might be found at any site. In her 1978 article she remarks on the work in progress and does not provide a clear indication of dating,"" but her later work provides a dating of fifth to the ninth century. Some of the portable items are combs, boxes, coffins and fragments of lintels, which have Latin and Greek type crosses as well as christograms. She also reports three

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 footnotes:

5 Clédat, 1904, Baouit, Plate XCIII.
finds of the *crux ansata*, though one of these is a pendant and it is debateable whether it is indeed an ansate cross.\(^{10}\)

Much of what was found at Bāwīt has been removed to museum collections, notably in Paris and Cairo. Given the extensive and elaborate paintings, it would be reasonable to expect that there would be a corpus of crosses. However, most of the art is figurative. The crosses, or those that have survived, are incidental, such as those that appear on the garments on various personages, as staffs or as decorative elements. In short, while Bāwīt is famed for its figurative art, it does not have a significant repertoire of crosses.

**Dayr Abū Fānah**

The decoration of this monastery, located near the town of al-Ashmūnayn on the edge of the Libyan desert, has given rise to it being known as the Monastery of the Crosses.\(^{11}\) Sameh wrote that large parts of the old church are still preserved, but only in the east of the building.\(^{12}\) In 1991 only the church remained, deeply sunk into the sand. Of the original paintings, Grossman notes, only some on the western wall and at the western end of the north wall have been preserved. The apse paintings, notably including a draped cross, are more recent. The church is dated to the seventh century by Grossman, though Bolman dates it to 450 CE.\(^{13}\) The occurrence of a *khārūs* would suggest later modifications. Surprisingly, given its sobriquet, Grossman makes no mention of crosses, through he does talk about the architecture.\(^{14}\)

There are two draped, Latin-type crosses still visible including the one in the apse mentioned above. The apse cross is similar to a much smaller cross at Dayr al-Suryān in the floating drapery, but here it displays extremely intricate braiding.\(^{15}\) The other draped cross, much deteriorated, is similar in concept to that of the *parekklesion* of the old church of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, though in a much simpler rendition.


\(^{13}\) Bolman, 2016. *The Red Monastery Church*, p. 44.


Van Loon remarks that in the fifth-century funerary chapel of Dayr Abū Fānah the walls of the nave were decorated with rectangular plaques. She notes there are also crosses of the same type as at Shaykh Sa’id, presumably meaning the ansate type. On the southern wall there is a large ansate cross with gems, accompanied by two unicorns. Mario Cappozzo has published a reconstructed colour image of this cross and a second Latin type cross with two antelopes. Both display the elaborate decoration. The inclusion of unicorns in the first is notable.

Kamil mentions that in the Coptic tradition, not necessarily proven, Dayr Abū Fānah was visited by the Empress Helena, who authorised the construction of the Church of the Cross. The Empress Helena was certainly associated with the discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem and the cult that developed from this find. If Dayr Abū Fānah is believed to have been linked to Helena, this would have contributed to its development as a pilgrim site. Kamil also notes that during Napoleon’s expedition there was a quest to find the monastery of the cross but it was buried under debris and sand. Maspero visited in 1883 and said the church was in the shape of a cross and walls were decorated with crosses. Presumably in the intervening years much of this decoration has disappeared.

Dayr Abū Ḥinnis, Dayr al-Dīk and al-Shaykh Sa’id

The monastic communities of Dayr al-Dīk, Dayr Abū Ḥinnis and al-Shaikh Sa’id are in close proximity and were established on the east bank of the Nile, to the south of the modern city of Minyā. The first two were established in ancient pre-Christian era quarries and the third re-used Old Kingdom tombs. Van Loon points out that while the three settlements are geographically close and seem similar, they have their own characteristics. She also notes that they have been under-researched to date.

The location of Dayr al-Dīk is around three kilometres north of Shaykh Abādah. A church with a large niche in the east wall was established in quarry #13. Van Loon

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notes that the niche was decorated with sculpture and two phases of painted decoration, of which the first layer could date to the fifth or sixth century.

The location of Dayr Abū Hinnis is four to five kilometres south of Shaykh Abâdah. A church with a baptistery, dedicated to John the Baptist, is located in the south-west corner of one of the largest quarries. It is decorated with wall paintings that are mainly frescoes of infancy scenes of Jesus as well as of John the Baptist.\(^{113}\) As with other sites, it is hard to reconcile the archaeological data with information in the surviving documents.\(^{114}\) The small church in the present day village has remains of foundations that can be dated to late fifth century. The church has been greatly modified. Van Loon notes the issue of encroaching building and landscaping projects, vandalism and bounty hunting.\(^{115}\) Unfortunately these are not issues that are likely to be limited to this site.

Van Loon notes that the *laura* of Shaykh Sa’id, is five kilometres south of Dayr Abû Hinnis and has tombs dating to 2400 BCE, which were reused and transformed by Christian monks. As was often the case, one of the reused tombs was converted into a church. Another, known as tomb 25 or the tomb of Werirni, has a crux ansata in ochre and red with small traces of yellow. The loop of the cross is encircled by two branches. Most of the cross has disappeared but there appears to be a small red cross within the loop. A unicorn is shown to the left and other animals such as antelopes and gazelles to the right. Van Loon has provided a photograph of this image but the painting is poorly preserved and hard to decipher. Her accompanying drawing provides more clarity.\(^{116}\) The animals are not in close proximity to the cross and may not have been intended to be part of the same tableau. There is too much damage to determine what else might have been included in the design.

*Al-Bahnasā (Oxyrhynchus)*

Located on the western edge of the Nile Valley in the Minyā province, Oxyrhynchus or al-Bahnasā is best known for the discovery of a large quantity of Greek papyri. According to the *Historia Monachorum* in the fourth century there were numerous


\(^{113}\) ibid, pp. 241–242.

monasteries in Oxyrhynchus, with around twelve churches. Monks are said to have inhabited repurposed pagan temples and shrines."

Subías Pascual’s work elaborates on the richness of the Christian site and its devastation following the discovery of the papyri during the early excavations in 1897, and the subsequent pillaging of the site made worse by the construction of a railway line. In 1992 a joint team from the University of Barcelona and Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities commenced a systematic excavation of the site of the necropolis and found a homogenous collection of mud-brick structures comprising an early Christian oratory decorated with paintings and inscriptions. The oratory gave access to a series of crypts that were likely to have been repurposed tombs. She describes the inclusion of ‘ankh’ symbols, more likely ansate crosses, alongside images of Jonah in some of the structures. In some instances the ansate cross appears in the beak of an eagle. The dating is thought to be between the fifth and sixth century, which would be consistent with other occurrences of the ansate cross." The painted representations of drapery, decorated in this instance with ansate crosses, is similar in concept to painted ‘curtains’ at Isnâ, though the latter displays pattée crosses instead." However, it would seem that other types of crosses were also attested, as can be seen from an image of a quadrata cross on a pedestal and with a tang, flanked by quadrupeds, with a suggested fifth to seventh century dating. This particular cross appears in a room that Subías Pascual cautiously suggests could be a monastic site, given the decoration which alludes to the veneration of the cross. She also notes that some of the paintings appear unfinished leading us to speculate that more crosses could have been intended at the site.""

Perhaps the most famous find from this area is the sixth-century Codex Glazier, a partial copy of the Book of Acts, and which displays a much-photographed endpiece consisting of a unique ansate cross. The cross is composed of braided bands of

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various colours and is accompanied by perched birds. It is also the sole example of an ansate cross with a tang.\footnote{120}

*Shaykh Abādah (Antinoë)*

As Akhmīm is thought to be the origin, perhaps incorrectly, of Coptic textiles, Antinoë and Fayyūm are names used in connection with mummy portraits.\footnote{121} This is a loose ascription though widely used in museum collections. Of interest to this project are the portraits with Christian symbols of which there are a limited number with ansate crosses, such as those in the collections of the Louvre and Benaki Museums. As will be discussed later, these images are relatively early and the crosses in question could be from an origin other than Egyptian.

In summary, except for a few examples of ansate cross at Bāwīṭ, Dayr Abū Fānah, Dayr Abū Ḥinnis and Shaykh Saʿīd, the dominant type in Middle Egypt is the Latin cross, followed by the pattée cross.

\footnote{120 The codex and cross will be discussed in more detail later.}
\footnote{121 Doxiadis, 2000, Fayum Portraits, p.118, 119, 120, 214, 215.}
Monasteries of the Eastern Desert

The monasteries and hermitages on the Red Sea coast of Eastern Desert are far from the Nile valley. They are few in this harsh landscape, and are generally located in proximity to natural water sources. Wādī al-ʿArabah had, and still has, hermitages in the vicinity of the major monasteries. The ruins of the small monastery of Dayr Abū Darāj,¹ and associated hermitages are located in the vicinity and are not accessed easily, unlike the bigger monasteries of Dayr Abū Antuniyūs and Dayr Abū Bula, which are on the well-trodden pilgrim route.

There are also monasteries in the eastern part of the delta towards the Sinai Peninsula. Pelusium or Tell al-Farama is close to Port Saʿid and is cited several times as a place where anchorites lived. Abu Salih wrote that there were numerous churches there. He attributed the destruction of the place to the Persians and later the Arabs.² There does not appear to be extant visual representations of crosses at these sites.

Dayr Abū Antuniyūs

The monastery of Abū Antuniyūs is located forty-five kilometres south-west of the Red Sea lighthouse of Ras Zaʿfaranah, in Wādī al-ʿArabah, at the southern end of the Jalālah mountain range. The monastic settlement was established around 361-363 CE and eventually consisted of church, cells, kitchen and bakehouse. In the fifth century, monks from Wādī al-Natrūn took refuge here as they were subject to raids from marauders. The monastery thrives today as a pilgrim centre.³

Of the large number of churches only the church of St Anthony, also known as the Old Church or Great Church, has any ancient significance. Doresse describes it as the most important part of the monastery. It is 20 metres long and 6 metres wide and belongs to a type of church he describes as ‘long churches’. It is divided by brick arches into three parts: narthex, khūrus and sanctuary. He states that the whole church can be dated to the ninth century approximately. There are later paintings, of military saints and other figures, which are from the thirteenth and definitely prior to the fifteenth century. Doresse focuses on the elaborate decoration of the main church and

¹ Since commencing this project in 2014, information has come to hand that the ruins of Dayr Abū Darāj have been lost to the construction of a road from the Red Sea coast to Cairo.
² Abu Salih, Churches and Monasteries, p. 167, 168.
does not remark on the side chapel, which contains the intricate draped and stepped Latin type cross.  

Similarly, perhaps not surprisingly, most other writers tend to focus on the elaborate figural art in the main church but overlook the several apparently random representations of pattée and bifurcated Latin-type crosses on the walls. An important exception is van Moorsel, who also provides images of these, which he describes as ‘consecration’ crosses as they occur below paintings of various saints with the triumphal nomina sacra inscription (IC XC NI KA). He notes the vibrant red and green pigment of the earlier crosses, even in their unrestored condition with layers of soot and grime, and describes the later renditions as predominantly grey and geometric. Van Moorsel draws substantially on Leroy’s earlier work, using similar language to describe the crosses in the lower register to the saints.

A cave exists on a terrace above the monastery where St. Antony is believed to have lived. There is no extant ancient art in the cave.

An epigraphical study by Coquin and Laferriere informs us that, after the church was built, Theodorus who called himself a son of Bishop Gabriel of Atfih was commissioned to paint the church. This was likely to have been in 1232 and 1233 CE. Much of Theodorus’ work remains and is referred to extensively by Bolman.

Adjoining the church and to the south of it is a side chapel or parekklesion, dedicated to the Four Living Creatures and also displaying a lavishly decorated draped cross. The dating of this painting has been the subject of much discussion and contrary statements. While Coquin and Laferriere date the chapel’s paintings to the thirteenth century, Gabra notes that the recent discovery of an older painting on the arch leading to the Chapel. Bolman also dates the painting of the draped cross, based on the signed work of Theodorus, along with other elements of the parekklesion’s niche to

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2 van Moorsel, Paul. 1995. Les peintures du monastère de Sainte-Antoine près de la mer Rouge. Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, pp. 165, 166. Plates 99 and 100 show images of these crosses, which were also photographed by the author in 2015.
6 van Moorsel, 1995, Sainte-Antoine, p. 10. It would appear that not only were altars and churches dedicated to the Four Living Creatures, but according to Abu Salih’s account, there was also a festival dedicated to them. See Abu Salih, Churches and Monasteries, p. 125.
7 Gabra, 2002, Coptic Monasteries, p. 79.

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the thirteenth century." Perhaps the best description of the side chapel is from Leroy, who notes the similarity of the angels flanking the cross to those in the khārus. He also notes that the arched opening between the side chapel and the Great Church caused the destruction of a painting of a cavalier saint. He comments on the perfect state of preservation of the paintings in the sanctuary of the side chapel, and suggests there are many indications that they were painted by the same hand as those of the Great Church, though he also concedes that others could have been involved."

As Gabra describes, the elaborate painting of the side chapel is wholly within the sanctuary. Below the rendition of the Deesis and the Four Living Creatures there is a niche, which is almost totally filled with a large draped Latin type cross, flanked by two angels swinging censers. The well-preserved cross is decorated with medallions enclosing rosettes. Apart from the name of Jesus, there are Greek inscriptions, which read “the tree of life” and “the precious cross”. "The cross is on a raised platform and is very distinctive with its elaborately executed drapery. It does somewhat recall the much smaller draped cross at Dayr al-Suryān in Wādī al- Naţrūn, and to a greater extent the draped cross at Dayr Abū Fānah and another at Dayr Anbā Shinūdah at Suhāj. " The whole tableau of the Four Living Creatures above and around the draped and stepped cross also recalls the apse decoration of Santa Pudenziana in Rome, which dates to the fifth century but was restored in the sixteenth century.""

The other similarities are seen in the layers of paintings that show two types of crosses, both at Dayr al-Suryān and the monastery of Dayr Anbā Antuniyās. In both instances the earlier layers show a bi-coloured, bifurcated cross in bright red and green pigment, referred to earlier. These are best described as quadrata-type cross which each arm bifurcated into equal areas of red and green. The terminals are either flared or end in small round designs and the whole cross in encircled in green leaves terminating at the top of the motif in two pomegranates, though van Moorsel sees these as flowers." The later layer, often super-imposed on the first, shows a different type of cross altogether. These are pattée crosses in green, within a border of concentric circles. The spaces created by the concave arms are decorated with patterns

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in red pigment. There are also several plain pattée crosses in red pigment within circles that are very similar in appearance to those in the monasteries of Wādī al-Naṭrūn.

_Dayr Anbā Bula_

Dayr Anbā Bula is located in proximity to St Anthony’s monastery, some thirty nine kilometres south-west of the Ras Za’faranah lighthouse. St Paul of Thebes fled to this site at the age of sixteen to escape the Decian persecution in the middle of the third century. For several hundred years, until the nineteenth century, it was administered by the neighbouring monastery of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, though today it is fully independent and thriving on its own.

The monastery of St Paul has four churches, three in the ancient part. The church of St Paul of Thebes is the spiritual centre and occupies the cave where St Paul is said to have lived. The walls of this church have eighteenth century paintings done by a monk and graffiti from the fifteenth century. The art at this monastery is figurative with no emphasis or special appearance of crosses.
Upper Egypt – from Asyūṭ to Aswan

For the purpose of this project the boundary of Upper Egypt is taken to mean the area from Asyūṭ to Aswan. This area has some large clusters of monasteries and hermitages, notably those at Suhāj and Isnā. Also notable is that, rightly or wrongly, many textile finds are attributed to the burial grounds of Akhmīm, which are in proximity to the Suhāj monasteries.

Akhmīm (Panopolis)

Akhmīm was a textile centre, noted in Strabo’s Geography. Most ‘Coptic’ textiles are loosely described as being from Akhmīm, which seems to be more a matter of expediency than accuracy. Textile fragments were brought to the open market in a seemingly ad hoc manner, with little or no provenance. Suffice to say there are several such fragments in international museum collections, several of which are embellished with crosses. The textiles feature ansate crosses as well as quadrata types, in richly embellished designs.

Akhmīm is also listed as the origin of a type of funerary stele that features ansate crosses. In a few instances there is a face included within the loop of the ansate cross. As with the textile finds, dating and actual provenance are unknown.

Dayr Anbā Shinūdah (White Monastery)

The monastery is located to the west of the modern town of Suhāj, at the margins of the western desert. Grossman notes that the church of Anbā Shinūdah is the most complete of the structures still standing.

Shinūdah was a strong influence on the monastic movement; he was one of the earliest leaders of monasticism in Egypt, who left behind a significant corpus of letters and canons. He was the head of the monastery during the fourth and fifth centuries. His canons provide us with a clear picture of the strictures and rigours of

— Strabo. Geographica. Warmington, E. H. 1932 (ed). The Geography of Strabo, translated by Horace L. Jones. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Havard University Press. XVII: 41. The dating of Geographica is not known though it is variously thought to be from around 7 BCE to 17 CE.
monastic life in a great amount of detail.\textsuperscript{13} Caroline Schroder expands on the theme of the rigours of monastic life, noting that Shinūdah laid out rules for the most basic of things such as cooking, eating and rest.\textsuperscript{14} From this one could surmise that there was little room for personal expression. However, the exhaustive list of rules and regulations and his constant injunctions in his letters does tend to suggest that this was his ideal rather than the reality of monastic life.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, the numbers of letters that Shinūdah wrote on these subjects leads one to believe that his flock were not altogether obedient to his strictures.

Bolman notes that at both Shinūdah’s monastery, also known as the White Monastery and at the nearby Red Monastery (Dayr Anbā Bishōi), buildings survive above the ground with architectural sculptures as well as wall paintings from several periods covering the fifth to fourteenth centuries. These monasteries are therefore unusual in that there is substantial archaeological, art historical, architectural and textual evidence much of which dates to the early Byzantine period. While she states that neither site is well published, her 2016 publication goes some way to remedying this.\textsuperscript{16} Both have functioning churches and like others in a similar situation, both are today subject to the pressure of pilgrim visits.\textsuperscript{17}

The monastery is still in the process of being studied by Yale University in collaboration with Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities, including work on a triconch funerary chapel. Bolman reports an iconographical program consisting of gemmed processional (with tangs) crosses, deer, gazelles and other fauna in the tomb chapel. These are in the inner tomb chamber, in the upper register, alongside figurative art. The paintings are all believed to be from the same period. Bolman further notes that the iconography and architecture of the tomb have echoes of funerary art in the late Roman Empire and provides a fourth century barrel-vaulted tomb in Iznik (Nicaea) as an example with similar subject matter. The dating of the

\textsuperscript{16} Bolman, 2016, \textit{The Red Monastery Church}.
paintings is unclear, though it could be as early as shortly after the death of Anbā Shinūdah, believed to be in 465 CE."

From the descriptions there do not appear to be any ansate crosses. The others would seem to be of a Latin type.

Dayr Anbā Bishōi (Red Monastery)
This monastery is located around three kilometres to the north of Dayr Anbā Shinūdah. Nothing remains with the exception of the church, which is built of red bricks giving the monastery its popular name of the ‘Red Monastery’.

Hans-Georg Severin notes that the painting and decoration of this monastery’s church is less elaborate than that of the nearby Dayr Anbā Shinūdah. However, while he described the latter’s decorative program as being in ‘ruinous condition’, he notes that the decoration of Dayr Anbā Bishōi’s church is well preserved, especially in the sanctuary. He believes the quality of the paintings, as in the neighbouring monastery, is the work of professionals."

Bolman has written of the magnificent decoration in the sanctuary, which contains mainly figural subjects and decorative elements. She remarks in passing on the faint paintings of crosses in the nave."

The crosses generally are secondary to the brilliantly coloured figural and geometric designs as seen in Bolman’s volume, which provides many colour representations allowing a better appreciation of the extent of the chromatic palette used."

Isnā (Latopolis)
Isnā is on the west bank of the Nile around 48 kilometres south west of Luxor. It has a long and rich Christian tradition. Even before the council of Nicaea in 325 CE, it had a bishopric under Ammonius. A number of martyrs are commemorated. Isnā was excavated by Sauneron and Jacquet in the 1960s.

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Bolman, 2016, *The Red Monastery Church.*
Isnā consists of a number of hermitages and monasteries. The major monasteries are Dayr al-Fakhūr, Dayr al-Shuhadā, Dayr Apa Ishaq and Dayr al-Rūmānīyah. Van Loon notes that there has been little interest in these monasteries since Leroy’s 1975 publication. The decoration of Dayr al-Shuhadā appears to be mainly figurative including images of the Deesis, John the Baptist and the Virgin, while at Dayr al-Fakhūr the paintings preserved in the domed section of the nave are also figurative.

In addition to material in the archaeological reports over several seasons, numerous original photographs are held in the archives of the Institut français d’archéologie orientale (IFAO) in Cairo that were not included in Sauneron’s published reports. These, from al-Fakhūr, al-Shuhadā and several hermitages, are yet to be digitised or published and are therefore not contained in the image collection.

From the archaeological reports and the unpublished photographs it is clear that Isnā had an extensive corpus of crosses.

Dayr al-Fakhūr is described as a vast complex of mud brick buildings with an enclosing wall. Only the eastern part of the wall was still visible by the 1990s. There were remnants of towers and other buildings. Remains of paintings were extant in the central hall of the church, mostly figurative, of the Apostles and Old Testament characters. Some of the paintings are dated to the early twelfth century while there are others from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. While crosses are not mentioned in Grossman and Castel’s report, it is clear from the IFAO’s archives that they are plentiful. Van Loon suggests that the oldest phase of the church dates to the eighth century, the time of Matthew the Poor.

Dayr al-Shuhadā is referred to as Chohada by Sauneron and is in proximity to Isnā. It also known as Dayr Anbā Bākhūm, no doubt to commemorate Pachomius who was born and lived near this town. The old church, van Loon suggests, appears to be a

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The Cross in the Visual Culture of Christian Egypt

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Chapter 2 – Survey

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footnotes:

composite of two buildings. To the south is a basilica-type church with paintings on the walls of the sanctuary. To the north is another church with two conch-shaped apses set into the east wall. Here paintings are distributed in the apses. The south church appears to have been built on the site of an older church with the paintings dating to late eighth century. Of the paintings few are decipherable but are noted to be of high quality. The most notable paintings appear to be figurative with representations of Christ in Majesty and the evangelical symbols. There is no mention of crosses though we know they are plentiful from the IFAO archives. This lack of mention could be because the crosses are not as striking as the figurative paintings or are regarded as incidental.

At Isnā crosses are used in what appears to be an apotropaic theme. This is evidenced by multiple crosses drawn over doors and windows, similar to the entrance to the modern church of the Archangel Gabriel in the Fayyûm (al-Naqlûn). Conceivably monks would have touched the crosses as they crossed thresholds between rooms or when entering the monasteries and hermitages. These crosses are of a very simple Greek type, drawn in serried rows and forming a border design around doorways and windows. Sauneron’s report provides sketches of these arrangements.

Isnā also has a repertoire of elaborately braided Latin-type crosses, some of which are suggestive of processional crosses, with bells and censers suspended from them. Some of these knot-work designs are reminiscent of Armenian and Celtic designs. There are also six-pointed motifs that Sauneron and Jacquet have described as crosses though equally they could be geometric or floral designs.

There are also many depictions of the pattée crosses at Isnā, with motifs in the interstices of the arms that could be interpreted as fish or petals. Linda Evans believes the design to be fish, which she believes to be a reference to Ancient Egyptian art where similar designs are attested showing tilapia fish.

The rendition at Naqlûn is not old as mentioned earlier; it is mentioned here as a point of reference.
Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, Esna Vol I. Hermitage 9, fig. 28.
No link has been proven between Egypt’s crosses and those of Ireland/Scotland and Armenia.
Evans, Linda. 2012. “Animals in Coptic Art.” Göttinger Miszellen 232: 63–73. This will be discussed in more detail later.
Notable at Isnā are the linear and geometric patterns used in interstices of some pattée crosses. Some of these designs have been replicated in Sauneron and Jaquet’s reports and can be interpreted as stylised flowers and bells. There are also clusters of three pattée crosses on the walls, similar to those of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs and Dayr al-Suryān.

Rassart-Debergh notes that the ornamentation in the hermitages of Isnā is simple, homogenous and limited in the range of subjects. She also notes numerous crosses on the walls and draws attention to images of birds, which are shown confronted. These are mainly peacocks and doves. The eastern niches mainly show crosses and birds facing each other.

Armant
Armant is in proximity to Isnā and is reported to be the origin of a type of fairly elaborate funerary stele. The stelae are mainly in museum collections and the provenance is not guaranteed. The attractiveness of the design would suggest that the stele were popular with bounty hunters. However, there is a stylistic similarity among the stelae said to be from Armant, and as with those from Akhmīm, they feature ansate crosses. This raises the issue that ansate crosses were especially used on funerary stelae, as they do not occur in the wall paintings of nearby Isnā.

Dayr Anbā Hadrā
Walters informs us that the monastery known as St Simeon’s was dedicated to Anbā Hadrā who became bishop of Aswan during the Patriarchate of Theophilus in the late fourth and early fifth century. As he says, it is not possible to confirm whether a community existed at the site during that period, though there is evidence that there was a settlement there in the sixth and seventh century. Monneret de Villard suggests that the monastery fell into disrepair in the eighth century. The monastery has been uninhabited since the tenth century but is fairly well preserved, with an imposing silhouette.

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Sauneron, 1972, Esna Vol IV, p. 70
Walters, 1974, Monastic Archaeology in Egypt, p. 241.
Walters, writing in 1974, noted that the paintings in the semi-dome of the church of Anbā Hadrā were badly damaged. The Coptic Encyclopedia further notes that the frescoes were not systematically photographed. The scene in the semi-dome is of Christ in Majesty within a mandorla. He has a nimbus and is beardless. His left hand holds a book and his right hand is raised in benediction. Walters makes no mention of a cross on the codex, while Pierre du Bourguet notes in the Coptic Encyclopedia that the codex depicts a cross. In fact, given the frequent representation of codices with crosses, it is not surprising that Walter fails to mention it. Jules Leroy provides an image of this fresco, and the cross spanning the codex with four designs in the quadrants, which could be X-shaped crosses, is clearly visible.

Jean Clédat’s notebook, currently in the Louvre Museum, contains of designs from Dayr Anbā Hadrā of what are described as rosettes. Both images, one fragmentary, could also be pattée crosses within wreaths and can be seen on the website of the Institut français d’archéologie orientale in Cairo. This is also an image seen frequently at Isnā.

Henri Munier’s two articles on Coptic stelae from this monastery mention in passing that there are Greek and pattée type crosses on the stelae, but his focus is on the inscriptions and he provides no images.

Nag Hammadi

Nag Hammadi is notable for its finds of codices. Unlike those from al-Ḥāmtūlt, which are also considerably later in date, these are not richly illustrated or with elaborate frontispieces. However, the inclusion of a row of ansate crosses, in Codex I, as a border following a block of text is notable, as is the leather binding of Codex II with three ansate crosses.

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Theban area

Despite a detailed search of information relating to monastic sites, it came as a surprise that no crosses of any note from were identified from this area. It is highly probable that they did exist but as the sites are badly degraded none could be identified with the exception of an unusual object, described as a window aperture, from the monastery of St Epiphanius. This was displayed at an exhibition by the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1941, but no further information has been forthcoming about the piece, which has been carved from a block of sycamore and is a cross-shaped aperture in a wooden disc.\(^1\)

Monasteries of the Western Desert

There are numerous oases in this area, which is also known as the Libyan massif. Monastic centres were numerous, no doubt because of the watering places and frequency of caravans.

Khārjah Oasis

Khārjah is known as the Great Oasis. It is the largest and best connected to the Nile Valley by a road from Asyūt and was a waypoint on caravan routes in ancient times. The necropolis of al-Bagawāt is located here.

Beadnell, writing in 1909, remarks on what he describes as a wonderfully preserved early Christian necropolis, dating from the time of Bishop Nestorius who was banished to Khārjah in 434 CE. Parry notes the existence of the tradition that Nestorius was exiled in various places in Upper Egypt, and that while the evidence of his tomb is not substantiated, banishment to the Great Oasis was well known. Wilkinson remarks that only the paintings of Saqqārah, Bāwīt and Khārjah had been found by 1927, and notes the difference between the early Christian visual representations at these places and Ancient Egyptian art. He describes how the interiors of many of the tombs were simply given a coating of rough mud-plaster and comments, with what appears to be some disappointment, that several were adorned with ‘nothing more’ than the crux ansata. He does, however, describe the dome mural in the Chapel of Peace and wonders who could have painted the ‘foreign’ looking figures depicted there.

Ahmed Fakhr noted expansively in the preface to his 1951 publication that the necropolis of al-Bagawāt was one of the most important Christian monuments not just in Egypt, but in all the East. He was desperate, by his own admission, to have the paintings preserved and saw his book as a means of highlighting the beauty of the paintings and to draw attention to the need to conserve them. Thanks to him we have

– Beadnell, H. J. L. 1909. An Egyptian Oasis. London: John Murray. The focus of his detailed work is on the geology and topography of the area with a particular interest in water management, including Roman aqueducts, expanding on the view that Khārjah was well known in pre-Christian times.
fairly detailed copies of the various renditions of the *crux ansata* at this location." From Cipriano we have more recent photographs of many of Fakhry’s sketches, showing the deterioration and desecration of the crosses. Both present the wide range of ways in which the ansate cross was depicted.

Rassart-Debergh notes that the necropolis complex contained around two hundred and sixty tombs used by both Christians and pagans. Two chapels are particularly renowned – the chapel of the Exodus dating to the fourth century, and the Chapel of Peace dating from the sixth century. She notes that the themes pictured in the necropoli of the period are the same as those seen in Rome and Naples."

Ghica notes that the funerary chapels of the al-Bagawāt necropolis are unique as places of worship in the Western Desert. Among the mausolea of the necropolis are those that were used as Christian places of worship. The original buildings underwent a series of transformations to adapt to the needs of Christian ritual. These renovations are difficult to date but are not thought to be later than the fifth century."

The necropolis of al-Bagawāt has a rich corpus of ansate crosses. The dating of the Chapel of the Exodus would suggest that these are some of the earliest representations of crosses in monastic Egypt. Bowen notes that there are varied representations of the *crux ansata*, usually in red pigment on a plain surface. Some are rudimentary drawings while others are more elaborately decorated with dots and concentric bands within the circular loop. Seven of these chapels have substantial wall paintings, and twenty have ansate crosses painted on the walls, either as original art or later *dipinti* left by visitors. Most surviving images are on the inside of the buildings but there are some on the exteriors. Each of the painted chapels has at least one ansate cross. Bowen also notes most of the ansate crosses are on the interiors of the buildings, suggesting therefore that the exteriors are not overtly Christian in appearance."
While the dominant motif is the ansate cross in the various mausolea, Bowen also notes that they are of different types. This is clear from Fakhry’s work, which provides sketches of the ansate crosses in several of the chapels. What is also clear is that, aside from the three ansate crosses in the tableau of the Promised Land in the Chapel of the Exodus and the image of Eirene in the eponymous Chapel of Peace, who holds an ansate cross very much in the manner of gods in Ancient Egyptian art, most of the crosses are random depictions. In the Chapel of the Exodus there is a large ansate cross painted within each of the pendentives, and others at the tops of each of the arches. On the façade of the painting of the Promised Land, there are three ansate crosses with ovoid loops that look more like *ankhs*. In the Chapel of Peace, which is the most southerly of the tombs, Fakhry draws attention to the superior quality of the painting and notes that the style and clothing suggests a Byzantine influence. The ansate cross here is shown in outline, with the loop contiguous with the *tau*. It has a trapezoidal base and arms.

Bowen notes that a large number of ansate crosses are painted above each of the niches in tomb 25, and above a scene that could represent Paul and Thekla. An ansate cross, executed in relief, is placed over the niche above the central arch. It is not possible to tell if this cross is original or a later addition. The crosses are all shown in outline, filled with dots and geometric shapes. In one example the loop is composed of six concentric circles with solid triangular blocks of colour in the arms and base. In two other examples the loop is separate from the shaft.

In some of Fakhry’s sketches we see a smaller ansate cross within the loop of the larger one. To the north of the necropolis are several small chapels all with ansate crosses in various configurations. The size of the loop varies in relation to the tau shaft, as do the number of embellishments. There are loops composed of triple concentric circles, sometimes with another cross within the loop. One particularly unusual cross has the lateral shafts of the tau terminating in a wavy branch-like design. Notable also are the four ansate crosses in chapel 210 where they appear above each phoenix, which decorate the four pendentives.

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* Fakhry provides no explanation for the conflation of Old and New Testament themes, which appear in the tableau of the Promised Land, showing Moses and three ansate crosses.
* The image of Eirene is unusual, especially in dress and the manner in which the cross is held.
The date of the decoration of the chapels is, at best, speculative. Bowen assumes that the tomb chapels were painted at the same time as the initial entombment, though she agrees that this cannot be verified. While the buildings and tombs can be dated, albeit poorly, the span of occupation is thought to be from the fourth to seventh centuries. Badawy suggests a fourth century date for the Chapel of the Exodus and Chapel of Peace, noting that there are similar themes in the Roman catacombs and at Dura Europos. Rassart-Debergh also alludes to this in the Coptic Encyclopedia. Margaret Riddle suggests a fifth century date is more probable but acknowledges more work needs to be done. The incorporation of a Latin-type cross in chapel 161 may give more clues about the dating as this type is extremely rare at al-Bagawāt. That said, it could possibly be a later addition and post-date the ansate crosses.

'Ayn Jallāl is a short distance south of Dayr al-Bagawāt, marking the north-western periphery of ancient Hibis. A baptismal font with a crux ansata was found in the northern sector, which can be dated to the fourth or fifth century. The ansate cross on the font has a circular loop in a thick line in red pigment. The base and arms are trapezoidal. There are several more examples of ansate crosses on the eastern wall of the chapel on the first layer of painted plaster.

**Al-Ḍākhlah Oasis**

Further west from Khārjah is the al-Ḍākhlah oasis. Bowen writes of two early fourth century churches at Ismant al-Khārāb in the Ḍākhlah oasis. These both feature ansate crosses as part of the decorative scheme. She suggests that the use of this motif in an ecclesiastical context during the fourth century has hitherto not been attested. She compares the motifs at this location with those at al-Bagawāt’s mausolea in the neighbouring Khārjah oasis to determine is they are contemporaneous.

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Bowen suggests there is textual evidence that a Christian community existed at Ismant al-Kharab since 280 CE, but that the sites were abandoned by the end of the fourth century. In both churches the painted decorations were confined to the apse and wall of the sanctuary facing the nave. The apse paintings beneath the cupola are preserved while those on the outer walls of the sanctuary are badly damaged. Fragments of the ansate crosses were retrieved from where they had fallen. Bowen describes the most impressive as being of deep maroon on white plaster. The loop consists of two circles with a further outer circle of maroon dots. The trapezoidal arms and base are of equal length with more dots apparent in the design. The whole design is estimated to be 28 centimetres high with the diameter of the circle being 15 centimetres. This example is assumed to be original."

Bowen also noted traces of a Christian presence at Mut al-Kharab, though the remains are in a poor state of preservation." Buildings from late antiquity have been lost or inadequately identified, though large stone architectural pieces were found on the surface in 1980. A image described as a ‘six-branch cross’ was attested, though it must be said that this more closely resembles a pattée cross of the type seen at Isnā. It is interesting, though perhaps not at all surprising given the state of the ruins, that no ansate crosses have been found.

_Al-Farāfrāh Oasis_

Due west of Asyūṭ is the oasis of al-Farāfrāh. Traces remain of the occupation of one or more Christian hermits at ‘Ayn Jillāw, a few kilometres south of the Qasr al-Farāfrāh. A group of three rock tombs have been excavated. One of these was found to have been occupied by anchorites, dated by the ceramic finds to the Byzantine era. Several crosses are painted on the inside of the cubiculum. These are not ansate crosses but appear simply executed Greek-type crosses with chevrons on each of the terminals."

At the conclusion of this survey a brief note is required to explain the exclusion of St Catherine’s monastery at Sinai from this collation of sites where significant crosses

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were identified. South Sinai remained separate from the rest Egypt for most of period under study. While I have made a point of staying away from the use of the term ‘Coptic’, in this instance the distinction must be made between the Coptic monasteries of this survey and St Catherine’s which, as Gabra succinctly notes, retained its Greek character. More is Ghica’s assertion that no Coptic manuscripts have been found in the library of this monastery. Further, hardly any Coptic graffiti has been found in Sinai, with the mention of just a handful, mostly at Wadi Mukattib, the so-called Valley of Inscriptions.

**Summary and observations**

This survey has shown that within the extensive span of monasteries and hermitages across the landscape of Egypt there exists a significant corpus of crosses, both in uniqueness and number. There are four basic types, with considerable variation within each type, in the design vocabulary of early Christian art in Egypt.

These are ansate or *crux ansata*, Greek or *crux quadrata*, Latin or *crux immissa* and pattée with considerable variations within each type. The basic form of each type is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ansate</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Pattée</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Ansate Cross" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Greek Cross" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Latin Cross" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Pattée Cross" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Briefly, the ansate cross or *crux ansata* is, in essence, a *tau* or T shape surmounted by a loop of ‘handle’. The shape of the loop may be circular or ovoid. Greek and Latin crosses are composed of two intersecting lines with the distinction occurring in the

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* The typology is discussed in detail in the analysis chapters – 4 and 5.
length of the vertical axis. In several instances it is difficult to distinguish between Greek and Latin types because the length of the vertical axis is indeterminate. In such instances they are referred to as quadrata. The pattée cross has flaring and occasionally concave arms, and is sometimes contained within a circle.

It is rare to see any of these types in Egypt without design embellishments, for example, flora, fauna, geometric motifs, braiding, gems and tangs. These decorative elements form the eight sub-types.**

With the exception of ansate crosses, which are exclusively Egyptian, the other types occur in other parts of the Mediterranean world. Intentionally or otherwise, there are parallels with Byzantine art but the local elaborations of the Greek, Latin and pattée types are often uniquely Egyptian in expression. For example, there are similarities between some scenes in Wādī al-Naṭrūn and St Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna. There are congruencies between the crosses of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, Dayr Abū Fānah and Santa Pudenziana in Rome. Catacomb themes from Rome and Naples are seen in Egypt. However, there is no proven link between Egypt and any of these places and it is possible that the apparent similarities are merely coincidental. While it is possible that these design elements arose independently of each other, there was trade and traffic and therefore an exchange of ideas within Egypt as well as with the rest of the Byzantine world.

With these definitions in mind the following are some of the significant sites: al-Bagawāt, Kellia and Isnā stand out from the other sites for the sheer volume of crosses. In addition, each displays a predilection for a particular type. Kellia’s crosses are almost all ceremonial or processional, Isnā’s are predominantly pattée and al-Bagawāt’s are mostly ansate.

Dayr al-Suryān in Wādī al-Naṭrūn and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs are notable for their striking designs and Dayr Abū Fānah for design similarity not only with Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, but with churches elsewhere in the Mediterranean world.

Kellia has the largest range of painted crosses, while Bāwīt and Saqqara are better known for stone sculpture. There are a number of excellent examples of funerary stelae, loosely attributed to Armant that follow a particular design program. Textile

** The sub-types are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
examples are plentiful, in a wide range of motifs and composite designs and are generally, and perhaps expeditiously, ascribed to Akhmîm.

The survey has shown that the cross, as a motif, is frequently overlooked as a design element. This is especially the case when it is incidental to the frieze or tableau in which it occurs. Archaeologists and art historians have tended to focus on figurative representations, to the detriment of adequately recording of crosses. This is not surprising given the unique qualities of ‘Coptic’ figurative art.

A serious limitation of this survey is that, in many instances, it is impossible to determine whether there were significant or unique representations of crosses at the monasteries that no longer exist. Doubtless many monasteries had artistic programs that were never recorded. Further, we have situations where we know there were representations of crosses but unfortunately these are no longer visible. For example, Dayr Abû Fânah is popularly known as the monastery of the cross, but it is difficult to locate more than a few poorly preserved early images. It has also been important to guard against assuming that the published images, for example in archaeological reports, constitute the entire corpus at a particular site.

In completing this survey it has become increasingly clear that there are gaps in our knowledge which are hard, if not impossible, to fill. For example, there is little or no material evidence from the very early days of Christianity in Egypt. Indeed, it is only from the fourth century onwards that we begin to see substantial material evidence of Christian artefacts, though as we have seen there are ansate crosses on mummy portraits which have been described as being from the Severan period, that is, late second and early third century."

Another limitation of this survey, as has been noted earlier, arises from the issue of adequately dating material. Acknowledging that this is an ongoing problem that is not possible to resolve in the short term, the survey none the less has sought to collate as many images of crosses as possible. Of course, more information may come to light in subsequent years, both in terms of dating as well as the possible finding of other artefacts. This survey therefore does not purport to be definitive, but has focused on significant representations based on information that is available at the time of

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writing. As further information is published by scientific teams it is possible that our knowledge of the corpus of crosses in early Christian Egypt will grow.

The final observation is that there are few figural crosses, that is, crucifixes. A possible exception are two crosses in the church of the Archangel Gabriel at Naqlūn both of which have the bust of Christ superimposed on a cross in the place of the upper part of the vertical shaft, and one at Kellia. However, the vast majority of crosses observed in early Christian Egypt during the course of this survey are non-figural. There is a notable example of a crux ansata in a textile fragment where a beardless face that has been superimposed, at a later date, within the loop of the cross. The image does not resemble conventional or contemporary depictions of Christ and is therefore ambiguous.

The following chapter, ahead of the analyses into symbolism, influence, chronology, location and context, is a brief exploration into the materials and techniques used in the production of the visual representations.
Chapter 3 – Materials & Techniques
Chapter 3 – Material and Techniques

The chapter consists of a brief exploration of the main materials and techniques used in the production of Egypt’s crosses. A brief discussion on the subject of fakes is included.

While visual expressions of faith were slow to develop in the early centuries of Christianity, by the fourth century the pace of artistic representation had increased. As Viladesau remarks, the role of artistic expression became important in Christianity. The understanding and articulation of faith was embodied in language, both spoken and read, and also in visual representations which often contained complex ideas and rich symbolism. For many early Christians, images were a means of receiving and reflecting on their faith.

The focus of this project on Egyptian crosses traverses many boundaries and precludes the study of one particular medium or type. However, as has been noted earlier, the emphasis is on significant representations, that is, where the cross is the dominant feature. Crosses in the visual culture of Christian Egypt occur across an extensive spectrum of depictions and in a wide range of materials and surfaces. The legacy of the producers of Christian imagery in Egypt consists of both complex painted compositions as well as hastily drawn amateur representations, elaborate carvings in stone and wood as well as unsophisticated articles for personal use, brightly coloured textiles with intricate designs, and metal and ceramic objects of varying degrees of intricacy. Crosses are sometimes integral to the design and in other instances appear to be secondary.

The settings in which the crosses were included were formal as well as seemingly casual, as in the case of the motif on commonplace objects, though the use of the cross in design was never without meaning. On the one hand crosses appeared on architectural elements and stelae in limestone, sandstone and marble, and on the other in humble domestic items such as clay lamps, and small pendant crosses in wood, bone and ivory. Wood and ivory were also used in decorative architectural features such as doors and screens. Mudbrick and plaster walls were decorated with paint or pigment, which were also sometimes used to colour stone and wooden items. Gold

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and silver were used in jewellery; copper and bronze were used in various liturgical objects such as censers and lamps. The level of craftsmanship was often a reflection of the intended purpose of an artefact; more elaborate or professionally crafted work was generally for public display while small, crudely wrought items were usually for personal use.

The choice of medium was dictated, to a large extent, by the function of the object or surface. Economics also played a part in the choice of material. Locally sourced products were clearly more accessible and less costly than those that had to be imported. Further, as Taylor notes, the choice of medium became part of the creative activity as it determined the eventual form of the visual representation and the viewer’s experience. This distinction is apparent in the different outcomes, for example, from using a friable stone such as limestone or sandstone for stelae, compared to a more durable material such as marble. The latter display sharper outlines and present an altogether more professional and costly appearance. Similarly, finely wrought gold jewellery such as pendants contrast vastly with similar objects in wood and ivory though the emotional or spiritual intent of the wearer of the cheaper objects was probably the same.

Finely wrought pieces in stone, bone, ceramic and wood were likely to be the product of artisanal workshops. More expensive materials such as marble were certainly the preserve of skilled artisans. Conversely there are many artefacts too rough-hewn to have been created by anyone other than an amateur. This is especially the case in small items of a personal nature such as a wooden pendant cross in the Louvre’s collection. Many such unsophisticated, but nonetheless precious, small crosses have come to light following excavations at various necropoleis, buried along with the deceased. [ECD391, ECD376].

The following pages explore the materials on which crosses are most frequently attested, and the accompanying techniques, on painted surfaces, carvings in stone and wood, textiles, metalwork and ceramics.

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Paint/pigment

Painted crosses are attested in ecclesiastical buildings as well as in monasteries and hermitages. At first glance it might seem strange that basic mud brick and plaster buildings were decorated with what, in some instances, were very elaborate paintings. The temptation to compare these to the more enduring stone surfaces of the pharaonic era is strong. However, this provides a sure indication of the entirely different context – social, economic and political – in which Christian era visual representations occurred. As Bolman suggests, such images were not simply decorative; they were used to enable spiritual growth, to protect and to provide a focus for prayer and contemplation. Thus the paintings, both simple and complex, had a strong sacred element, with the repeated themes and motifs suggestive of a response to the needs of the monastic community. The earliest paintings, such as those from the fourth century at Kellia, are very simple but from the sixth century there is a wider and richer range of visual expression; which speaks not only of a growing confidence in artistic expression but also in the access to professional painters. [ECD175].

Aside from painted walls, there are instances where remnants of pigment are attested on wood and stone objects. However, for the most part paint or pigment was used in both mono and polychrome representations of crosses on walls. The relative impermanence of the mud brick buildings and the oxidisation of mineral pigments has meant that many of these paintings, where still extant, are badly deteriorated and in some instances hard to decipher. Within churches, where they might have had more of a chance of survival, they were still subject to the accretions of dust and soot from oil lamps over a period of centuries. Restoration programs, such as those at Dayr al-Suryān, Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs and Suhāj, have revealed the rich original colours.

In the hermitages that have come to light, painted crosses are attested in the oratories, vestibules, refectories as well as in seemingly personal spaces such as cells. This is

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3. See, for example, Bolman, 2016, The Red Monastery Church, and Bolman, 2002, Monastic Visions, for a wide range of images. See also https://www.facebook.com/DeirAlSurianConservationProject/ for current images of the work at that site.
evident at Kellia, Isnā and at Bāwīt. In the oratories the prayer niche in the eastern wall takes precedence and is often painted with one or more crosses of various types.

As noted earlier, surfaces and objects were painted by both amateur and professional painters. Numerous red ochre crosses from the necropolis of al-Bagawāt would fall into the amateur category, which does not mean that they were lacking in creativity. In contrast, at the same site the well executed figurative paintings from the Chapel of Peace and the Chapel of the Exodus are more likely the work of professional artists. 

Amateur representations also abound at Isnā while skilled and professional paintings are more the norm at Kellia, the Wādī al-Naṭrnī monasteries and at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. Examples of the work of various, unnamed, professional artists can be seen in the khārus of the al-ʿAdhrā church at Dayr al-Suryān. [ECD100].

Techniques included fresco and secco methods. In the secco process, where the pigment was applied to dry plaster, a binding agent was required. This was either tempera using egg yolk or a thin wash of lime plaster, applied prior to the pigment. Occasionally glues derived from animal products were also used. Sometimes, depending on the type of pigments and surfaces, both fresco and secco techniques were applied in the same composition. Clearly, this required some planning and an eye for detail in the execution, and these complex methods were obviously the work of professional painters.

The palette across the span of monasteries was bright, some might say garish, and very varied. The artists and artisans had a good knowledge of the pigments they worked with, showing an ability to mix pigments to produce a range of colours.

Gage highlights a common problem in archaeological research, where reports frequently publish images in black and white, and colour is often overlooked. This is certainly the case in most of the early archaeological reports from Egypt which, at

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1. See Fakhry, 1951, *El-Bagawat*, for colour plates of the two chapels mentioned above, as well as numerous sketches of the graffiti crosses. Cipriano, 2008, *El-Bagawat*, provides photographs that are a more accurate depiction.
best, provide black and white photographs of the most professional quality that was available at the time. In a few instances the reports are supported by limited aquarelle copies of wall paintings, which provide a fair indication of the colour palette. More recent publications, such as Cappozzo’s, are accompanied by good replications in colour which demonstrate the chromatic range used.

Lucas and Harris note an incorrect assumption is made that the bright colours of ancient Egyptian paintings were no longer available or were not used in later periods. They assert that strong pigments continued to be available, and there is clear evidence of this in the Coptic monasteries. However, the relative impermanence of the mud brick buildings of Christian Egypt, compared to the stone structures of the pharaonic era, means that the paintings have, in many instances, been exposed to detrimental conditions. The pigments used have been analysed and have found to be naturally occurring minerals which gave black, blue, brown, green, grey, orange, pink, red, white and yellow. Black was almost certainly some form of carbon, including soot, but occasionally manganese ore was also used. Blues came from a variety of sources including copper carbonate, found in the eastern desert and in Sinai. Azurite was used, as was a compound of silica, copper and calcium. Browns generally were from ochre or iron oxide, greens came from copper and powdered malachite, which also occurs in Sinai and the eastern desert. Red and yellow derived from iron oxides and ochres; pink and orange were obtained by mixing red and white or red and yellow.

The limited number of specific studies on the chromatic palette of early Christian Egypt inform us that the pigments used in wall paintings were indeed derived from local sources. At Dayr Anbā Bishōi at Suhāj a wide array of minerals were used to produce a range of colours. Abd Elrehim and his colleagues have provided a chemical analysis of paint fragments used at Suhāj and have identified several mineral sources. Red was derived from cinnabar as well as red ochre, with the latter being more prolifically used, especially for preparatory drawings as well as other painted elements. Orange, used for haloes, came from minium and was also used as a preparation prior to the application of gold leaf. Yellow also came from at least two sources, one being ochre and the other being crocoite. While yellow ochre was also used for preparatory drawings and general motifs, crocoite was used for highlighting.

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10 See, for example, Quibell, 1908, Saqqara. See Plates XL, XLII, XLVII, LVI, LX. In his introduction Quibell acknowledges the work of his wife, who is identified on the plates as ‘AAQ’.
which would have been applied as a final thin wash. Green derived from what the authors call ‘green earth’ which can be assumed to be glauconite, a mica type. Verdigris also produced a green pigment, and was also used in preparation for the application of gold leaf. Different blues came from azurite and chrysocolla. Black was obtained from coal. There were two types of white identified, one from lead and the other from lime.\(^\text{13}\)

The pigments analysed in the Church of the Virgin at Dayr al-Suryān in Wādī al-Natrūn were also from mineral sources, with Moussa and his colleagues noting the use of malachite, an expensive copper derivative, for the green colouration. They note that malachite was used in Egyptian wall paintings from pharaonic times until the eighth century CE. They also mention the use of hydrocerussite which was a mixture of yellow leads, chrome and blues derived from iron oxides.\(^\text{14}\) The minerals at each site were local. Wādī al-Natrūn, with its mineral salts, appears to have been a good source of pigments.

El Yamin and his colleagues completed a similar study in the necropolis of al-Bagawāt. Most of their samples were from Chapel 25, where they noted a wide palette comprising green, red, pink, light red, dark and light yellow and white. From Chapel 210 they noted the presence of olive, light and dark greens as well as red-brown. Glauconite was used for green, ochre for yellow and red was produced from iron oxides and red ochre. Thus they note that, similar to the findings at Suhāj and Wādī al-Natrūn, earth pigments were the main components of the chromatic palette.\(^\text{15}\)

Many crosses including those at al-Bagawāt were executed in red ochre, without the addition of extra colours, which suggests this was an easily available, inexpensive and a basic colour for outlines and sketches.\(^\text{16}\)

Liz James, writing about Byzantine art and mosaics in particular, confirms the use of mineral pigments, much as described by the scientific studies of Abd Elrehim,

\(^\text{13}\) Abd Elrehim, et al. 2015. “Analytical Studies of Plaster Painting”, p. 162. Uses for each type of pigment are set out in a table.


\(^\text{16}\) Gage, 1999. “Colour”, p. 110. Gage remarks on the predominance of red in paleolithic cave art which again suggests the general availability of red earth pigments, not restricted to Egypt alone.
Moussa and El Yamin. She adds, saliently, that a practical consideration in the use of pigments was the costliness of the product and the difficulty of sourcing it. Even in the Byzantine era costly pigments such as lapis lazuli came from Afghanistan, indigo from India and saffron from the Levant. It would appear that the readily available, and local, mineral sources in Egypt influenced the artists’ ability to source and produce a wide range of colours.

The crosses which were supposed to represent processional or blessing types were usually shown in yellow, presumably signifying gold, with ‘gems’ in green and red. There are examples of this from Dayr Anbā Shinūdah at Suhāj as well as from Dayr Abū Fānah and Kellia. An example of such a cross from Kellia is now in the Biblioteca Alexandrina. [ECD179 is an almost identical example].

Various shades of green were used to represent foliage and other vegetal material. Flowers and fruit were shown in appropriate colours such as reds and yellows. Birds and animals were shown in browns and greys or blues, perhaps as close to the original as possible. Browns also occur in some of the vegetal representations, though it is hard to know whether these are simply oxidised reds and yellows in unrestored or deteriorated paintings. This use of colour supports James’ view that using life-like hues was important, though conversely and perhaps strangely there is not a similar attention to detail in the depiction of vegetal forms. Plant representations tend to be generic rather than specific.

There is evidence in the more formal compositions that outlines were drawn in red or yellow ochre, while more hastily drawn crosses were clearly sketched without much planning or preparation. In geometric designs there is evidence that some form of compass was used that allowed the drawing of neat circles. It would also seem that stencils were used for repeated motifs. A variety of brushes and pens were used, of varying thickness, to allow for thin and thick lines. Brushes in Ancient Egypt were made of vegetable fibres and twigs and fibrous wood of varying degrees of fineness. Palm fibres were used and the fruit stalks from date palms, and there is no reason to suppose that similar materials were not used in the Christian era.

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The monasteries which have rich repositories of painted crosses are Kellia, the Wādī al-Naṭrūn monasteries with special mention of the al-ʿAdhrā church at Dayr al-Suryān which has amateur as well as commissioned art of a very high quality, the old church at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs and Dayr Abū Fānah. There are also some notable painted crosses at Suhāj, very similar in design to those at Kellia. Isnā’s images, even in the original photographs, are only available in black and white and it is therefore not possible to draw conclusions about its chromatic palette.

Apart from paint and pigment appearing on walls, there is work of a much more detailed and delicate nature that occurred on frontispieces of various codices. The best known of these are the al-Ḥāmūlī manuscripts that were found together in 1910 near Dayr al-Malāk Mīkhā’īl in the Fayyūm. All the codices are dated to either the ninth or tenth century and consist of elaborate braided crosses. Unfortunately, many are now deteriorated, and there does not appear to have been any analysis done on the pigments used.

A well-known end piece with an ansate cross occurs in what is widely known as the Codex Glazier, from Oxyrhynchus. This is better preserved than the later al-Ḥāmūlī codices, and the colours are distinctly visible. Bober describes the colours as warm and earthy in yellows, reds and browns. He notes that the browns have been opaquely applied causing flaking, while the reds and yellows are thinly applied, transparent and uneven. As he suggests, this is one of the earliest examples of an interlaced or braided design used in a cross. Hunt notes that the interlacing deviates from ‘classical’ forms in two ways: the braiding is interrupted and the colouring of the ribbons is discontinuous, changing colour as they progress. It would appear that the creators of the illumination were expressing an uniquely Egyptian ornamentation in this cross. [ECD059].

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22 Sauneron and Jacquet’s unpublished photographs of the hermitages and monasteries of Isnā are held in the archives of the IFAO in Cairo and were viewed personally in early 2015.
25 The image is much reproduced in various media and on websites.
Carving – stone, wood, ivory

Carved crosses occur in stone, wood and bone or ivory. Of these perhaps the best known, and most widely attested, are stone carvings. In fact Badawy suggests that stone sculpture, along with textiles, are the most characteristic production of Coptic art.\(^2\) This is not necessarily true, and is probably more a reflection of the relative number of stone pieces that have survived into modern times. However he makes two other points; one correctly suggests that dating has proved difficult mainly due to pieces being removed from their original contexts.\(^6\) The other point offered by Badawy, using Bāwīt and Saqqārah as examples, is that most sculptural art is architectural.\(^7\) This, however, does not take into account the number of funerary stelae, including those attributed to Armant, that are not remotely architectural.

Stone was used in Ancient Egypt for obelisks, sarcophagi and statues as well as for building purposes. It was also used for smaller objects such as bowls, vases, tools and weapons. Different materials were used based on the purpose, and Egypt had a rich repository of stone material including alabaster, granite, limestone, porphyry, quartz, sandstone, schist and steatite. Ancient methods of working in stone, which no doubt continued in some form into the Christian era, including abrading the stone surface with coarse materials such as pebbles and perhaps sand, working with copper tools to drill, as well as using chisels and adzes.\(^9\) In the main, the materials used in Christian era stelae are sandstone or limestone, perhaps an indication of the availability and cost of the material. Severin reinforces the view that in the later period through to the middle ages, local limestone and sandstone were used in preference to more expensive materials.\(^{10}\)

Marble is thought to have been imported into Egypt at great cost, arriving by sea at Alexandria. Most marble used in carvings is dated to the fourth to fifth century and came from Proconnesus in the Sea of Marmara, near Constantinople. Notably, there are examples of marble carvings at Wādī al-Natrūn, from Dayr al-Baramūs and Dayr Anbā Maqār, which is in relatively close proximity to the Mediterranean.

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\(^6\) See for example Thomas, 2000, Late Antique Funerary Sculpture, and Tudor, 2011, Christian Funerary Stelae.


Severin also points out that mistakes have been made in assessments of sculpture, leading to misunderstandings. The funerary nature of certain buildings, notably at al-Bahnasā, Bāwīṭ and Saqqārah were not recognised and were initially wrongly assessed as ecclesiastical. Further, the widespread habit of using spolia led to incorrect dating of buildings; he cites the main church of Apa Jeremiah at Saqqārah as an example. Quibell’s 1912 report contains examples of crosses carved on spolia, which contributes to confusion in dating and provenance. Severin also alludes to the fact that stone pieces were traded by excavators and entered museum collections with inadequate or no details of provenance. An additional problem has been the proliferation of counterfeit works. It has been relatively easy to produce imitations by modifying or replicating existing pieces, especially those created in softer types of stone.

Carved stone crosses are widely attested on funerary stelae, many of which now reside in museums. Some excellent examples from the British Museum in London and the Coptic Museum in Cairo show multiple crosses on the one stele. These are generally a combination of ansate and Greek crosses, with the occasional inclusion of christograms and staurograms, floral and faunal elements.

There are also numerous crosses in architectural features as suggested by Badawy above. These are lintels, pillars and capitals. Unfortunately many of these pieces were removed, or found away from their original contexts, which makes it difficult to be certain what types of buildings they originally occupied. [ECD312]. Crosses, while present, are not necessarily the dominant feature in these pieces and are often incorporated into complex geometric and flowing designs.

The carving of the attested architectural elements at Saqqārah and Bāwīṭ is very professional, generally with a Greek-type cross surrounded by vegetal decoration. The dominance of this type of cross in stone compositions is likely due to the symmetrical nature of the design. Examples of lintels with Greek crosses, in friezes of acanthus or palm leaves, are attested. [ECD239]. Quibell’s reports on Saqqārah provide several examples of carved stone crosses. One is of a deeply carved Greek type cross with five circular medallions and four lily-like flowers in the interstices. The cross is thought to have been painted, though at the time of their discovery no pigment

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remained. [ECD231]. Another example from Quibell is described as one of a group of stones. The block is a metre in length with an elaborate braided Greek cross carved in relief, with the same lily-like flowers as noted above, but this time encircled in an elaborate wreath which is flanked on both sides by a well-executed design of acanthus leaves. The quality of the carving is very fine, a testament to the skill of the sculptors."

The same report of Quibell’s provides an image of a pattée cross carved into a sandstone block. Described as a 1.2 metre long block, the pattée cross is in the centre of the composition, flanked by two circular six-pointed motifs, with the space between the three medallions filled with a commemorative inscription." Several such commemorative blocks are attested and now housed in various museum collections.

Less known and remarked on than stone of various types, sculpture is also attested in wood. Items include coffins, boxes, altars, small items of personal adornment and other trinkets, and on architectural elements such as screens, windows and doors. Wood was used for functional objects from the at least the fourth century until the middle ages.

Egypt originally had plentiful supplies of wood, but these resources quickly diminished. Even in the Pharaonic era shortages were apparent and steps were commenced to reforest the land by Ptolemaic rulers, a practice that was continued through to the Islamic era. The shortage of wood was felt between the fourth and seventh centuries." By the Christian era Egypt did not have large trees, which were already in short supply in the pharaonic era, and it was necessary to import wood, most of which came from western Asia.

While inland areas had to depend on whatever local resources were available, coastal areas and those in proximity to the coast were able to use imported woods. Among the imported timbers were ash, beech, cedar, cypress, elm, fir, juniper, maple, oak and pine which were used variously in furniture, coffins, farm implements and wheels. Little is known about the craftspeople who worked in wood though clearly they produced two types of work; practical woodworkers such as carpenters and builders,

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*Quibell, 1912, *Saqqara*. See Pl. XXXVIII of the 1906 report (below), and Pl. XXXIII of this report.

*Quibell, 1909, *Saqqara*, Plate XLVI.

as well as those who created more decorative pieces.” Of course while this cannot be verified it is possible that practical workers also produced decorative pieces.

The crosses in wood range from rudimentary to elaborate, depending on the object and its intended use. For example, on the one hand is the fifth century pine altar removed from the church of Abū Sarjah in Old Cairo, now in the Coptic Museum, which is richly carved, and on the other is an example of a ninth or tenth century pencil box from al-Ḥamūltī, with a simple cross incised into the sliding lid. \[ECD375, ECD378]\.

Rutschowscaya’s catalogue provides a range of examples from architectural features such as door panels, to everyday objects.”

Functional as well as decorative works included screens and doors. A fine example of such a set of doors can still be seen at Dayr al-Suryān in the Church of the Virgin (al-ʿAdhrā) where one set separates the nave from the khūrus and the other screens the sanctuary. The doors in paduk are finely inlaid in ivory in a variety of designs, several panels of which are geometric compositions some with varied cross motifs. These doors are particularly notable because, as mentioned earlier, they can be precisely dated to the time of Moses of Nisibis’ early tenth century tenure at the monastery. The doors to the sanctuary have been beautifully restored while the doors to the khūrus are in original condition and still subject to the attention of souvenir hunters.

Purpose built screens are also attested, from various sources including the churches of Old Cairo, with geometric motifs in inlay. Some newer screens are copies of older prototypes and shows that the designs persist today and have come to be a regular feature of Coptic churches.

Rutschowscaya remarks that the majority of wooden items were intended to be painted, though some precious objects were given a veneer of ivory, mother of pearl, metal, leather and glass.\(^\text{39}\) Pieces from Dayr Apa Apollo at Bāwīt show remnants of painted woodwork in the South Church. The palette was black, blue, green, ochre, red


\(^{38}\) Palmer-Jones, 1911, “Coptic Monasteries”, p. 17.

\(^{39}\) A much later (fifteenth century) example is in the Coptic Museum, #1565, consisting of an elaborate silver sheet with coloured glass cabochons, which would have been fixed to the wooden cover with small nails. See Gabra and Eaton-Krauss, 2007. Illustrated Guide, p. 222, 223.
and pink. Insufficient painted examples have survived to allow for an analysis of the pigments used on wood, but we can assume that the same mineral pigments that were used on plaster would have been used, perhaps with a different binder.

Wooden crosses were also used to mark grave sites. These were often ignored by early excavators, for example when they cleared the necropolises of Shaykh Abădah and Bāwīt. These crosses were generally removed or destroyed, though a few are preserved in museums but with the usual problems of lack of dating and provenance. Often the lower part of the crosses, intended to be planted in the ground, were without decoration. Occasionally there is decoration on the terminals but in several instances the crosses are plain. [ECD377, ECD379].

Crosses also appear on wooden coffins, such as two examples from Shaykh Abădah in Rutschowscaya’s catalogue. [ECD385]. They also are attested in door and wall panels and lintels. [ECD390].

Small carved crosses were created to be worn around the neck. An wooden example has been recovered from a relatively recently excavated grave site at al-Naqlūn. [ECD376]. A carved ivory pendant cross was also unearthed at al-Naqlūn. [ECD018]. These are simple pieces, not artisanal in nature, and are likely to have been carved by amateurs for personal use. They could also have been traded locally.

While small rustic objects such as pegs and pendants would seem to have been carved by amateurs, perhaps even the owners of the objects, larger and more formal pieces in wood, stone and ivory would have been the work of skilled workers. They would have been employed in artisanal workshops and would have worked on pieces commissioned by wealthy individuals, churches or monasteries.

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* For example, one with inscriptions is in the Louvre Museum, #25091, and a plain example is in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, #UC45023.
* Godlewski, 1999, “Naqlun: Excavations, 1999”, p. 132 reports the find of a wooden pendant cross found at Site D on the western periphery of the site.
* Godlewski, 2000, “Naqlun: Excavations, 2000”, p. 157 notes two ivory crosses found with a female corpse, one was around her neck.
Textiles

Crosses are numerous on textiles. The motif was used in garments, wall hangings and furnishings in varying degrees of complexity and sophistication. The colours have, for the most part, remained vivid though in many instances the weave of the fabric has deteriorated.

Tunics were decorated, front and back, with clavi of different lengths. Decorative borders, with scrolls, vines, crosses and fauna, appeared on neck openings and lower edges of the garment. Circular or square medallions, with flora, fauna and crosses, were included on the upper and lower parts of the tunic.

As noted by both Kendrick and Persson, early excavators habitually separated tunics into several pieces for sale to collectors. Fragments of garments, generally tunic medallions and borders, were removed from their original contexts, separated into multiple pieces and were sold to museums and private collectors. The dating and provenance of these pieces are debateable, most being loosely and conveniently attributed to Akhmīm. As such, textiles are among the hardest items to date, not the least because the designs persisted for long periods. For the most part the fragments are now viewed separately. Given the large number of fragments in various international museum collections, it is potentially difficult to attempt to match up textile fragments to give a more complete picture of the designs, date and origin.

Textiles display a wealth of intricate and colourful designs, though here too there is a visible difference in sophistication in the fragments that are available to study. Generally, while it is likely that only the more attractive fragments were bought by museums, even here there are obvious distinctions. Compare, for example, a simple purple cross, with circular medallions in contrasting colours, in wool on a linen background, against an elaborately woven band of a tunic, also in purple, with scrolls, vegetal motifs, hares and lions. [ECD340, ECD 341]. The latter is significantly more complex in design and finer in execution. Unfortunately the stories they could tell about where they came from and who wore them seem to be permanently lost.

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Rutschowscaya notes that Coptic weavers used yarn from four types of fibre – linen, wool, silk and cotton. Linen from flax was cultivated in Egypt from early times and wool was available locally. Cotton was occasionally imported along with silk, the latter being very expensive and limited to special uses. The yarns, of whatever type, were spun with or without spindles.* There are few, if any, entirely silk fabrics among the ‘Coptic’ textiles in museum collections, though there are examples of silk used in combination with wool or linen for embroidery. Most textiles are from flax or wool, sometimes in combination.

Unlike pigments for paint that were mainly from mineral sources, in the case of textiles animal and vegetable dyes were used. Techniques for dyeing were known in the pre-dynastic period though little is known about the nature of those dyes and methods.

Red dyes, which are quite dominant in the extant representations, were derived from madder root (*rubia tinctorum*). The same plant also provided shades of pink and rose. The eggs of the kermes insect (*coccus ilicis*) produced vermilion. Carminé came from the cochineal insect (*coccus dactylopis*). The lac insect (*kerria lacca*) produced scarlet. Orchil (or archil), a lichen from the Mediterranean, yielded shades of violet and was cheaper than the dyes from murex, more widely used to produce the imperial purple of Roman and Byzantine dignitaries. There are no traces of murex in the Coptic textile finds. Blues came from woad (*isatis tinctoria*), which was cultivated in the Fayyūm in the Christian period. It produced a lighter blue than the dark hues from indigo (*indigofera tinctoria* and *indigofera argentea*) which were imported from India and Nubia/Ethiopia respectively. Purple shades from lilac to violet and blue black came from mixing indigo with madder in varying proportions. Yellows came from berries and were mixed with blue dyes to produce shades of green.* It would appear that safflower (*carthamus tinctorius*) and pomegranate (*punica granatum*) were used to produce yellows in Ancient Egypt and it is possible that knowledge of these plant

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dyes continued into the Christian period.\textsuperscript{51} Purple fabrics from Shaykh Abâdâh (Antinoë) were found to be a mix of madder and woad.\textsuperscript{52}

The vegetable dyes provided a rich and vibrant palette attested in the extant textile examples. Some of these have survived being buried, sometimes wrapped around corpses, dug up indiscriminately and handled with little regard, including being cut into several pieces.\textsuperscript{53}

Given the enduring bright colour of the textile fragments, it is clear that some sort of mordant was used. Vogelsang-Eastwood mentions the use of alum, a naturally occurring salt, as a fixative from Ancient Egyptian times and we can only assume that this practice continued into the Christian era.\textsuperscript{54}

Dyeing took place at various parts of the process, depending on the fibre. Wool was dyed before spinning while linen was dyed after. Finished garments were rarely dyed.\textsuperscript{55} From the various museum fragments it is clear that brightly dyed wool was used in embroidery, in similar colours to those used in paintings, on plain linen material.

Most textile producers were professional craftspeople, with entire families engaged in various parts of the work. As with other crafts, the skill was hereditary. While these professional workshops manufactured goods to order and for sale, basic weaving also occurred at monasteries and in homes.\textsuperscript{56} Not least from the wealth of textiles in museum collections, we can assume that spinning, weaving, dyeing and other decorative work was widespread in Egypt. The richness of the materials found in grave sites indicates that there were customers who were willing to pay for expensive dyes and yarns, as well as fabrics constructed in professional workshops. However, as

\textsuperscript{51} Vogelsang-Eastwood, Gillian. 2000. “Textiles.” In Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology, edited by Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw, 268–98. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 279. She also notes (p. 278) that mineral dyes such as iron oxides were used as textile dyes in Ancient Egypt.
\textsuperscript{52} Lucas and Harris, 1999, Ancient Egyptian Materials, pp. 150-152.
\textsuperscript{54} Vogelsang-Eastwood, 2000, “Textiles”, p. 279.
Cromwell points out, monks also produced flax for spinning and weaving. She notes the existence of heavy but portable looms among finds from monastic sites."

Du Bourguet suggests that the themes in Coptic textiles are not as spectacular as the colours and irridescence. The subjects varied according to the type of article with ornamentation occurring on cuffs, neck openings, clavi and shawls.« Certainly the motifs and compositions were not unique, occurring in other media. Classical themes were as common, if not more so than Christian motifs and crosses were also juxtaposed with pagan symbols, as will be discussed later.

While the textile examples are startling in their brightness and beauty, and there are many hundreds of decorative pieces that can be studied, there are insufficient entire garments or furnishings with crosses to draw definite conclusions about the placement of the motif in the overall designs. From the extant examples we know that a range of types was used, sometimes in the same composition, either in borders and also in medallions. There also appear to be pieces of furnishing fabric with crosses covering the entire field, but we are hindered in deeper study because there is little contextual information. [ECD364].«

Notwithstanding this, Kendrick’s catalogue is an excellent resource, listing several interesting textile pieces with crosses. Many of these raise more questions than answers, including about the positioning and purpose of the motifs. For example, as will be discussed, there are three examples of fragments with a dominant bird with the crosses relegated to a secondary position, as well as perhaps the most thought provoking of the pieces where a face has been added to the loop of a gemmed ansate cross.

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Metalwork

As with other portable pieces, the origin, manufacture and history of the metal artefacts are mostly speculative. Even where the find site is known, it is possible that portable metal artefacts, including liturgical objects, could have been manufactured elsewhere in the Byzantine world and traded into Egypt. The find site of an object does not necessarily denote origin, though it can tell us about design trends and preferences.

In the period broadly described as Coptic, the metals used included gold, silver, copper and bronze. Iron and lead were less frequently used. Metallic ores were found in the Eastern Desert, Sinai and Nubia. Silver and tin were usually imported. Gold, copper and iron were available in Egypt. The technology for extracting ore and forming ingots was known from the time of the pharaohs, where gold could be hammered into sheets and pulled into fine wire. Objects such as pendants and amulets were created using the lost wax technique. Decorative techniques included repoussé work, engraved and incised patterns, filigree and the setting of stones. While not much is known about how the metal trade was organised, churches are thought to have had metal workshops and presumably these would have produced items such as lamps and censers for ritual use.

Liturgical objects were usually crafted from bronze and Bénazeth suggests that the cross was a frequent motif in metal. She distinguishes between what she called ‘benediction’ crosses and those used for processional purposes. The former were smaller and were held in the hand. They were generally of a Greek type with flared ends and pendantalia such as balls and palmettes. Processional crosses were larger than the benediction crosses and had hooks on the horizontal arms from which small objects were suspended. Some of these were decorated with crosses in silver on a baser metal foundation.

Two bronze liturgical vessels from the Fayyūm, with silver inlaid crosses, were displayed at the Brooklyn Museum’s 1941 exhibition, and are now in the Walters Art Museum where they were studied by Maccoull. The vessels are thought to be

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eucharistic in nature, one for bread and the other for wine, and were small enough to be used when visiting the sick. While the Brooklyn Museum suggested a fourth to sixth century date, Maccoull has made a closer study of the Coptic inscriptions and the use of *nomina sacra* and has dated them to between the seventh and tenth centuries. [ECD038, ECD039]. They are both inlaid with rudimentary Latin crosses in silver, and are nowhere near the quality of répousse work seen in Syria in the almost contemporaneous, seventh-century Kurin collection, for example. The use of Coptic inscriptions would suggest that these vessels were fabricated in Egypt.

Censers were used from the pharaonic period and this continued in the Christian era. Incense, including frankincense and benzoin, was burnt in churches as well as in homes. The Louvre Museum has a good collection of Egyptian metal objects from the Christian era including lamps, censers and other vessels. However dating of these is hypothetical.

Amulets are attested in copper as are personal items of jewellery such as pendants and earrings with crosses. These are generally in gold or silver and ‘Byzantine’ in style, leading to speculation that they could have been imported.

In this vein Bénazeth suggests that provenance is often accorded by style rather than by a full analysis, a theme continued by Petrina, who also notes that the Egyptian pieces cannot be clearly distinguished from, for example, Syrian and Byzantine output. It is only when an object is found *in situ* with a Coptic inscription that it can confidently be described as Egyptian Christian. Such pieces are few in number. Dating has also been problematic as dependence simply on stratigraphy is not necessarily reliable. Further it is important to note that style is not an indicator of date as it was often affected by design trends of foreign imports.

In regard to jewellery Bénazeth describes two types of jewellery found in Christian era Egypt. One was in the Byzantine style using gold and precious stones. There was

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63 Maccoull, Leslie S. B. 2013. “Two Coptic Bronze Vessels in the Walters Art Museum.” *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 60: 21–25, p. 21. The 7th century Kurin treasure, in the Walters Art Museum, #57.636, is an arcaded chalice with the cross and apostles in répousse work. This is noted as a contrast to the ‘coptic’ metalwork. Ref #54.2288 and #54.2289 for the Coptic bronze vessels.


also very simple jewellery, more in the realm of trinkets, made from less expensive material. Numerous cross-shaped pendants have been found, though sites and provenance are necessarily vague.

Jewellery was very portable, and as Petrina notes, it is not possible to be certain of its place of manufacture. Many pieces have been sold to museum collections as ‘Egyptian’, but as with other portable objects the find sites are unknown or unclear. However, it is possible to examine and compare objects with a view to determining origin. She cites an example of a find from Taposiris Magna (Lake Mareotis) of a gold chain where the largest link has a repoussé cross surrounded by a wave pattern. Both ends terminate in filigree crosses. The chain was found in 2001 in a Byzantine basilica with a coin hoard that provides a terminus post quem of approximately 640 CE. A chain found at Abū Qīr has a very similar pattern. Petrina’s contention is that the similarity is strong enough to suggest they came from the same workshop. The number of finds in the vicinity of Abū Qīr seems to suggest the existence of a local workshop. She also notes stylistic peculiarities of other finds, such as a finger ring with an oil lamp decoration as being particularly Egyptian, pointing to local places of manufacture.

Petrina also believes that Alexandria would have been the location of a large number of jewellery workshops and shops, but as of 2016 only one had been excavated. This was in the industrial area of Kom el-Dikka, close to the largest excavated public baths in Alexandria. The excavation yielded a number of stone moulds, multi-coloured glass beads in various stages of production and raw materials including glass, rock crystal, amethyst, agate and coral. It would appear that this particular workshop produced beads of various materials but there was no evidence of completed pieces of jewellery. However Abū Qīr, about 20 kilometres east of Alexandria revealed scattered small finds, such as strips of gold wire, suggesting the existence of a gold workshop as noted above. The Abū Qīr workshop can be dated by numismatic finds to the sixth to eighth century CE, though Petrina suggests that it flourished between the sixth and seventh centuries. Several finds displayed Christian symbols including crosses. Apart from the area around Alexandria, there is also evidence that there were goldsmiths at Oxyrhynchus, in the Fayyūm and at Antinoë.

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Petrina, 2014, “Jewellery from Late Antique Egypt”, pp. 32, 33, 34.
Petrina, Yvonne. 2016. “Late Antique Jewellery from Egypt: Workshops and Select Literary Sources.” In Coptic Society, Literature and Religion from Late Antiquity to Modern Times.
There is also evidence from stone (steatite) moulds found in Egypt that finely crafted cross-shaped pendants were produced locally. [ECD330, ECD329]. The mould is approximately 4 x 2 cm and would have belonged to, or been used by, a jeweller to make pendant crosses.

Ceramics

Pottery was widely produced in Egypt. It was an essential but lowly profession with skills passed from father to son and with other family members involved in auxiliary tasks such as decoration, and more fundamentally, in gathering fuel with which to fire the kilns. Clay of various types was readily and cheaply available and was the principal material used for a wide range of domestic ware. Such domestic ware did not have much value but nonetheless was decorated, or perhaps more appropriately, marked with crosses, though of a very basic nature. There is evidence that larger monasteries had their own kilns as did village and town communities.

There were three types of clay used in pottery production. From Lower Egypt there was calcareous clay which is beige to yellow in colour. The breaks in pottery reveal a reddish pink hue. Siliceous clay, which is essentially Nile silt, contained high levels of silica and iron oxide, as well as grains of quartz and mica which remained visible after firing. It is reddish brown in colour. The third type was kaolinic clay, which contained kaolin, a hydrous silicate of aluminium. This was used for fine ceramic ware. There were concentrated areas of clay in Upper Egypt in the Aswan area. It is possible to analyse the clay and ascribe provenance, as has been done in more professional museum collections. [ECD010].

Pottery is generally differentiated as thrown on a wheel or made by hand, either by coiling or moulding, both in a mould or shaping manually. In fact, few pottery items are exclusively one or the other as there are always tools of some description used.
even though these can be very basic. Probably the oldest method of creating pots was by pinching or hollowing out a lump of clay. The use of a concave mould into which clay is pressed is a more advanced technique based on the concept of a negative image, and it also allowed production of many identical items."

Once shaped, the clay objects were dried slowly and then fired in mud-brick kilns. Pottery was loaded from the top and stacked on open platforms. The tops of the kilns were sealed with temporary structures of branches and broken pottery and fired to temperatures depending on what sort of clay was used. Siliceous clays were fired at lower temperatures of 500-800°C while calcareous clays were fired to 850-1000°C."

Production techniques were no different to those from other parts of the Graeco-Roman world, common to much of the eastern Mediterranean. During the Roman period potters copied or incorporated ideas from outside Egypt, while adding their own design elements. The most notable local design features were ansate crosses and inscriptions honouring Egyptian saints.

Vessels of various sizes and shapes were generally thrown. Lamps were usually moulded, as were pilgrim flasks and breadstamps. Decoration consisting of incised and stamped designs is attested, especially in small lamps and breadstamps, but painting was popular for larger items with scenes of fish, birds and animals attested. Ballet believed that there was a Roman influence seen in the pottery, such as impressing with ropes, and incised patterns made with reeds and other implements. However, these are not outstanding or innovative practices and could just as well have arisen in an indigenous Egyptian context.

Many pottery artefacts have survived into modern times with traces of slip or other pigment still visible. Ballet suggests that this ‘painting’ was done after firing. This technique suggests that the ‘paint’ would not have been very durable as the slip would have washed or worn off with use.

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Terracotta was used for domestic purposes in the production of flatware, pots and amphorae to be used in the preparation, consumption and storage of food. There are several examples of whole or partial vessels in the collections of most international museums. One such example is a terracotta pot with an ansate cross that is on display in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. It is unglazed and painted in a linear design using brown and black. The design of ansate crosses, alongside tear-drop shaped motifs, is simple and elegant. Unfortunately there is no record of dating or provenance.

Terracotta was also used for everyday items such as lamps, as well as pilgrim souvenirs such as flasks and ampoules which were designed to carry holy oil. Crosses were inscribed in and on lamps, of which there are several examples in museums worldwide. There are also examples of relief work lamps in terracotta with crosses and inscriptions. There was nothing that was unique in these techniques or objects. Lamps from Egypt looked like lamps from anywhere else. Unfortunately the provenance and dating of these items is largely unknown, not the least because there is nothing particularly unique about the pots and lamps, unless of course they are decorated with ansate crosses which are a particularly Egyptian motif.

Clay flasks or ampoullae, were made at several locations around the Mediterranean coast. From around the fifth century they were produced at Dayr Abū Mīnā, in vast numbers to cater for the numerous pilgrims who visited the site. They have distinctive imagery with the saint and his legendary camels on the obverse and often a cross on the reverse. Such flasks have been found at many sites away from Egypt, indicating that the monastery was popular on the pilgrim trail. They would have been constructed in two moulded pieces and joined together with slip. [ECD014]. Replica ampoullae, in various sizes, are still produced for sale at the modern St. Mari Mīnā monastery.

In addition to locally sourced pottery, there have also been finds of better quality imported ceramics, such as Samian ware, which was produced throughout the Mediterranean. From such finds it is clear that basic domestic items, of some value, were also traded into Egypt.

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*Photographed personally. The pot was displayed with no explanatory material.
* Victoria & Albert Museum #C.79-1953.
Fakes

The topic of materials and techniques would be incomplete without a brief discussion of fakes and forgeries. That Boyd and Vikan were able to devote an entire exhibition to questionable artefacts from Christian Egypt, under the banner of authenticity, speaks of the volume of such objects in international collections, and the interest among collectors for Egyptian Christian material. As Boyd and Vikan rightly note, while detecting forgeries is interesting detective work for the art historian, it is a much more serious issue for museums. That so many fakes, especially in sculpture, made their way into the collections of various international museums speaks more of the need for collectors to acquire ‘Coptic’ material than of those who were apparently so willing to fulfil the demand.

In the course of this study is has become abundantly clear that respected museums are willing to display objects with no provenance. Some of these are just loosely attributed to Egypt, more on the basis of a stylistic congruency with other known items, as well as the broker’s assurance that it was purchased in, perhaps, ‘Luxor’ or ‘Karnak’. Of course, not all of these are lacking in authenticity. However the inclusion of known fakes in their collections, without describing them as such, is an error of judgement. Kruglov is quite damning of the Brooklyn Museum’s methods of acquiring and displaying inauthentic material, though in all fairness the situation is not limited to them. Spanel is rather more conciliatory in excusing museum curators, because in his view there was insufficient published scholarship when the dubious material began to flood the art collectors’ market during the 1950s through to the 1970s. In defence of museums, as Kruglov also suggests, the display of fakes can be very instructive to art historians, provided they are correctly identified and described.

Of the most questionable group of sculptures are those attributed to Shaykh Abâdah, consisting of funerary stelae and various architectural objects. Of these, some were authentic, some were reworked pieces and some totally fake. The friable nature of Egyptian sandstone and limestone made it relatively easy to rework or sharpen

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* Boyd and Vikan, 1981, Questions of Authenticity, p. 3.
features that were otherwise deteriorated. Marble, being harder, would have been more difficult to alter, but as can be seen in Boyd and Vikan’s catalogue, there are marble panels that have been wholly faked. For example, limbs were made to fit into a panel with an attendant loss of perspective, and in some instances breaks artificially created to hide poor workmanship.

Spanel identified several distinct categories of fakes, just among stone sculptures. We now know that these include figures with strange hairstyles, formulaic facial features such as drilled eyes, inappropriate expressions such as smiling lips, so alien to the ‘Coptic’ artistic milieu, a general rubbery appearance as if they lacked bones and overly large heads, even allowing for the genre’s inclination towards disproportion. As an aside, given the lack of perspective and proportion in Egyptian Christian paintings, perhaps it is not surprising that museums were so easily duped. Additionally, all categories made frequent use of Christian symbols and imagery, including crosses, presumably to underline the ‘Coptic’ nature of the objects.

Forgeries and fakes are not limited to stone sculptures but also arise in other media, especially of a transportable and desirable nature. While museum curators and art historians are now well aware of the situation, amateur private collectors are still open to being duped. In the case of acquisitions from brokers, it is still very much as case of †caveat emptor.

† Boyd and Vikan, 1981, Questions of Authenticity, p. 5.
Summary

Egypt’s crosses are attested on a wider range of materials and surfaces than would be seen in modern times. They were plentiful in paint on wall surfaces and in codices, in various types of stone in the form of architectural elements and funerary stelae, in wood mainly for decorative screens and panels but also for coffins and grave markers, in textiles for garments and furnishings, in metal for liturgical and domestic objects and in ceramics on a range of mainly domestic items. A much smaller attestation on leather shows that tools were used to create decorative patterns for codex bindings.

The production of crosses was dictated by the availability and cost of raw materials. Generally local resources were used, especially where expense was a consideration.

From the range of objects it would seem that there was no limit or restriction on the cross being used, even on the most banal of objects. This particular topic will be further explored in the chapter on context.

What follows is an exploration of the likely influences on the varied designs that are attested, and a discussion on possible symbolism.
Chapter 4 – Design and Symbolism

Egyptian crosses rarely appear without various types of ornamentation, though a few undecorated crosses are attested at various sites. Embellishments contribute to the overall composition and, in some instances, meaning of the artefacts. This chapter is presented in three parts. The first provides an overview of the cross in design, the second examines the four basic crosses attested in Christian Egypt, and the third engages with symbolism.

Part 1: The cross in design

The cross, as a motif, existed well before the time of Christ. This should come as no surprise as the cruciform shape, in its very basic form, is an unpretentious device composed simply of two lines. It is also a pattern easily extrapolated from the natural world, such as from the arrangement of stars or parts of trees, as well as from common items like masts, ploughs, crooks, and staves, as indeed Justin Martyr claimed, going as far as to see an upright human figure with arms outstretched as reflecting the cross. John Denham Parsons’ nineteenth century search for pre-Christian uses of a cross-like motif resulted in a publication that continues to generate comment. He concluded, without much evidence, that it was used as a symbol of life much prior to the Christian era, giving culturally specific examples such as the swastika in India and the ankh in Egypt to illustrate his hypothesis. However, in many such early cultural iterations, the meaning of cross-like symbols is more a matter of speculation than fact.

An outstanding example of pre-Christian use of a cross-like symbol is seen on an Assyrian statue carved some eight hundred years before Christ, and on display in the British Museum. It depicts Shamshi Adad V wearing a cruciform pendant. Viewed in haste and without paying close attention to historical detail, or with a particular cultural bias, the pendant could easily be mistaken for a Maltese or pattée cross, so close is the resemblance. However, this amuletic symbol represents the sun god. Here

3 Snyder, 2003, Ante Pacem, p. 60.
4 British Museum # 118892. The stele is dated to 815-811 BCE and was found at the Temple of Nabu in what is now North Iraq. The cruciform symbol representing the sun god is also attested on
we not only have evidence of pre-Christian use, but also it would seem meaning, in an Assyrian context.

Turning to Christian use, there is no doubt that the dominant symbol, or as Dreyer describes it, the ‘anchor of Christianity’s system of symbols’, is the cross. It has ascendancy over all other motifs associated with Christianity. Prior to the fourth century it was not widely used in artistic representations, though Hurtado has also shown that symbols such as the tau-rho and chi-rho were commonly used in documents. The tau-rho, the earlier of the two symbols, was used as early as the second century as an abbreviation of stauros and stauron. Both it, and the more familiar chi-rho came to be used to refer to Jesus. In Egypt there are also ample examples of small crosses used in scribal practice. These, composed of two intersecting lines of a similar size to the lettering that followed them, were also used in correspondence. Naldini provides three such examples of private correspondence from the fourth or fifth century. None of the letters are ecclesiastical in nature and are, in fact, quite mundane in content. Two other examples from the monastery of St Epiphanious date to the sixth century and are on ostraca, further demonstrating that the subject of the text did not need to be religious to warrant the inclusion of a cross. One is a writing exercise consisting of the opening lines of Homer’s Iliad, and the other a request for goatskins to be procured and brought to a craftsman.[ECD331].

This commonplace use of the cross and similar symbols such as the tau-rho not only marks the correspondents as Christian, but demonstrates that there was no aversion to the symbol during this early period. It would therefore appear to be a misconception that the cross was not referenced prior to the fourth century, though it certainly gained in currency and richness of design following the Edict of Milan and Constantine’s conversion.

Notwithstanding such scribal conventions, material evidence of Christianity prior to the fourth century is relatively scarce. Various explanations have been advanced to

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Sumerian and Kassite seals. See:
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=367083&partId=1&searchText=Assyria+sun+symbol&page=1


There are many hundreds of ostraca with crosses as part of correspondence. These two examples are from St Epiphanius and were discovered in monastic cells. See Crum and Evelyn White, 1926, *The Monastery of Epiphanious at Thebes*, p. 254, 320. Metropolitan Museum #14.1.165 and 14.1.140.

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account for this. Jensen, for example, suggests two possible reasons: directives against idolatry or the need for a more restrained and modest religious practice.

Certainly such attitudes of temperance and discipline flavoured the comments of early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria who advised in his Paedagogus to avoid ostentatious displays; inward faith and confessing Christ were more valuable than any outward show. However, this internalises the situation of the practitioner and does not take into account the external challenges faced by early Christians. Hostility resulting in state sanctioned persecution was the reality for many in the early centuries in Egypt, and in such situations material output in the form of art and artefacts was unlikely to have been a priority. Nor can we, as Finney notes, assume that the absence of artistic representation relates to an in-principle aversion to art. It is possible that visual representations were simply not a matter of primacy for early Christians. It would seem that attempts to explain the lack of Christian art in the early centuries, and the assumed absence of material evidence, rest on speculative foundations.

While art historians tend to focus on the Christian use of the cross in terms of when it came into use and why it was not more extensively or overtly used prior to a particular time, of more interest are issues of ownership and inculturation that allowed or even encouraged its use, especially in the diverse forms that are evident in Egypt. A quick pan-Christian survey suggests that almost every cultural group that embraced Christianity created their own embellishments and elaborations of the cross, with clear and recognisable differences. For example, the khatchkars of Armenia cannot be confused with the Egyptian corpus of crosses, or with Celtic types, though all use braided and knotted designs. Regional iterations appear to override locational proximity as can be observed in the vastly different corpora of Egypt and Ethiopia.

It would seem that practitioners within a particular cultural framework felt compelled to put their own mark on a very basic but profoundly evocative symbol. Such a level of engagement with the motif is sometimes seen at a personal level in Egypt where

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12 Further afield, crosses in China and India from around the 7th to 9th century onwards display a specific iconography not seen elsewhere, for example, the extensive use of the lotus pedestal beneath the cross. See the chapters by Ken Parry (pp. 26–37) and István Perczel (pp. 38–73) in Chong, Alan, ed. 2016. Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour. Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum.
monks or visiting lay people inscribed crosses on walls with divergences in the basic design. This is seen, for example, in the choice of flora or fauna to accompany the cross, or in the type or number of *pendantalia*. Such an apparent need to personalise the symbol would seem to be a clear demonstration of individuality and proprietorship. This speaks of a level of attachment to the cross and its meaning. It is also evidence of freedom of religious expression.

Grabar remarks on this freedom of choice that enabled the evolution of varied designs. Rather than attributing profound meaning to these changes and progressions, he likens it to fashion in art.\(^1\) According to this view, developments in the representation of crosses may be attributed to artistic trends rather than personal expressions. This would certainly be the case with artefacts created *en masse* in workshops, where a piece might be commissioned from a range of popular or fashionable designs. However, another element comes into play if we consider the importance placed on the sense of possession that a devotee might bring to a symbol that he or she wishes to claim as their own. Not discounting artistic trends, which would have been a factor, it would seem from the corpus of Egypt’s crosses that there was a need for personal expression in the way in which the crosses were embellished. This is apparent in the range of variations and elaborations on a particular design.\(^2\) In this sense, ornamentations and adornments become personal and cultural expressions of devotion and faith and must have been imbued with meaning, though in many cases that significance is no longer clear.

Such freedom of expression would suggest, according to Grabar, that early theologians took little interest in art and standardising it. However, he proposes that there are two points denoting church intervention. The first he sees in the choice of subject; there is a broad commonality in the symbolism of themes represented such as hope, deliverance and salvation, most often seen in images of Noah, Jonah and Daniel. The second is the close connection between imagery across Europe and the Middle East.\(^3\) It is true that similarities can be seen, for example across the Byzantine world. Motifs and themes at Ravenna are reflected at Dayr Abū Fānah in the case of the draped transfigural crosses, and between the Syrian monasteries and the

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\(^2\) This freedom of expression continues to the present and is manifested, for example, in the design of modern Coptic crosses which bear little resemblance to the early representations. For example, various monasteries produce crosses in leather and wood with a considerable play on the basic design.

hermitages of Isnā in the use of patteée crosses and rosettes contained within circles. However, these congruencies cannot be assumed to denote church intervention. Traffic, trade and religious pilgrimage around the eastern Mediterranean and beyond would have ensured the transmission of ideas, themes and motifs, even without church or official sanction.

With a few exceptions, the producers of artistic representations in Egypt were anonymous. A notable exception occurs in Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs where the name of an Egyptian called Theodore, the lead-painter of a group of artists of the thirteenth century decoration of the Great Church, is recorded. In the case of painted images, the artists were a combination of trained and skilled monks and lay people, and commissioned professionals. That said, there are also rudimentary efforts that are more likely to have been the work of amateurs. From Kellia, for example, we have examples of both professional and amateur efforts with gradations between the two extremes. For instance, at one end of the spectrum we have a cross apparently composed of indented thumbprints in a mud brick wall with no attempt at further embellishment, and at the other an opus sectile from Kellia’s Quṣūr `Isā depicting a staurogram within a laurel wreath, flanked by two chalices, in what would have been an expensive and professional composition of glass tesserae. [ECD016, ECD017]. In between, across the Egyptian monastic landscape, is a range of effort, in varying degrees of sophistication.

Notwithstanding the distinctiveness of Egyptian Christian visual representations, not just in the crosses but across the board, there appears to be a need in scholars and art historians to attribute influence. Conversely, this uniqueness could lead one to reject the notion of influence altogether. For example, ‘Coptic’ figurative art, apparent in images of Christ and the saints with their frontal orientation, large staring eyes and ill-proportioned bodies, rejects both Ancient Egyptian and Hellenic traditions of form and proportion, and appears convincingly different. Talbot Rice, however, suggests that it was rare for art to emerge out of nothing; continuity of design was essential and, to him, especially important in Christian art. All places and cultures where Christianity was preached had something to contribute to the development of the genre though he questions which of the possible powers had the principal role – the

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17 Weidmann, 2013, Kellia, Plate 63.4 and p. 535.
Graeco-Roman world or the Mediterranean with its varied influences. His focus, like many others, would seem to be on western Christian art; it is debateable if Egyptian Christian images were considered in any depth in his time. Since then, through the work of researchers and conservators, we have been exposed to a wider spectrum of visual representations from Christian Egypt.

Talbot Rice’s point does, however, have merit. Undoubtedly, the artists and artisans, and those who commissioned their work, were subject to a range of influences, direct and indirect, indigenous and ‘foreign’ in addition to their own cultural nuances. Nonetheless, in the context of Christian Egypt, it is difficult to ascribe foreignness to a design with any degree of certainty. Egypt was far from insular. The country was, at least from the time of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, subject to multiple external influences with likely syncretisation of design concepts. Greek became the language of administration and with it came literature, art and a way of life. Egyptian gods were altered to fit the personalities of their Greek counterparts. Alexandria became an important trading centre, linking the western Mediterranean with the Arabian Sea and beyond. Caravans criss-crossed the landscape, linking cities and oases. Like any society that was subject to travel and trade, ideas and cultural exchanges were parallel commodities to material goods.

Naturally, artistic endeavour was affected through this exchange of wares and ideas, either deliberately or indirectly, as occurred in other parts of the world. As Du Bourguet suggests, Egypt was a confluence of indigenous and foreign elements. Borrowed artistic themes abound in every culture that is exposed to external influence. He questions, in a ‘Coptic’ context whether these borrowings were fully assimilated into a new type of art. This wider question subsumes the matter of whether images of bounty and abundance derive from a Hellenic source or from an Ancient Egyptian context, where the Nile was also a source of abundance, supporting a wealth of flora and fauna. To answer Du Bourguet’s question, it does seem that

\* A case in point is the syncretic art of Gandhara (modern Afghanistan and Pakistan) which was subject to influence from India to the east and Greece to the west, after Alexander’s arrival. Thus we have statues of Buddha, and other artefacts, displaying both Indian and Greek sculptural characteristics.
these so-called borrowings were absorbed, and further elaborated, into what we now describe commonly as a distinctive ‘Coptic’ art. Here we have an acknowledgement that a culture might pick and choose elements to incorporate into their cultural representations, possibly adding their own ideas to form an entirely unique design lexicon.

By the early Christian era, Egypt was a mélange of diverse ethnic groups. Christians and pagans continued to live and work alongside each other in a pluralistic environment, at least in the earlier centuries until the time Egypt was totally Christian. It is likely in this early period, just as happened in Roman workshops, that non-Christian artisans were commissioned to produce Christian imagery. Some of this non or pre-Christian thinking is evidenced in the assortment of designs where the juxtaposition of potentially conflicting ideologies is apparent as late as the sixth century. For example, a sixth century tunic was decorated both with a cross and a nude female figure with heart-shaped objects in her hands. [ECD367]. Magical thinking and practice continued to permeate everyday life, evidenced by the number of amulets and apotropaic crosses.

While it is possible to speculate about the level of influence of Graeco-Roman and Ancient Egyptian ideas, beyond the fourth century the inspiration from the Byzantine world is more clearly perceptible, both in form and function. Hourihane’s view that Byzantium played a pivotal role in bridging the eastern and western worlds is relevant. He saw it as ‘filter’ through which ideas from the east made their way to the west, though equally it could be said that ideas and themes flowed in both directions. This would appear to be evident in the iconographic similarities between some Egyptian Christian visual representations and other key Byzantine sites, Ravenna being the most notable example. It could also be seen in the large number of gemmed processional crosses at various sites in Egypt. Conversely, the lack of crucifixes in Egypt in the period under consideration would suggest that they did not follow everything Byzantine.

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24 “Pagan and Christian Egypt”, 1941, Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, p. 81, # 255 shows a 6th century piece with both Christian and pagan themes.
26 Byzantine crucifixes also occurred relatively late.
The later Arab conquest in the seventh century did not immediately impact on Christian art in Egypt. This is perhaps not surprising as it took centuries before Arabic replaced Greek and Coptic as the language of commerce and administration. By the ninth century Christians were converting in numbers to Islam, though it was not until some three to four centuries later that Egypt was predominantly Islamic. This relative slowness of cultural change is reflected in visual representations, which did not display a strong Islamic influence until beyond the Fatimid era.

Notwithstanding the distinctive corpus and multiple possible inspirations, Hunt takes a more reasoned and conservative view, cautioning against attributing direct influences. She notes that by the end of the sixth century a common repertoire of artistic devices and imagery was being employed by artists and artisans, both eastern and western.¹ While prima facie this might appear to reinforce rather than reject the notion of influence, in most instances the attribution of particular origins to the design elements in Egyptian Christian art is unverifiable and counter-productive. Thus one has to question at what point themes that might variously be regarded as classical, or pharaonic, for example, could validly and entirely be regarded as Egyptian Christian.

The foregoing discussion underlies the popular need to ascribe influence, however biased or limited those views might be. The art historian or critic would be wise to consider his or her own predisposition to a particular view. However, such caution is not always exercised; the personal knowledge or experience of viewers and scholars often directs their judgement about particular influences in Egyptian Christian art. Where one person sees the hand of Byzantium, another might see Persia, the Sassanian Empire or indeed Ancient Egypt itself. Auth, for example, notes the predominance of Egyptian and classical themes in Egyptian Christian art.² Der Nersessian sees a Sassanian influence in images of what she perceives to be tree of life designs, ignoring the fact that this motif is seen across many cultures.³ Further, allowing that motifs might be borrowed or adapted, the meaning does not necessarily

¹ Hunt, 2000, Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam, p. 4.
remain the same. As Jensen aptly notes, a meaningful symbol to one person (or culture) may simply become another’s decoration and nothing more.\(^30\)

Thus, the precursors and contemporaries of Christian art in Egypt, and therefore the influences, have been variously attributed to Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Palestine, Syria and the Byzantine world. Images of bounty and abundance are occasionally interpreted as Nilotic,\(^31\) but are equally construed as classical. They could also be read as Egyptian Christian, or ‘Coptic’ in popular parlance.

The point must also be made that western Christian art is rarely subject to the same scrutiny when it comes to influences; it is as if the latent notion of the inferiority of ‘Coptic’ art, prevalent with early writers such as Zuntz and der Nersessian, extends to a continued belief about its lack of creativity and originality.\(^32\)

Notwithstanding possible varied and visible influences, and the tendency to moderate any latent creativity, Egyptian Christian art has unique elements and to that extent can be described as a type unto itself with fully assimilated ideas. It is little more than speculative to ascribe definite influence, despite the temptation to do so. More important is the need to acknowledge the uniqueness and validity of Egyptian Christian visual representation as a genre, whatever one’s views may be about its sophistication or creativity.

Christian Egypt’s visual representations were commissioned by church dignitaries, monks and the wealthy faithful. While the former focussed on painted and sculptural pieces within monastic and ecclesiastical contexts, the latter procured for themselves elaborate textiles, jewellery, or commemorative objects such as funerary stelae. They also commissioned paintings within churches as acts of thanksgiving or supplication.\(^33\)

The al-ʿAdhrā church at Dayr al-Suryān contains examples of works commissioned


\(^{32}\) Der Nersessian, 1941, “Pagan and Christian Art in Egypt”, p. 165. She notes that Coptic art is not very imaginative, with limited themes and motifs, and the same combinations appearing in different media. See also: Zuntz, 1935, “Two Styles of Coptic Painting”, p. 63 where she claims that compared to Pharaonic, Greek and Roman styles, Coptic art is inferior.

both by patrons and by church dignitaries in the paintings and the elaborate timber and ivory doors, as does the Great Church at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs."

Aside from formal commissioned pieces, there is a large corpus of hastily drawn and painted effort, some of which could be best described as amateur, though no less interesting or indeed devotional. For example, some of Isnā’s crosses are relatively inexpert, which in a way makes them more touching as genuine expressions of Christian faith, including in their obvious talismanic use. [ECD195, ECD165]." From other sites the humble crosses carved from bone and wood, perhaps intended as amulets, and domestic pieces such as combs and writing implements with very simply inscribed or carved crosses, have the effect of creating a sense not simply of the object but also of the producer and user.

The designs of crosses in Egypt, therefore, are a product of amateur and professional artists and craftspeople, created within a pluralistic and syncretised environment, incorporating a range of themes and elements significantly different to other contemporaneous Christian art. Broadly, they cover a range of functions. Though largely the product of anonymous artisans, they reflect cultural nuances particular to Christian Egypt.

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34 Notable are the varied paintings of the khurus, adorning most surfaces, and the doors of the khurus and haikal which are known to have been commissioned by Moses of Nisibis. For a description and image of the unrestored doors see, No author. 1911. “The Coptic Monasteries of the Wadi Natrun,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 6 (2): 19–29, p. 26. For the image of a commissioned painting see: Innemée, 2003, “Mural Painting in Egypt”. See also Bolman, 2002, Monastic Visions, Chapter 4, which provides details of people who commissioned paintings at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs.

35 For Isnā, the oratory niche decoration of Hermitage 6 is a case in point. See Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, Esna, Plate XXXI. For a more sophisticated oratory niche decoration at Kellia see: Rassart-Debergh, 1989, “Les peintures”, p. 74, 76.
Part 2: The basic types

The survey established that, stripped of embellishment, there are four more or less distinct types of crosses in Christian Egypt in the period under review which may be described as the fundamental or basic types: ansate, Greek (*quadrata*), Latin (*immissa*) and pattée.\(^3\)

These four basic shapes are very rarely seen without decorative elements, some of which are so elaborate that they can distract from, or appear more dominant than, the core design. For example, in some instances especially on funerary stelae, the centrality of the cross is diminished by the elaborate ornamentation.\(^3\)

Freedom of expression, or indeed sloppiness in execution, has occasionally given rise to ambiguities in constructing even the basic shapes. Such uncertainties are particularly the case in painted crosses, some of which are particularly hard to interpret. For example, even allowing for deterioration, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a Greek or Latin cross was intended. Indeed we need to consider whether the distinctions of Greek and Latin were even relevant at the time.

As the original intent of the artist or artisan is not known, allowances need to be made in the reading of the basic shapes. The *crux ansata* is the only one of the four types that cannot be confused with any other type, though even here there is a degree of uncertainty, though of a different sort, that will be elaborated on later.

Nevertheless, from a modern reading there are four distinct types. Based on the accompanying decorative elements eight sub-types have also been identified.

\(^3\) The four types are also known by different designations, but for the purposes of this project will be referred to by the naming convention listed above. For example, the *crux ansata* is known as an ansate cross, an ankh cross or a looped cross. The pattée cross is more commonly known as the Maltese cross. A Latin cross is sometimes called a simple cross.

\(^3\) Thomas, 2000, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*. Thomas provides two such examples: Fig 108, p. 15, is of an Armant-type stele with 5 crosses surrounded by braided designs; Fig 87, p. 11, shows an ansate cross with a flower within the loop and two large leaves flanking the cross.
The basic types, shown earlier, are repeated here for convenience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ansate</th>
<th>Greek/Quadrata</th>
<th>Latin/Immissa</th>
<th>Pattée</th>
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**Ansate**

The *crux ansata* is unique and is visually distinct from the other types present in Christian Egypt, which are essentially derived from two intersecting lines.  

In essence, the *crux ansata* is a *tau* (τ) shape surmounted with a loop or ‘handle’. It has a strong visual similarity to the Ancient Egyptian *ankh* hieroglyph. Gabra and Eaton-Krauss are among contemporary writers who believe the *crux ansata* testifies to the continuity of Ancient Egyptian tradition. The widespread belief that it derives entirely from the *ankh* is based, it would appear, almost entirely on a visual resemblance, combined with a play on the meaning of the hieroglyph. Doresse draws on Rufinus and Sozomen to bolster the view that, following the destruction of the temple of Serapis in Alexandria in 391 CE, the *ankh* was transformed into the *crux ansata*, not the least because of its visual resemblance but also because it was interpreted as the life to come. Rufinus mentions that the ‘Lord’s cross’ replaced all signs of Serapis, but goes on to say that the Egyptians had this sign among their hieratic characters. Sozomen described the destruction of the Serapeum and remarks that stones were found on which were hieroglyphic characters in the form of a cross,

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* [ECD118] is a good recreation from Chapel 25 at al-Bagawāt.
which were interpreted as signifying the life to come. Parry quotes Socrates Scholasticus in noting that when the temple was torn down engraved stones were found with cross-like symbols which Christians and pagans interpreted differently; the first group read these as crosses while the second believed them to represent both Christ and Serapis. It would seem from such reports that images of Serapis were replaced with modified and re-signified ankh$s, creating a uniquely Egyptian Christian symbol.

Given the pervasive view that the ansate cross derives entirely from the ankh, a short excursion into the meaning of the hieroglyph is necessary here. The view that the ankh is the precursor of the ansate cross derives mainly from the visual similarity but also draws on the meaning of the hieroglyph, which is generally accepted to signify ‘life’. In Pharaonic era tomb paintings, the ankh is often held in front of the body by the shaft or by the loop, hanging from the hand of the bearer. These latter depictions have led Schwabe and his colleagues to propose that the ankh symbol derived from the thoracic vertebra of an ungulate, possibly a bull or ram, as early Egyptians believed that life sprang from the spine. The Ancient Egyptian god, Ra, bore the ankh in his hand as a symbol of stability and living sustenance. Isis also held the ankh, and was regarded as the source of all life. The theme of life is a constant in these and other theories. Based on the original interpretation of the hieroglyph and the absence of dissenting views of any substance, it is widely accepted that the ankh symbol represented life.

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* It is only in past two hundred years that Egyptian hieroglyphs have been interpreted or translated, thanks to the work of Jean-François Champollion in 1822 and others before and after him. See Champollion, Jean-François. 1822. *Lettre à M. Ducier*. Paris: Firmin Didot père et fils.

* Most Ancient Egyptian art occurs in funerary contexts, in tombs or burial chambers. Artists were commissioned to create scenes from the life of the tomb owner to assist his or her transition into the hereafter. There are numerous examples of the ankh in tomb paintings. This is relevant because tombs were often reused by monks and hermits, both as private and liturgical spaces.

* Schwabe, Calvin W., Joyce Adams, and Carleton T. Hodge. 1982. “Egyptian Beliefs about the Bull’s Spine: An Anatomical Origin for Ankh.” *Anthropological Linguistics* 24 (4): 445–79. The authors provide a detailed explanation of the veterinary aspects of dissection and the belief that the spine and bone were thought to be elements that generated life. The bull was a symbolic of power.


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Chapter 4 – Design & Symbolism
While the *ankh* is strongly associated with Ancient Egypt, there is also a view that it, or a similar symbol, existed in Syria around 1700 years before Christ, possibly suggesting it was not exclusively used by Egyptians. Meek notes that an *ankh*-like motif appears on Syrian cylinder seals that date to approximately 1700-1350 BCE. He also suggests there is evidence that the symbol was in use in Assyria around 800 BCE.\(^5\) However, as with pre-Christian forms of the cross, we do not know what these Syrian and Assyrian motifs meant.

Among the earliest representations of ansate crosses in Egypt could be those on mummy portraits attributed to Antinoë. Doxiadis dates several such portraits to the Severan era, that is, before the destruction of the temple of Serapis.\(^6\) In these images, the deceased are shown with what appear to be ansate crosses and other potentially Christian iconography such as doves. In one notable instance, there are three such crosses where the circular loop appears superimposed on a Latin-type cross, rather than resting on a tau shaped shaft. [ECD056].\(^7\) While the portraits, generally, are well catalogued and discussed by Parlasca, Boyd and Doxiadis whose main focus appears to be on materials, techniques, style and dating, the few occurrences of ansate crosses are, perhaps not surprisingly, not considered in much detail.\(^8\) However, if the date proposed by Doxiadis is accepted, and it must be noted that it is not without detractors, it is possible and even likely that these crosses are of a different (non-Egyptian) attribution. For example, similar crosses composed of circular wreaths superimposed on Latin crosses are evidenced in Roman sarcophagi such as those in the dispersed Lateran Museum.\(^9\) Doresse, in asking how the cross could be confused with the *ankh*, also notes that earlier crosses with superimposed foliate wreaths give approximately the same silhouette as an *ankh*.\(^10\) It would appear that he is referring to the same type of cross that appears on the Roman sarcophagi where the superimposed circular foliate design is thought to relate to the triumphal laurel wreath awarded to victors. [ECD401, for example]. In a Christian context, this placement of a symbol usually associated with triumph would appear to be concordant with Christ’s victory

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\(^6\) Doxiadis, 2000. *Fayum Portraits*, pp. 119, 120. Doxiadis offers no hypothesis on the progenitor of the crosses; her primary focus is on portraiture. Her belief is that the portraits can be dated to the late 2nd and early 3rd century, based mainly on dress and hair styles. However, as will be seen in the later discussion on dating, there are opposing views.

\(^7\) Louvre Museum #6440.

\(^8\) This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.


over death, leading to the nomenclature of ‘Resurrection crosses’ in relation to these particular representations.

Other views are less useful. For example, De Zwaan, drawing a somewhat long bow, goes as far as seeing the ankh as a progenitor of the christogram but agrees that it is a matter of speculation.\(^5\) Hurtado meanwhile notes the formal similarity of the tau-rho device to the ankh but discounts a relationship between the two, though he seems to lean to the view that the appropriation of the ankh may have resulted from a visual similarity to the tau-rho which was in use as a nomina sacra as early as 175-225 CE.\(^6\)

Notwithstanding the various claims, it is difficult to be certain of the antecedent of the crux ansata. It is possible that it developed from two likely sources; the visual similarity to the so-called Resurrection crosses cannot be discounted, especially in the early representations on mummy portraits. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that the ansate cross is derivative both of such triumphal crosses as well as the ankh, the Ancient Egyptian symbol of life, resignified here as the Christian concept of eternal life.\(^7\) This would suggest, contrary to popular view, that the ansate cross was not fully reliant on the ankh as its progenitor and therefore was not wholly Egyptian in all its representations.

A notable visual distinction between the ankh and ansate cross is that the latter usually appears with one or more embellishments, though this is not the case in very early representations such as those on the mummy portraits of the Severan era where the crosses are simply and elegantly represented.\[^{ECD055}\]\(^8\) There are also relatively simple representations of the ansate cross at al-Bagawāt in the Khārijah oasis, some embellished and others not.

The loop of the ankh, generally shown as sharply ovoid in Ancient Egyptian art, appears in the ansate cross in either of two forms. In some instances it continues to appear in ovoid form, though noticeably larger in relation to the τ. More commonly,

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\(^{7}\) Witt, 1971, *Isis*, notes on p. 17 that notions of heaven and an afterlife were common in Ancient Egypt. He remarks that the humblest tiller of fields could look forward to eternal rest in the afterlife.

\(^{8}\) See Doxiadis, 2000, *Fayum Portraits*. Benaki Museum, #6877. A third possibility, also speculative, is that the symbols accompanying the mummy portraits are in fact ankhs, and that the deceased were subject to traditional mumification practices.
the ansate cross has a circular loop. It is usually shown contiguous with the base, though occasionally it appears to lie above it. In some fifth and sixth century sculptural examples, generally on funerary stelae, the loop is portrayed as a wreath, even having leaves or foliage within the concentric circles of the loop. [ECD278].

These would appear to draw on the design lexicon of the Roman sarcophagi with their Resurrection crosses.

At al-Bagawāt there is a wide range of ansate crosses, most of which have circular loops. Several of these appear as concentric circles with geometric motifs or representations of gems. [ECD118].

The simple but strong example on the baptismal font at ‘Ayn Jallāl is circular. [ECD136].

At Bāwīt there is a gemmed example that has a circular loop. [ECD208].

So also is the example from Dayr Abū Fānah. Bowen’s description of the ansate crosses at two of the three churches in Ismant al-Kharāb in the Dākhlah oasis also mentions circular loops. It is clear that the circular loop is a significant and enduring deviation from the ankh.

The circular loops are commonly depicted as wreaths, usually composed of laurel or palm leaves. Occasionally, a floral element is shown within the loop. It is also relatively common to see other smaller crosses, christograms and staurograms within the loops. On occasion, a face is inscribed within the wreath, usually beardless, and it is unclear whether this is supposed to represent Christ. [ECD278].

A particularly rough-hewn stele has what appears to be a rudimentary ansate cross with a face within the loop, apparently orant arms and triangular body, and could be interpreted as a representation of a monk. [ECD324].

Shafts and arms of ansate crosses can be trapezoid, rectangular or rhomboid, sometimes in varied combinations. In some instances, the arms are flared to such an extent that, to a modern viewer, they can be interpreted as wings. [ECD262].

Generally in this type the base is triangular and, with the combination of a circular loop can, in some instances, resemble a human or angelic figure.

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* The representation is thought to be from Akhmim.
* Fakhry, 1951, El-Bagawat. Chapel 25. See fig. 2.
* Ghica, 2012, “Pour une histoire”. See also Ghica’s photograph in fig. 3.
* Clédat, 1904, Baouit. See fig. 4 of an image from Chapel 27.
* Crum, 1902, Catalogue général, Plate XXX. Coptic Museum # 8576.
The corpus of ansate crosses occurs in various media. They occur in paint on walls of monastic or religious buildings. Some painted examples are rudimentary and roughly executed. These representations are generally in red pigment on plaster. As noted earlier, a large collection of painted ansate crosses appears in al-Bagawāṭ, sketched by Fakhry and later photographed by Cipriano, the latter providing a more realistic view of them. In this location, we see many and varied representations of the ansate cross, painted on the walls of the chapels, some relatively elaborate. Generally, the crosses here were painted without the addition of flora and fauna. Exceptions are those in the Chapel of Peace and the Chapel of the Exodus that occur as part of a tableau. The gemmed ansate example at Dayr Abū Fānah, accompanied by fauna, is more complex in design. [ECD221].

Stone ansate crosses, almost without exception, occur on funerary stelae. There are several examples in the Coptic museum in Cairo, but few with definite dating, context or provenance. [ECD294]. There are also stelae in the British Museum that depict ansate crosses in a lower register to a more dominant Greek type cross. These are said to be from Hermonthis (Armant) but the nominated find site appears to be more a matter of expediency than proven fact. There are also, albeit fewer, examples in wood. [ECD392].

The motif occurs on many fragmentary textile finds, most unfortunately of uncertain provenance and dating. Unfortunately, the piecemeal nature of these holdings precludes an analysis of the entire design program of the materials. It is in the textile designs that we see the most sophisticated renditions, not just in garments but also in furnishing fabrics.

A fine example of a crux ansata is the illumination that occurs at the end of Codex Glazier, held by the Pierpoint Morgan library. The Codex is a partial copy of the Book of Acts, chapters one through to fifteen, in a Coptic dialect (Mesokemic). The

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* One is said to be from el-Badary, Asyūt, and is dated to the 6th century. See Coptic Museum inventory #8566, which shows an ansate cross with a large circular loop and three Greek crosses, one within the loop and two flanking the shaft. The body and loop are incised with a linear design reminiscent of palm fronds.
* British Museum inventory # EA679, EA1463 and EA1764.
cross has a rounded handle seated upon a \( \tau \) cross. There is elaborate braiding within the design and there are five birds: a pair of peacocks, an eagle, and two other birds that could be doves.\(^7\)

**Greek and Latin (Quadrata and Immissa)**

Greek and Latin type crosses are very similar in their pure form, both being composed of two intersecting linear shafts or bars, one horizontal and one vertical. These are very simple shapes, not exclusive to Christianity as has been noted earlier. The Greek or *quadrata* type has four equal arms where the horizontal and vertical shafts intersect exactly in the centre of each shaft, creating equal quadrants between the shafts. The Latin or *immissa* type has a vertical shaft that is longer than the horizontal, with the point of intersection being between a quarter to a third from the top of the vertical shaft.

Greek and Latin types, in many variations, are the most plentiful in the attested corpus of Egyptian crosses, which is surprising given the indigenous aspect of the ansate cross. Both Greek and Latin types are also widely attested around the Mediterranean and in Byzantine art. They were, and are, used extensively in heraldry and vexillology, though not in Egypt, suggesting the popularity of the forms across a range of cultures.

The similarity or inexactness in the execution of Greek and Latin type crosses in the Egyptian corpus is strong enough to recommend a caveat in their classification. In some instances, especially in hastily effected examples, it is unclear whether the cross in question is definitely Greek or Latin. Also, there are a number of crosses that are too deteriorated to determine the exact type. \([\text{ECD171}]\).\(^7\) Ambiguities are especially the case in painted renditions. Executions in stone are generally clearer, but there are instances where even here the viewer must guess the sculptor’s intent. \([\text{ECD313}]\).\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Images of the Codex Glazier ansate cross are several and widely available from various sources including Wikimedia commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex_Glazier_2.JPG.


\(^7\) An example of a stone carving that could be interpreted as Greek, Latin or even pattée is a 6th- to 7th-century limestone piece of unknown provenance, held in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, # 6529. See Gabra and Eaton-Krauss, 2007, *Illustrated Guide*, pp. 190, 191. The cross sits within a design which itself is ambiguous, possibly a shell or a peacock’s tail.
Such vagueness suggests that the classifications described as ‘Greek’ or ‘Latin’ by the modern viewer were probably less relevant to the artisans of early Christian Egypt.

There does not appear to be firm evidence of the progenitor of Greek and Latin types though it is most likely to be a visual representation of the crucifixion cross. It is also possible that the type derived from exhortations from various church fathers, who advised early Christians to sign themselves on the forehead and body as an apotropaic action against evil. For example Hippolytus counselled, in regard to the midnight prayer, to “catch your breath in your hand and signing yourself with the moisture of your breath, your body is purified even to your feet”, “if you are tempted, seal your foreheads reverently” and “by sealing the forehead and eyes with the hand, we turn aside from the one who seeks to destroy us.” Certainly, this physical signing of the cross across the body or forehead, still in use today in various forms, could be said to follow the linear model of Greek or Latin typology.

Another possible reason for the dominant use of Greek and Latin types is the Empress Helena’s so-called discovery, in the fourth century, of the ‘true cross’ in Jerusalem, an event that was widely propagandised, not the least by Cyril of Jerusalem in 349/350 CE. Almost concurrent, in 351 CE, was the phenomenon of the ‘cross in the sky’, said to be witnessed and reported by many. Efforts to represent the cosmic event graphically, described by Sozomen as being “not feeble…but splendid and concentrated” and of proportionate length and breadth, could have resulted in either a Latin or Greek type cross.

Greek and Latin types occur with many variations including serifs, bars at the end of each terminal, on steps or platforms, and with many decorations and elaborations.

Crosses with bars at the end of each terminal, as distinguished from serifs, are known as potent types. In many instances, it is difficult to distinguish between potent and serif types, especially if the serifs are elaborate. Potent Greek crosses with distinctive bars at each terminal are seen in geometric designs in iconostasis screens and doors.

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§ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book 4, chapter 5 also noted that the emperor received numerous accounts about the event, including Cyril’s letter.
These designs are still in use in Coptic churches where the symmetry of the Greek type cross lends itself to composite designs of screens and inlay panels. It is particularly difficult to distinguish between serifs and bars on the terminals of Latin crosses when they are executed in paint such as those at Kellia. In a number of instances these are shown with pendantalia suspended from the bars or serifs.

Greek and Latin types are also attested with bifurcated terminals, such as those at Wādī al-Naṭrūn, Suhāj and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. Generally, the terminals are bifurcated close to the end and branched outwards in an arc. Many of these crosses have dual coloured shafts and arms in opposing colours of red or green. Some are surrounded with foliage and pomegranates also in red and green. Bifurcated Greek crosses can be quite elaborate in their symmetry.

Most Greek and Latin types are seen with various embellishments including gems, flora, fauna, braiding and symbolic motifs. Many Latin types appear to be ceremonial or ‘processional’, so described as they occur with a protrusion or tang at the base. It is also common to see Latin-type gemmed crosses, where the painted crosses are made to resemble gem-encrusted artefacts. Examples of these can be seen at Kellia and at Dayr Anbā Shinūdah at Suhāj.

The ambiguity between Greek and Latin types is necessarily less pronounced in embroidery and sculpture, though still with enough variation to lead to subjective analyses. Generally, in textiles the more common of the two types is the Greek cross. There are examples of Greek gemmed crosses in the textile collections of various museums.

There are several sculptural examples of Greek type crosses at Saqqārah and Bāwīt that are shown with vegetal elements. Here, the cross is usually the central motif.
flanked by vegetal decorations. Lintels such as those from Saqqārah are typical. [ECD230]. Many of the carved crosses of Dayr Apa Jeremiah in Saqqārah follow the Greek type.

Another feature of the Greek and Latin crosses are the steps or platforms upon which they may rest. Again, this is not unique to Egypt. Notable examples of stepped crosses are attested at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs and Dayr Abū Fānah.«

There are two examples of Latin type figurative crosses from Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl at al-Naqlūn, where the bust of Christ is superimposed on the intersection of horizontal and vertical axes. The images are badly deteriorated and difficult to interpret. However, it appears that Christ is shown as beardless, similar to the textile example of a face superimposed on an ansate cross.» A similar example is attested at Kellia.

**Pattée**

Pattée crosses are commonly known as ‘Maltese’, that is, with flared vertical and horizontal arms, generally of equal length, radiating from a central point of intersection. In the Egyptian versions they often occur within a circle. This is especially the case in Isnā where they are plentiful. [ECD202].« There is also evidence that similar designs were widely used in Syrian monasteries and ecclesiastical buildings.» It is unclear whether these pre or post-date the Isnā crosses, or whether there was influence in either direction.

The vertical and horizontal arms of the attested pattée crosses can be composed of straight lines forming trapezoidal shapes, or arcs forming concave and convex designs. Designs using arcs are generally symmetrical, that is, if a convex design is

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« Quibell, 1909, *Saqqara*. Plate XXXIII shows part of a screen between rooms 1704 and 1706.
« The apse cross at (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DeirAbuFanaChurchInside.jpg) is mounted on steps, as is the cross in the sanctuary niche of the parekklesion of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. See p. 26 of the *Illustrated Guide to the Coptic Orthodox Monastery of St. Antony, Red Sea, Egypt* – booklet produced by the monastery in 2011.
« Fernandez Ferreira, Romualdo. 2004. *Simblos cristinos en la antica Siria*. Kaslik: CEDLUSEK. Fr Romualdo’s book provides a wide range of pattée designs from various monasteries in Syria but without dating or context. Emma Loosely, in correspondence during early 2016, believes these are from the NW Limestone Massif area dating from the late 4th to the first decade of the 7th century.
used for the vertical axis it is most likely that the horizontal axis will also use convex lines.

As noted earlier, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between Greek and pattée types, especially where the vertical and horizontal elements are drawn only slightly flared or trapezoidal. In this instance the observer is left with having to make a subjective interpretation. For example, a Greek type with elaborate or stylised serif, or with a trapezoidal flare, could easily be mistaken for a pattée type. Examples of these ambiguous shapes are those on lintels from Saqqārah. [ECD230].

In other instances, it is very clear that the intent of the artist was to create a pattée type cross. This is especially the case where the arms are flared into arcs such as those seen plentifully in Isnā, especially in the oratory niches of various hermitages. Here, even rudimentary drawings and sketches are clearly of pattée type, contained in a circle. These crosses are significantly different to those in the oratory niches of Kellia where the dominant designs are of tanged Latin or Greek type crosses with vegetal designs.

At Isnā, where pattée crosses are the dominant type, it is common to see designs in which the interstices are decorated with floral or geometric designs. There is a wide repertoire of apparently unique linear and geometric designs attested at the hermitages associated with Isnā. Floral motifs are expressed in lines terminating in circular and triangular shapes, sometimes intersected with arcs and chevrons in simple but elegant designs. These geometric, stylised, floral designs are well planned and executed and are restrained in contrast to the exuberant and flowing vegetal forms prevalent at Kellia.

Apart from floral elements, there is some suggestion from Badawy that the shapes formed in the interstices by the concave and convex arcs resemble similar tilapia fish motifs in Ancient Egyptian art. Evans continues this theme in suggesting that the design of fish around a central point was modified to fit the cross. If this was the

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* Quibell, 1909, *Sakkara*. The cross on Plate XXXIII, noted earlier, could be interpreted as either as the arms flare, but only slightly.
* The earlier example of the cross 12 in Hermitage 3 is a case in point. Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, *Esna*, Plate XXV.
* Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, *Esna*, p. 70. The authors provide re-creations of the various geometric decorative elements.
intention of the artist it is possible to suggest an Ancient Egyptian influence, though it was more likely that the interstices of the pattée cross were reminiscent of the fish motif rather than crosses being designed to accommodate fish.

Isnā also has painted designs to approximate draperies, with pattée crosses appearing on these ‘curtains’ in a painting from the oratory niche of hermitage 6, where the cross in a roundel forms part of an elaborate though inexpert decoration. Sauneron and Jacquet comment on the nature of this image as managing to be both complex and naïve at the same time. It is probable that these painted draperies with crosses are representative of ecclesiastical furnishing, such as curtains across the entrance to a sanctuary. [ECD195].

Ceramic examples with pattée crosses include lamps, of which several survive in various international museums. Where it is possible to determine the source of the clay used, provenance can be safely attributed to Egypt. [ECD010].

Pattée crosses are widely attested in stone, appearing in lintels and funerary stelae at Saqqārah, though there are some examples where the design could also be interpreted as a Greek type, as noted earlier. A limestone slab with a commemorative inscription shows a pattée cross with alpha and omega symbols in the interstices. [ECD235]. In such examples, the circle surrounding the cross is sometimes shown as a wreath. In fact the design, in common with some Greek examples, lends itself to being enclosed in what could be perceived as a victory wreath, hitherto seen in the loops of some ansate crosses.

Finally, there is also an example in marble from Evelyn White’s excavations at Dayr Anbā Maqār in Wādī al-Natrūn. In this instance, the cross is finely wrought and is flanked by two birds. This is another example of an ambiguous motif as the cross could also be construed as Greek. [ECD400].

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\* Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, Esna, Plate XXXI. See also Zibawi, 2003, Images de l’Égypte chrétienne, p. 91, for a reconstruction of this image.
\* The British Museum has several examples, including an Aswan-ware lamp with pattée cross #1888.0609.1, dated to 5- to 6- century, with a Greek inscription “of the Holy Father Menas”.
\* Quibell, 1909, Saqqara, Plate XLIV of the 1907 report. Slab in the floor of room 773, near the north door. Inscription reads ‘This is the seat of Apa Jeremias’. Inscription 14 on p. 33. Quibell notes that from the careful and ornamental nature of the work, this inscription probably does record he place where the founder of the monastery used to sit.
\* Evelyn White, 1921, “Wady ‘N Natrun”, p. 58. The piece was recovered from the remains of the church of D. Anbā Maqār and consists of a finely executed cross with flared arms and concave terminals, flanked by birds in the lower quadrants.
In summary, four basic types of crosses have been identified from the survey. It is clear that certain types of crosses are more prevalent in some areas and locations. For example, ansate crosses seem to have a stronger presence in Upper Egypt though there are examples in Karanis in the Fayyûm. Latin and Greek types are widespread across the monastic landscape, while pattée crosses are particularly dominant at Isnā. Thus far it has not been possible to determine why certain types of crosses are dominant at particular monasteries. It could be a matter of personal preference of the local monks, fashion or indeed influence such as in the case of the similarity between Isnā and Syria.\footnote{Issues of typology and location will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, as will those of context.}
Part 3: Symbolism and design

The centrality of the cross in early Egyptian Christian belief is undisputed. From the attested anaphoras it is clear that the cross was held in great awe and reverence with a focus on salvation rather than on suffering.\(^a\) Ps.-Theophilus of Alexandria’s sermon on the cross says, in translation, that in the moment that Christ was crucified he saved and purified the earth and heavens. Ps.-Theophilus is thought to have borrowed heavily from Ps.-Chrysostom, with similar material in Ethiopic, suggesting the widespread use of the litany of the cross in Egypt.\(^b\) Indeed, Haile alludes to the talismanic use of what he describes as ‘magico-religious’ prayers on the cross have proliferated in the Ethiopic tradition as a means of fighting evil spirits, which come disguised as illnesses or wild animals.\(^c\) This concept has parallels in Egyptian Christian tradition.

The anaphora in Ps.-Theophilus, similar to others, shows a very conceptual element to the veneration of the cross. However, the themes such as protecting and preserving from harm, and destroying one’s enemies, are hard to translate into visual representations and it is not surprising that there are no attested attempts to pictorialise these concepts. What is clear, though, is that the deep veneration and belief in the soteriological aspects of the cross caused it to be a popular motif.

Egyptian crosses rarely form part of a narrative, unlike in western Christian art. For example there are few attested images of crucifixion scenes with common tropes such as grieving women and disciples at the foot of the cross. The crosses are depicted alone or as the central element of a non-narrative tableau. They almost always occur with various embellishments, which, while not forming a narrative, can be perceived as adding to the meaning of the image. In faded or otherwise damaged images, the iconographical program, if there is one, is often unclear and it is therefore difficult to state with any certainty whether some of the decorative elements in proximity to the crosses are part of a composite design. For example, fauna are sometimes seen at some distance from the crosses and it is difficult to judge, especially in deteriorated paintings, whether they were intended to form part of the same scene or what other


\(^{b}\) Suciu, 2012, “Sermo de Cruce et Latrone”, pp. 194 – 196, 219. The manuscript is dated by its colophon to 855 CE.

motifs might have been part of the artistic program. In other instances, where flora, fauna and other ornamentations are either on, or intertwined with, the crosses, there is little doubt that they are meant to be construed as a single, synthesized image. In some cases, where relevant inscriptions accompany the image, we have a better means to decipher meaning. Conversely, inscriptions are often simply names or standard phrases that do not necessarily add clarity to the image.

Embellishments or decorative elements take many forms. There are often numerous types of decoration with the one cross. For example, a gemmed and tanged cross may also appear with flora and fauna. A braided cross might also appear with fauna or, in some instances, with pendantalia such as bells. Geometric motifs may be used to denote flora or gems. There are multiple variations and it is almost impossible to find identical representations across the landscape of Egypt, though without a doubt there are many similarities at and between sites. For example, while the dominant cross at Kellia is a Latin type processional cross, it is seen in various combinations of flora, fauna and pendantalia, and there is a similarity to those at Suhāj, though the Kellia crosses are generally more informal and free-form in their execution.

While there are many decorative elements such as interlacing and the inclusion of geometric motifs, it is usually in the flora and fauna that symbolism is expressed. Additionally, the use of other symbols along with the cross is relevant, such as the appearance of alpha and omega, and gables or aediculae over the cross.

With these multiple types of embellishments, and variations within types in mind, research into the corpus showed that the Egyptian crosses had not been classified before, even to the extent of describing the basic types. Consideration had therefore to be given to how a design typology could be developed. Given the design focus of this study, it was resolved to categorise the crosses by the type of dominant accompanying motif. It is these elements, broadly, that set the Egyptian crosses apart. Therefore, eight sub-types spanning the basic types were identified as ceremonial, vegetal, faunal, geometric (including interlaced), those with other symbols, plain, figural and cryptic. Each of these sub-types has further distinctions, which are elaborated on in the following pages.

The point must be made, before elaborating on the sub-types, that many crosses have two or more of these elements. There is consequently a subjective element in the ensuing classification.

**Ceremonial indicators**

The term ‘ceremonial’ has been chosen to describe crosses that would appear to represent a formal or liturgical function. They include crosses that could otherwise be described as processional or blessing types, as well as those that are draped or placed on steps or platforms.

A processional cross, generally, is mounted on a staff that is carried aloft in ceremonial situations. The cross itself would have a tang or protrusion, which would enable it to be inserted into the staff. In some instances it could then be removed from the staff and mounted on another stand, perhaps on or at the side of an altar. Alternatively if the staff was shorter, or indeed if the actual shaft of the cross was elongated, it could be carried in the hand of the bearer. In such instances they could be so-called blessing rather than processional crosses.

Processional crosses were in use in the Byzantine world by the fifth century at least and possibly as early as the fourth century. These were generally of a precious metal and were occasionally embedded with gems, which is relevant because of the gemmed representations at Kellia and Suhaj. Cotsonis provides several examples of Byzantine gemmed crosses that are studded with precious stones and hung with bells and other *pendantalia* and used on ceremonial occasions, both religious and secular and were carried in procession. He cites an example of a processional cross, used in the coronation of Leo in 457 CE. Cotsonis also remarks that there were smaller blessing crosses, which were also carried by priests and bishops, which were richly adorned and would have been carried by the shaft. Blessing crosses are common among modern Coptic monks and priests and are held in front of the body, usually at chest height. Modern examples, crafted by the monks of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, are produced with extra length in the shaft, enabling them to be held in the hand without losing the impression of a cross.

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Possibly contemporaneous with the Byzantine crosses mentioned above, is a rare reference to an Egyptian example of a cross being processed. St. John of Lycopolis who died in 394 CE, is quoted describing the scene of a cross being processed at Asyūṭ, along with hymns, chanting and censers, through the city and into the church, accompanied by clergy and other faithful. While the account is attributed to St. John of Lycopolis, it is certainly likely to be from a later date, though from this account it is clear that processional crosses were known and used in Egypt at least by the sixth century. Conversely there is an account of a feast in commemoration of Anbā Shintūdah, which occurred from the time of his death until the end of the twelfth century. It included clear and detailed instructions regarding a procession, which seemed to be a central part of the feast, and included information about where people should gather, what the route they should take, and what hymns and chants were to be used. There is, however, no mention of a cross. This is not to say that a cross was not included in the procession; as noted earlier the ubiquity of the symbol often precluded its specific mention.

The John of Lycopolis reference above would align with the plethora of processional crosses at Kellia, Isnā and Suhāj. These are generally of Latin or Greek type. There is only one attested example of a tanged ansate cross, that of the Codex Glazier. This last example is interesting because it does not follow a Byzantine model and the document attributed to St. John of Lycopolis does not suggest that the cross at Asyūṭ was anything other than a Latin or Greek type. It is difficult to know if ansate crosses were ever taken in procession. The inclusion of a tang in the Glazier image may represent a cross that was placed on a stand rather than into a processional staff.

There do not appear to be any examples of pattée crosses with tangs. This might be simply because pattée crosses are generally shown within a circle or wreath, which would not lend itself to the inclusion of a tang or staff.

There seems to be just one definite example of a metal processional cross recovered from a site in Egypt, though there are others in international museum collections that

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*Cotsonis, 1994, *Processional Crosses*, p. 33. The cross in question is from St Catherine’s monastery in Sinai.*
are attributed to Egypt but without definite provenance. All are of Latin or Greek type.

There are opposing views, including those of van Moorsel as noted earlier,108 which suggest that the representations of so-called processional crosses are more reminiscent of tree of life designs. This would seem to be because many painted examples appear to be planted in the ground or springing from it, with foliage flanking the cross, as is seen consistently at Kellia. Almost all the painted crosses of Kellia are depicted with a tang and Rassart-Debergh, who studied them closely, refers to them as processional.109

Egypt’s gemmed crosses, some without a tang but with pendantalia are too similar to Byzantine processional crosses not to be read as such. The inclusion of gems, denoting a costliness as well as formality, would lend weight to their ceremonial or liturgical use. Potentially where such gemmed crosses occur in oratory niches or within chapels, their function is clearly devotional rather than apotropaic.

There are few attested representations of gemmed crosses in stone, though some of the carved crosses from Saqqārah with medallions could also have been painted to resembled gems. In contrast, there are many representations of gemmed crosses in paint from Kellia, Dayr Anbā Shinūdah at Suhāj and Dayr Abū Fānah.110 As noted earlier, Dayr Abū Fānah has a particularly striking example of a gemmed crux ansata, similar to one was recovered from Dayr Apa Apollo at Bāwīt.111 Gemmed ansate crosses are also attested at al-Bagawāt.

Gemmed crosses are represented in textiles, with the ‘gems’ usually shown as brightly coloured medallions. [ECD339].112 In some examples these crosses are rudimentary, with coloured lozenges imparting interest to the otherwise bland pieces.

In paint the colours used to represent gems are usually red and green, though in the textile examples other colours such as purple and white are also used. Sill believes the red gems embedded in the crosses represent Christ’s wounds. It could equally be a

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111 Clédat, 1904, Baouit, Plate XCIII from chapel 27.
112 Kendrick, 1921, Catalogue of Textiles Vol II. Victoria & Albert Museum #296-1889. Said to be from Akhmîm, the cross is purple with nine coloured medallions thought to represent gems.
Eucharistic reference to the blood of Christ. Green is thought to represent hope and rebirth. However, it is more likely that, as James suggests, that there was no symbolic significance to the colours. The use of colour was to complete the image and in her view brightness was of more importance than colour. However using life-like colours was important, such as green for vegetation. Generally though, in an Egyptian context, the cost, availability and durability of pigments, and brightness of colour would have influenced the choice of palette.

Also in the sphere of ritual or liturgical design are the draped or Lenten crosses that occur in paintings at Dayr Abū Fānah, Dayr Anbā Shinūdah, Dayr al-Suryān and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. These are sometimes referred to as Lenten or Easter crosses in Western Christian tradition, in recognition of the ritual covering or shrouding of the cross during Lent. Bolman, while noting that research on the subject has failed to produce a text to support this view, notes that in modern practice at the monastery of St Antony a cloth is used to drape a large processional cross. It is said to represent Christ’s shroud. A black cloth is used during Holy Week, a white cloth is used for Easter and Christmas and a patterned cloth at other times. Thus is it possible to extrapolate that the draped cross is suggestive of the Risen Christ.

The draping of crosses is mentioned by Cyril of Jerusalem in reference to the empress Helena’s finding the true cross, where he writes that she ‘clung to it and swathed it in purple which belong to Constantine and wrapped it in costly stuffs’. And later, when Constantine visited Jerusalem, the ‘precious cross’ was draped in purple and lifted up on a white mule and taken to him, accompanied by people singing hymns, saying ‘the King has come to thee’, meaning that the cross had come to the people. This account would appear to demonstrate not only an early example of a cross being taken in procession, but a clear transfigural element which is apparent in many Egyptian representations.

Also relevant is the similarity of the draped crosses at Dayr Abū Fānah and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs with that of the Arian Baptistery at Ravenna. In the Ravenna example, the cross is ‘seated’ on a throne and draped with a purple stole, suggesting

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that the cross is a personification of Christ, the purple cloth being similar to that worn by dignitaries and rulers. The Egyptian examples do not follow the pattern of being enthroned, but are shown with drapery. In Dayr al-Suryān, the cloth is green, in Dayr Abū Fānah the painting is deteriorated but the stole appears to be purple or red, while at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, from a later period than the others, we see the most elaborate of the attested representations. Here, the cloth has the appearance of a brocaded fabric with floral motifs. It is reminiscent of the richly embroidered textiles seen in the mosaics of Ravenna, though Bolman is of the opinion that it reflects a much later brocaded textile from a reliquary of St Isidore at Léon, more contemporaneous with the painting itself.\footnote{Bolman, 2002. Monastic Visions, p. 75.}

The swags of cloth take two forms, best described as floating and draped. In Dayr Abū Fānah, we see both types; in the apse painting the cloth appears to float behind the cross and seems to take the place of a Christ in Majesty depiction. In this sense it is a personification of Christ. In the other it is draped like a stole or himation across the arms of the cross, again with imperial connotations. However, both forms could also be suggestive of a cast off shroud or grave clothes. The Dayr al-Suryān examples show the floating form, while the example of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs the cloth is draped across the arms of the cross. At Suhāj also there is an example of a cross with drapery across the arms. [ECD227].

The date of the Ravenna example is thought to be early sixth century; Dayr Abū Fānah is dated to between fifth and seventh century, Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs’ parekklesion painting is dated to the thirteenth century, while Dayr al-Suryān’s cross is variously thought to be from the second or third layer of painting and could be as late as the tenth century.\footnote{Innemée’s updated (2016) entry in the Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia, (http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cce/id/2137), notes that the commissioned paintings of the kharus belong to the third layer, i.e. the start of the 10th century.}

Another possible ceremonial or ritual element is seen in the crosses that are raised on platforms or steps. In the western tradition the steps are thought to signify Calvary or Golgotha. The number of steps is also thought to be relevant. Sill goes as far to suggest that three steps imply faith, hope and love, though there is no evidence to support this view.\footnote{Sill, 1975, Handbook of Symbols, p. 31.} Stepped crosses are seen across the Christian world and may not have symbolic significance other than to raise the cross above the ground, according it
prominence in the surrounding landscape. It could also signify the placement of a processional cross in the sanctuary of a church, on or near the altar, which in some instances is raised above the body of the church. The example mentioned above of the draped cross at Dayr Anbā Antunīyūs is also raised on a platform. Other examples include some funerary stelae, and on all the al-Ḥāmūlī frontispieces.

Other ritual objects that are decorated with crosses include metal lamps and censers. As the find site of metal objects does not necessarily denote their origin, we cannot be certain that they are Egyptian in provenance and design, though it is clear that they were used in Egyptian contexts. More often than not, such metal objects are fairly basic in execution.

While bronze lamps are often elaborate and even architectural, and are unlikely to have been used in domestic settings, there are some metal containers that appear more domestic on account of their size and the roughness of their decoration. For example, two bronze receptacles with silver inlay crosses from the Fayyūm, that are held in the Brooklyn Museum, have been mentioned before. One is a cup, approximately 10 x 13 cm and another larger vessel 14 x 21 cms. The workmanship of these is rustic and contrasts with a bronze lamp, also in the same museum. \[ECD038, ECD039\]. While relatively unrefined, it is more likely that the vessels had a ceremonial, Eucharistic, rather than domestic function.

Floral and foliate elements

The vegetal elements that occur with the crosses include flowers, fruit, leaves, vines, trees and wreaths. Vines, with or without fruit, spring from the base of the crosses and often inter-twine, flank or encircle them.

Generally vegetation is seen in several compositional forms. In ansate crosses flowers are occasionally seen within the loop. In some instances the loops themselves are composed of leaf-type designs, reminiscent of wreaths. \[ECD322\]. Occasionally the body of ansate crosses, especially those in stone, are decorated with foliate designs.

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\[ECD038, ECD039\] “Pagan and Christian Egypt”, 1941, Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. See # 81 and 82 for the metal containers and # 83 for the bronze lamp, p. 32.

\[ECD322\] Crum, 1902, *Catalogue général*, Plate XXII. Coptic Museum #8531.
In Latin and Greek types, as is often the case at Kellia, vines or creepers spring from the ground in paint to encircle the crosses and petals of flowers are stylised into geometric or symmetrical shapes to suit the limits of the design. [ECD184].\textsuperscript{a} Flowers and leaves, sometimes abstracted, are also used as symmetrical motifs accompanying the crosses, such as in examples from Saqqârah. [ECD231].\textsuperscript{b} Various flowers and vine-type foliage are often seen in the interstices of the crosses in most media in which the crosses occur.

Pattée crosses sometimes occur with floral designs, generally in the interstices. These are sometimes shown in a darker colour to the cross, creating an interesting play on the design where two crosses are visible, through the use of dark and light or plain and patterned elements. [ECD203].\textsuperscript{c}

Occasionally vases or similar containers are used as a decorative device with the crosses. These are usually shaped like urns with foliage in decorative arrangements. This motif appears in paint and on textiles.

Vines are also used as decorative borders on textiles. [ECD338].\textsuperscript{d} These are not necessarily recognisable but more often are simply generic plants.

The accuracy and detail of the vegetal elements are not necessarily a reflection of the type of material in which the motifs occur; ambiguities occur in various media. At Dayr al-Suryân and Dayr Anbâ Antunyâts the pomegranate motif, while not fruit of a vine, is depicted as part of a trailing plant encircling the cross. At Kellia, while there is an abundance of vegetal material with the crosses, with a few exceptions they are generic vines, flowers and fruit. A notable exception is a cross, composed entirely of palm leaves, which is now housed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. [ECD148].\textsuperscript{e} Fine stone examples include the carved blocks from Dayr Apa Jeremiah at Saqqârah in

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\textsuperscript{a} Kasser, 1999, \textit{Quocour el Izeila}, p. 313 has an image of a decorative vase, from which spring flowers, foliage and a cross. The arrangement sits within a roundel of two concentric circles, Qusûr al-Izaylah 90, eastern wall of chamber 11.
\textsuperscript{b} Quibell, 1909, \textit{Saqqara}. Plate XXXVIII shows one of two crosses found in chamber 712. It is a Greek-type cross with 5 medallions and a floral, lily-type flower in each of the interstices.
\textsuperscript{c} Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, \textit{Esna: Vol I}. The image from Hermitage 3 gives this illusory effect.
\textsuperscript{d} Kendrick, 1921, \textit{Catalogue of Textiles Vol II}. Victoria & Albert Museum # 259-1890. The medallion with an ananse cross shows two vases with foliate elements in the lower quadrants and a decorative border of vines.
\textsuperscript{e} Coptic Museum # 12549. Originally from the eastern wall of chamber 2/3 of kom 233, Qusûr al-Rubâ’ iyyât. See Rassart-Debergh, 1989, “Les peintures”.

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which the palmate leaves are clearly and sharply incised. [ECD230]. Conversely from the same monastery are carved floral motifs in the interstices of crosses that speculatively could be described as lilies.

It would seem that the producers of Egyptian Christian images were less concerned with accurate representations of plants than depicting the idea of flourishing growth and regeneration. In this they differed greatly from the artists of the pharaonic era, where there was great attention to detail in representation of vegetal motifs, to the extent that it is possible to identify which specific plant species was being depicted.

The proliferation of vegetal material in proximity to the crosses has led some to speculate about the conflation of the cross with tree of life designs as has been noted earlier. There certainly are images of the cross that do appear very strongly similar to tree and branch designs, of which an unusual representation of an ansate cross at al-Bagawāt is an exemplar. [ECD115, ECD123]. The fact that several of Kellia’s painted crosses appear to be embedded in the ground, or springing from it, along with other non-specific foliage, has given rise to the view that they represent the tree of life or cosmic tree. It is possible that this is true. However, this cannot be assumed with any degree of certainty, though the tree of life motif occurs in several cultures. The concept of the cross as wood or a tree also occurs in Christian context especially following the discovery of the ‘True Cross’ by the Empress Helena. Curiously though, the image of the elaborate cross in the parekklesion of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs’ Great Church is not remotely tree-like in conception, with no noticeable foliate elements, but has an inscription alongside that reads ‘tree of life’. This would appear to lend weight to the view that the concept of the holy wood and life eternal was well established in Christian thinking. 

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*Quibell, 1909, *Saqqara*. Plate XXXIII has been referred to before but is arguably one of the finest examples.
*Drijvers, Jan Willem. 1992. *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding the True Cross*. Leiden: Brill, p. 81. He makes the point that reverence for the cross or Holy Wood was greatly enhanced by Helena’s discovery.
Daniélou notes that the vine and tree of life were elaborated on by various church fathers, likening the planting of Christianity to the planting of a garden. The church was the spiritual garden of God planted through Christ.\(^{134}\) Cyprian, for example, expanded on the theme in his Epistle to Jubianus where he saw the church in the likeness of a flourishing paradise with fruit bearing trees within her walls, enriched by the four Gospels.\(^{131}\) This would seem to be the most accessible explanation for the use of flourishing vines and plants around the cross, and certainly in the case of Kellia where several crosses appear also to be planted in the ground. However, Tertullian uses the concept of a flowering tree growing from a small seed in a rather different metaphor. In his exhortation for unmarried women to be veiled, he used the theme to expand on maturity, especially in the growth of righteousness.\(^{131}\)

Sill provides interpretations for various vegetal elements, though she writes in a general context. Laurel is used in a Roman context of a victory wreath, and in the so-called Resurrection crosses of Roman sarcophagi. In Egypt it is seen in the loops of ansate crosses, especially on funerary stelae, and also around pattée crosses. It is more than likely to have the same triumphal meaning. Palms, which according to Sill, have the same triumphal meaning, are also used in Egyptian Christian art on funerary stelae, wall paintings and architectural features. She suggests that the pomegranate, with its many seeds, signifies fertility, though in a Christian context it can also represent the multiplication or growth of the Christian faith. Grapes and vines are linked, in a Christian context, to the Eucharist.\(^{134}\)

Jensen reminds us that grapevines were one of the most common motifs in Roman and early Christian art. The latent themes of abundance and growth were possibly relevant. However, she also suggests that in Christian use vines and grapes took on a different and deeper significance such as when Jesus is referred to as the ‘true vine’,\(^{134}\) and when Jesus referred to offering his disciples the cup of wine at the Last Supper, likening it to his blood.\(^{134}\) As an aside, given the supposed Eucharistic nature of the imagery, it is surprising that there are no images of bread in the design lexicon of


\(^{134}\) Sill, 1975, *Handbook of Symbols*, pp. 55, 56, 204, 205.


early Christian Egypt. An exception would be the specific example of the particular iconography relating to St Antony and St Paul in conversation, with depictions of the raven and loaf of bread of their legendary meeting."

Maguire takes a different view of vegetal imagery, and regards the portrayal of bountiful and abundant nature, such as flourishing vines and flowers, as showing a Nilotic influence.** However, as he himself noted, such cornucopia imagery also occurred in Classical art and therefore cannot be regarded as exclusively Egyptian.** Auth, like Maguire, believes that the proliferation of flora and fauna in ‘Coptic’ art represents the bounty of the Nile. However, she extends the metaphor to suggest that this Nilotic abundance can, in a Christian sense, can be ascribed to Christ.**

Given these, not incompatible, views, it would seem likely that the floral and vegetal imagery relates to a view of paradise and the centrality of the cross of Christ in that context, as well as the hope of growth and flourishing of the Christian faith, especially in the centuries following the arrival of Islam in Egypt.

Thus there are various possibilities in the symbolism of vegetal elements including themes of abundance, spiritual growth enriched by Christian thought and practice, and life eternal following the Resurrection of Christ. It is likely that the symbolism varied with the context as will be elaborated on later. Briefly, the representations in monastic settings are more likely to have followed the concept of the spiritual garden with Christ, represented by the cross, at its centre while those on garments and other personal objects would possibly have had a more talismanic function.

In conclusion, while vegetal designs proliferate in Christian Egypt, hardly any of it could be regarded as specifically or particularly Egyptian. This is largely because the designs are so generic with little attention to detail. Their inclusion with the crosses would sometimes appear to be purely decorative or incidental. Conversely, where compositions are repeatedly shown with vegetal elements in a particular arrangement,

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such as springing from the ground to encircle the cross, though the plants themselves are unrecognisable, it would appear that there is a more symbolic context at play.

Faunal elements

A range of birds and animals, both mythological and real, are often seen in proximity to the crosses in wall paintings, illuminated codices, sculpture and textiles. Some are intended to be read in conjunction with the crosses; others are not necessarily part of the same tableau as far as it is possible to determine. Certain fauna are clearly recognisable, even if their symbolism is not immediately apparent. In other instances birds and animals are either generic or so abstruse as to defy classification.

Fauna, with a few exceptions, are composed in a particular way in Egyptian Christian art. For the most part they are shown as pairs of birds or animals, flanking the cross with heads and bodies facing the cross, in what could be described as an attitude of veneration. This type of tableau is common at Kellia and Suhāj in paint, as well as on funerary stelae from Armant and Isnā. [ECD150, ECD225, ECD306]. It also occurs on raised-relief marble tablets where, in some instances, there are multiple pairs of birds and animals in the one composition. The birds in these arrangements are mostly recognisable as peacocks or doves and occasionally birds with parrot-like beaks, however in one notable case in Kellia the birds are especially hard to identify leading to much speculation regarding their type. In another painting in Kellia, a small inscription near the birds reads ‘partridge’. Here we are left to wonder whether viewers thought the birds were ambiguous and needed description, or whether there was a particular significance attached to the partridge. The animals used range from mythical creatures such as unicorns, seen both at Kellia and Dayr Abū Fānah, to beasts of the wilderness such as antelopes, gazelles and hares.

A less well-attested variation on the type of composition mentioned above is seen in a painting at Dayr Abū Fānah, [ECD221] near Mallawi, and in the Dumbarton Oaks limestone frieze, thought to be from Minya. In these two cases the beasts are shown with their backs to the cross, heads turned across the bodies to face the cross and appearing to bear the weight of the cross across their shoulders. The animals could be described as ‘yoked’, suggesting domesticated beasts, and evokes a particular

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symbolism of the cross being a heavy and worthy burden to bear. In the example from Dayr Abū Fānah the yoked animals are unicorns while in the Minya frieze they are antelopes. Neither could be in any way regarded as domesticated. The imagery could therefore be more suggestive of the cross having power over the dark and perhaps mystical forces associated with the wilderness.

Vikan refers to the antelopes in the Dumbarton frieze as heraldic in the sense of symmetrical decorative insignia flanking a central symbol, in this instance a cross. He also notes that Coptic cross reliefs fall into two categories; those in which fauna adore or venerate the cross and those in which the central cross carries a triumphal or even apotropaic role in relation to the accompanying beings. In relation to the Dumbarton frieze, referred to by Frankfurter, he remarks that the animals appear to strain under the weight of the cross. This feeling is not apparent in Cappozzo’s recreation of the Dayr Abū Fānah image where unicorns do not appear to be particularly burdened. The inclusion of mythical beasts in proximity to the crosses is not unusual, however this appears to be the only instance where they are shown bearing the weight of the cross.

A related concept might explain the almost random placement of beasts on the frontispieces of the al-Ḥāmūlī manuscripts, which date to a period possibly at least four hundred years after the examples mentioned above. Here there are occasionally recognisable birds and animals confronted to the cross. However, in some manuscripts there are beasts, some mythical or fantastical, which are shown upside down in relation to the cross, in a manner suggestive of being flung away from the central, dominant feature. A possible explanation for this strange juxtapositioning of detailed, finely executed crosses and random scattered animals could also be along the lines of the cross having dominion over the beasts of the earth, both real and fantastical. [ECD072]. The birds in al-Ḥāmūlī manuscripts are more likely to be generic than specific, though this is often in the eye of the beholder, though there are clear representations of roosters among the depictions. However, it is possible that the ninth and tenth century creators and consumers of these codices had a clearer idea than we do today of what each of these animals represented, both actually and

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1 Depuydt, 1993, *Album of Photographic Plates*. Plate 35 is an image of the frontispiece of manuscript 596, dated by its colophon to 871/872 CE. Two animals in the upper quadrants flanking the cross are described by Depuydt as lions, but are striped with long necks and could equally be zebra or tigers or some fantastical beast. Tigers were not unknown; while not indigenous to Egypt, they were known in the Roman world and were imported from India, via Alexandria.

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Chapter 4 – Design & Symbolism
symbolically. The bestiary of the manuscripts is particularly interesting because in
their haphazard and almost nonsensical representations, they are at odds with the very
finely braided designs of the crosses themselves.

A third type of representation occurs when birds are shown perched on the arms of the
cross, or as in the case of the Codex Glazier endpiece, within the loop and on the arms
of the ansate cross. This type, where birds perch generally on the arms of the cross,
has the potential to be regarded as a tree of life motif. In one relief panel in particular
the cross appears to emerge from elaborate foliage that contains pairs of confronted
birds and animals, the latter closer to the ‘ground’. This could certainly be construed
as a tree of life theme, though these could simply be a variation on the venerative type
where fauna are confronted to the cross. Also as part of this third type are funerary
stelae where birds, generally eagles, perch above or below a cross, usually with orant
wings. [ECD308].

The beasts of Egyptian Christian art are not always easily identifiable. Apart from
some obviously fantastical creatures, there are some on the al-Ḥāmūlī manuscripts
that could be either lions or hooved creatures. Some of these bear a striking
resemblance to the drawings on the controversial Artemidorus papyrus. While not
wishing to engage here in a discussion about the authenticity or otherwise of the
papyrus, nonetheless, the similarity of some of the representations cannot be
ignored.

A pair of painted birds at Kellia, mentioned earlier, are particularly perplexing; they
are not ducks, doves or partridges, but appear to be a conflation of various types.
[ECD164]. They could also be quails, which are significant to Old Testament
themes while also occurring in Ancient Egyptian wall paintings. Attempting to guess
the artists’ intention is often a fruitless exercise, and as noted above, with the lack of a
definite classification we are apt to arrive at our own interpretations.

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2 The Artemidorus papyrus is widely believed to be an 18th-century fake. The al-Ḥāmūlī manuscripts
with their strange animals were discovered well after Artemidorus came to light, making for an
interesting situation. For general information on the papyrus see D’Alessio, Giambattista. 2009.
3 Rassart-Debergh, 1989, “Les Peintures”, p. 72. The image is from Qusţūr al-ʿIzaylah, Kom 19/20,
chamber 2, eastern wall to the south of the niche.
4 There are numerous references to quails, representing the bounty of God. Examples are Exodus
16:13; Numbers 11:31 and Psalms 105:40.
Generally fauna in sculptural pieces are easier to recognise though even here there are ambiguities. Beasts, that could be wild dogs, have been described by some as rams, and birds are similarly unclear in some instances. On the other hand, there are delicately carved-in-relief doves in marble from al-Baramūs monastery in Wādī al-Naṭrūn where there is no doubt about the artist’s intent. Severin is of the view that, as marble was imported, the designs used in marble were also introduced. This view may have merit where the entire piece, already carved, was purchased from a foreign workshop. However, in some instances the arrangement of fauna, and the beasts themselves, is particularly Egyptian in conception. It is possible that foreign workshops took commissions, and thus created specific designs, for the Egyptian market. Alternatively, it is possible that the marble blocks were imported and carved by experts in Egypt.

Faunal elements are also used in textiles. In a few instances animals are incorporated into a border of vines and scrolls. While birds and animals are common, it is less usual to see fish, other water creatures and insects. In this there is a clear divergence from Ancient Egyptian art in which the range of beasts, birds and insects was wide as well as clearly depicted.

The use of doves in Christian art is unsurprising given the role they play in various Bible stories. A dove features prominently in the story of Noah, and according to Eason in the flood stories of the Babylonians. In the New Testament the dove features in the story of Jesus’ baptism where the bird, embodying the Holy Spirit, descends from the heavens. Gilhus remarks that this appearance of the divine in animal form (as a dove) is at odds with the Christian context, but this ignores the fact that Christ is frequently represented as a lamb, more so in Byzantine and Western Christian art.

Peacocks are widely used in Egyptian Christian art and suggest immortality, given the ancient belief that their flesh was incorruptible. Thus, they become relevant to

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* Matthew 3:16. Further, the dove was one of a few symbols that was considered acceptable by Clement of Alexandria (Paedagogus, 3:11)
Resurrection themed paintings and carvings. Birds generally are thought to be messengers with their ability to soar high towards ‘heaven’.

In stone, usually said to be from Armant, are a number of stelae with eagles as mentioned earlier. The eagle is a symbol of power and occurs in pre-Christian cultures, for example, as a bearer of thunderbolts for Zeus. It became the symbol of the Roman emperor and empire. The eagle is also widely associated with St John the Evangelist, though their particular significance in Egyptian Christian art is not known. Several ‘Armant’ stelae bear the image of an eagle with wings upraised to encircle or ‘hold’ a wreathed cross. This could be taken to mean a devotion to the cross, or Christ, especially where the eagle holds the triumphal cross in embrace. In some instances, eagles are shown with small crosses held in their beaks, for example in some of the representations from Oxyrhynchus, published by Subías-Pascual. She regards the eagle as a psychopomp, or spirit guide, generally seen in a funerary context. As noted earlier, the Codex Glazier appears to have an eagle within the loop of the cross. Eagles and other birds are frequently depicted in this beak to chest posture, though not usually in Egyptian Christian art. The design of the bird in the loop of the Glazier cross could simply be the result of needing to fit the bird within the loop.

None of the birds that appear in Egyptian Christian art, unlike the animals of the wilderness, are exclusive to an Egyptian design lexicon.

**Geometric designs, including braiding**

Plaited designs are widely used to embellish the crosses, notably at Isnā and to some extent at Kellia. The knotwork is complicated, well planned and executed, especially at Isnā. Kellia’s examples are generally more loosely formed,

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4. These are generally referred to as the Armant-type stelae. Several are listed in Thomas, 2000, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*.
rudimentary and almost experimental, with one notable exception. [ECD182, ECD185].

The frontispieces recovered from al-Ḥāmūlī in the Fayyūm, now part of the Pierpont Morgan collection, all have Latin type crosses with braiding of various elaborate, sophisticated and diverse designs. The interlaced patterns appear to have been limited only by the artists’ imagination. The work is intricate and detailed and would have involved many hours of planning and execution. Though the frontispieces span the ninth and tenth centuries, and clearly would have involved several artists, there is a recognisable overall similarity in the designs. This suggests that they were either produced in the same scriptorium, or that the habit of creating elaborate interlaced crosses was a more widespread fashion at the time. It is hard to be certain without attested examples from other sites from the same period.

It is in the braided and knotwork patterns that the evolution of design in Christian Egypt is most evident. From the early examples at Kellia and Isnā to the much later instances from al-Ḥāmūlī there is a clear development of the patterns. While Isnā’s braided crosses are by no means unsophisticated, those of al-Ḥāmūlī are extremely complex and elaborate, using many colours and methods of inter-weaving the strands. In some instances the strands separate to include other, figurative, motifs.

Braided and knotwork motifs are not without significance, the inter-twining bands forming endless lines, which could be construed as signifying eternity. The endpiece of the Codex Glazier is a very fine early example that has been dated to the fifth to sixth century through carbon dating of its binding, and would therefore be much earlier than the ninth and tenth century frontispieces from al-Ḥāmūlī.

Bober, and later Hunt, have written about the braided design of the Codex Glazier and drawn attention to the nature of the plaiting executed in pigment, as well as the colours used. They remark on the use of ‘discontinuous ribbons’ where the coloured

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* See Alin Suciu’s blog: https://alinsuciu.com/2014/04/06/radiocarbon-dating-of-codex-glazier/
  He reports here on the carbon dating of the binding of Codex Glazier, which appears not to have been replaced, is not later than 598 CE. The earliest date is 420 CE. The end piece is therefore presumed to be of the same date.
strands disappear under other strands and emerge in a different colour. They both make the point that the torsaded design of this particular endpiece predates Hiberno-Saxon braiding and could even be one of the progenitors of what we know as Celtic knotwork.14

Not as complex though no less interesting is an apparently unique ansate cross with looped ribbons or bands, executed in wood, from the Louvre Museum, which could be considered a braided design. This is nowhere as elaborate as the painted examples, which is not surprising given the relative difficulty of creating such designs in wood. [ECD392].15 Nonetheless it shows an interesting streak of creativity and abstraction. Unfortunately provenance and dating are unknown.

Generally, stone carvings, while showing some braided designs, are also not as elaborate as those in plaster or parchment. However, Quibell’s 1912 excavation unearthed some examples from Saqqārah, one being an elaborately carved pillar with spiral fluting, around a central wreathed Greek cross, which recalls the looped designs of the braided crosses while itself not being braided. Another small slab shows rudimentary looped designs alongside a cross. [ECD240, ECD238].16

Aside from braiding, there are numerous geometric designs that occur in and around the crosses. Crosses can composed of rectangular, trapezoidal or rhomboidal axes, sometimes in varying combinations. This mixing of geometric shapes is particularly evident in ansate crosses. Moreover, geometric motifs such as diamonds, squares and circles are used to suggest gems with a cross at Bāwīt being a particularly good example. In pattée crosses, the arms can form convex or concave shapes. Geometric designs with and in the crosses mirror those that occur more generally in early Christian art in Egypt, such as in the faux architectural elements executed in paint or pigment. As an example, a repeated wall decoration at Bāwīt consists of linear crosses within circles.

14 Bober, 1967, “Glazier Codex”, pp. 32, 41. Bober regards the braiding of Codex Glazier to be a precursor of the Book of Durrow (circa 680) and the Lindisfarne Gospels (circa 698). Also: Hunt, 2000, Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam, pp. 2-4. Hunt describes the interlacing in detail and traces significant features such as the discontinuous colouring and interrupted flow of the ‘ribbons’ in Insular manuscripts of the second half of the 7th century, for example, the Durham Gospels and the Book of Durrow.

15 Rutschowscaya, 1986, Catalogue des bois # 512, Louvre Inventory AF 4903. Rutschowscaya sees this unusual design as an ansate cross where the loop is formed by two ribbons. The base of the cross appears within a triangle formed by a saltire cross or letter chi.

16 Quibell, 1912, Saqqara. Plates XI and XXXVIII.
Similar linear motifs incorporating or indeed forming crosses are seen in timber inlay such as on iconostasis screens and doors. The doors at Dayr al-Suryân, both to the haikal as well as the khurus, are a fine example of various types of geometric motifs seen in timber and ivory panels. The overall impression is one of harmony and complexity.

Vegetal motifs are also expressed in linear and geometric patterns, especially among the painted pattée crosses in the monasteries and hermitages of Isnā. These include triangular shapes similar to arrowheads and circular medallions in the place of flowers. Sauneron and Jacquet’s report has recreations of some of the designs that occur with the pattée crosses. [ECD207]. It is unlikely that such geometric patterns represent anything other than a play on design. This proliferation of geometric floral motifs is a particular feature of Isnā’s artistic repertoire.

Lastly, a geometric element seen at Isnā, with a more contemporary rendering at Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl in al-Naqlūn, is the composition of rows of crosses above doors and windows. At Isnā they appear as identical Greek crosses in two or more rows above and to the side of doors and windows. [ECD206]. The more contemporary rendering at al-Naqlūn shows them in moulded plaster, mirroring an arched door to the old church.

**Symbol types**

Under this category are crosses that appear with symbols such as alpha and omega, or stauromgrams (tau-rho) and christograms (chi-rho). These mixed elements often occur on stelae. An example of the funerary stele of a woman named Makaria, is thought to be from around Armant, and dates to between the fourth and sixth century. It displays four symbols in a row, a chi-rho, tau-rho, ansate cross and another chi-rho.

It is not uncommon to see two or more types of crosses together on funerary stelae, or a cross flanked by the Greek letters alpha and omega. This would appear to be a reference to the first and last chapters of the book of Revelation where the author, believed to be John the Apostle, says ‘.the Lord God says...I am the alpha and

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omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end. The text from Revelation is foreshadowed by a verse from Isaiah.172 Del Francia suggests that from the time of Constantine, alpha and omega were associated as victory symbols.173 Therefore, in a funerary context, flanking the cross, these motifs would encompass the notion of eternal life. A simple example of this is from the small mud-brick funerary structures attested at Karanis,171 while more sophisticated examples occur in stelae attributed to Armant. [ECD256, ECD266].174

Also seen, especially on funerary stelae, are aediculae housing a cross, birds or a human figure. Unfortunately many of these are of unknown provenance, including the well-known stele of Rhodia in the Bode Museum, in which an orant female figure stands beneath a gable, which contains an ansate cross flanked by alpha and omega symbols.175 A particularly ornate example is attributed to Isnā, and displays an eagle in a sharply gabled shrine in the upper register and two, arched, aediculae with small crosses in the lower register. [ECD275].176 In some instances the tops of the stelae are curved or pointed to mirror the gable. The use of aediculae would appear to be a Christian adaptation of a pagan artistic convention.

Also from Hellenic practice is the use of the shell motif, as distinct from a conch. Originally signifying Aphrodite, du Bourguet is of the view that this type of flat bi-valve shell was sometimes used simply as a design. He also notes the development of the design from simple and naturalistic to more stylised or even distorted.177 This is obvious in a stele of unknown provenance in the Coptic Museum where a shell forms the backdrop to a cross. In this instance the shell could even be construed as the tail of a peacock. [ECD313].178

Auth takes another view in that themes of birth and renewal can be garnered from the use of the shell motif, which she also connects with Aphrodite. She also notes the popularity of the design especially in textiles and suggests that the shell, in

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175 Crum, 1902. Catalogue général, Plates XXVII and XLIV. Coptic Museum #8557 and 8658.
177 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. #04.1845.
179 Coptic Museum #6259. I distinguish here between the occurrence of a conch shell (such as at Dura Europos) and the flat bi-valve type that occurs in Christian Egypt.
combination with other Nilotic motifs, is more likely to signify fertility and abundance.“This would suggest an apotropaic use, particularly when used on garments. However in the case of stelae, the shell in combination with the cross is more likely to encompass themes of rebirth.

**Figural types**

Figural crosses are not common in the Egyptian corpus. There are no crucifixes attested and no narrative scenes in the images collected, usually plentiful in Byzantine art from around the fifth century."

Of the figural crosses, there are two types. The first is where a face appears within the loop of an ansate type. This is attested in two stelae, very different in execution. The first appears to be an amateur rendition, where the cross itself could be read as a human figure. [ECD324]." The second example, published by Thomas, is of unknown provenance. This is a more practiced example, with an androgynous face within the loop. [ECD278]." This second example is quite close in appearance to a textile fragment, in which a face has been added to the loop of an ansate cross. [ECD338]."

It is hard to be certain whether these faces, open-eyed and beardless, are supposed to represent Christ. Certainly, it could be argued that they do, placed as they are in the context of a cross. Conversely, they could also represent venerated monks.

The second type of figural cross is a face and bust superimposed on a Latin type cross, generally at the point of intersection of the two arms, and is definitely a Christ-type. Again these are few in number, which in itself is noteworthy as by this time crucifixes were well attested in the Byzantine world. Examples occur at Kellia and al-Naqlûn. The Kellia example, from Quṣûr al-Rubâʾiyyât, has been recreated by Zibawi and shows the head and bust placed on the intersection of the arms of a gammed Latin-type cross. The Christ figure has a book in his left hand and the right raised in

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*Crum, 1902, *Catalogue général*, Plate XXX. Coptic Museum #8576.
*Thomas, 2000, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*, Fig. 110. The stele is described as being in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, though no current reference to it could be found there.
benediction, following standard Byzantine iconography. [ECD159]. This image is very similar to an imago clipeata, where a shield formed the background of the image, a device by which emperors and others were represented. If indeed an imago clipeata type representation was intended, a triumphal or imperial meaning could be suggested.

The al-Naqlūn images are from Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl. Both images are deteriorated, with one in especially poor condition. The first, personally photographed in 2015, is mentioned by Godlewski and is on the western wall of the narthex. The cross is within a circle, with the bust of Christ superimposed on it. The second image is in a poor state of repair, having been pitted and painted over with an image of the Virgin and Child. [ECD088]. The beardless figure is visible though the cross is barely discernable. The condition of these images precludes any specific analysis.

The dearth of crucifixal images in Egypt is initially surprising. In the few attested examples, in stelae and in paint, the images are always of a beardless (suggesting youthful) Christ, with eyes open. In other words, Christ is shown alive. There are no images of Christ’s suffering and death. Yet we know from early Coptic liturgy that prayers and hymns referred to Christ’s Passion, and we can surmise from this that the topic was not unknown. However, the focus was more on the Risen Christ, leading to the view that these crosses are Resurrection types. A brief examination of early Coptic liturgy shows that references to death and suffering are present, for example, in the Eucharistic prayer, but the focus is on the ‘victory sign of the cross’. Further, as the focus of the hymns and prayers would appear to be on the soteriological aspects of Christ’s suffering and death, we could surmise that visual representations of a youthful and alive Jesus reinforced these themes of salvation and hope.

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4 Maravela, Anastasia, Agnes Mihálykó, and Glenn Wehus. 2017. “A Coptic Liturgical Prayer for the Consecration of the Chalice.” *Archiv für Papyrussforschung* 63 (1): 204–30, pp. 207, 208. They discuss P.Oslo inv 1665, dating to between 7- and 8-century. The text of a consecratory prayer mentions the crucifixion but emphasises the will of Christ and the voluntary aspect of his suffering. See also O.Crum 6 (7-century) from the monastery of Phoibammon in translation (Mihálykó) refers to the victory sign of the cross, as does Vienna, KM inv K8586b, also 7-century which is almost identical in content to O.Crum 6. BKT VI 72, P.Berol 6751 is, like the others, a prayer of inclination before communication and also mentions the ‘victory sign of the cross’.

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Chapter 4 – Design & Symbolism
Plain types

These are crosses without any embellishment. There is not a great number of crosses that could be described as plain but they do exist as a sub-type. For example, an ansate cross in red pigment on a baptismal font at ʿAyn Jallāl is without embellishment, [ECD136]. As are many of the crosses at al-Bagawāt. The early dating of these examples might be a feature of their lack of embellishment.

Innemée cites an example from Dayr al-Baramūs, found on the wall of a small cistern near the bakery, which he suggested was meant to hold water for liturgical purposes. The cross is plain, Latin in type and seems to be of moulded plaster, of similar material to the wall on which it is placed. Arguably, in this instance, the cross was for blessing purposes and not intended to be widely seen which could account for its very basic appearance.

There are some plain types at Kellia, at odds with the usual colourful and imaginative renditions. Some of these are so rudimentary that it is possible they are incomplete sketches.

Crum’s catalogue also contains an example of a funerary stele with a cross, conflated with a staurogram, incised in outline only with no other embellishment. [ECD309]. This is at odds with the usually more elaborate stelae and could be a factor of cost or availability of skilled artisans.

Cryptic types

There are at least two motifs that can be described as cryptic. The first of these is a particular design that is occasionally seen in paint and stone, and which has been classified, by some, as a cross. This is a six-pointed motif contained within a circle. Occasionally the ‘arms’ of the motif are drawn or sculpted to resemble petals of a flower. At Isnā and Saqqārah such symbols are seen alongside crosses. In funerary
stelae they are occasionally seen within the loop of an ansate cross. The motif is also widely attested in ecclesiastical buildings in Syria.\footnote{Ferreira, 2004, Simbolos Cristianos. Fr. Romualdo provides several drawings of the six-pointed motif.}

Sauneron describes these symbols, painted on walls at Isnā, as crosses. For example, in Hermitage 7 a six-sided figure that could be a design of petals or bells, is described in his report as ‘cross #49’. \footnote{Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972. Esna Vol I. Plate XXV.} Similar motifs occur in stone at Saqqārah. A lintel from chamber 1793 displays two rosettes flanking a pattée cross, and there is a similar composition from outside a church. \footnote{Quibell, 1909, Saqqara. Plate XLVI is described as being from the north face of a pier in the mandara, south of the church; and Quibell, 1912. Saqqara, Plate XLV.} Floral motifs with five or six points are also seen within the loops of ansate crosses of unknown provenance. Crum’s catalogue not only shows an ansate cross with ‘petals’ that Sauneron would likely describe as a cross, but also another with a more clearly formed flower. \footnote{Crum, 1902, Catalogue général, Plates XXII, XXIII and XXI, for example. All three are in the Coptic Museum. #8531 and #8532 show a rosette in the loop and #8518 shows another floral design.} \footnote{Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972. Esna Vol I. Plate XXV.} Floral motifs with five or six points are also seen within the loops of ansate crosses of unknown provenance. Crum’s catalogue not only shows an ansate cross with ‘petals’ that Sauneron would likely describe as a cross, but also another with a more clearly formed flower. \footnote{Ferreira, 2004, Simbolos Cristianos. Fr. Romualdo provides several drawings of the six-pointed motif.}

The belief that such six-pointed figures are, in fact, crosses is also noted by Sulzberger who suggested that such a stylised star existed prior to Christianity though he provides no evidence of this. However, he does mention that the symbol could be a conflation of the Greek letters iota and chi, which could be read as a monogram for Iesous Christos.\footnote{Sulzberger, Max. 1925. “Le symbole de la croix et les monogrammes de Jésus chez les premiers chrétiens.” Byzantium 2: 337–453, pp. 396, 397.} This explanation would make more sense than describing them as crosses, and would explain their proximity to clearly defined crosses.

Finally, included in the cryptic types is the so-called winged ansate cross that has been mentioned earlier. These are mainly attested in stone in funerary stele, with a very elaborate example from Isnā. The lateral arms are so stylised that they bear little resemblance to the basic representation of an ansate cross. It is hard to know whether the intent of the sculptor was to represent an ansate cross, an angelic or human figure or perhaps a conflation of both.
Summary

This chapter has focussed on the design of Egyptian crosses and the attendant symbolism, where this can be gleaned. The study thus far has shown that there are four basic types of crosses in the period under review, with eight sub-types based on the form of embellishment. The crosses are almost always decorated and occur in a range of materials, with the designs mostly replicated across various media.

While it is widely believed that ansate crosses have a single progenitor, the ankh, it is possible that there is another antecedent in the so-called Resurrection crosses seen on Roman sarcophagi. Notwithstanding the indigenous influence seen in the ansate cross, it is not the dominant type in Egypt, with that honour going to quadrata types. The other basic types, apart from the ansate, are attested elsewhere across the Christian world.

Depending on one’s perspective, the artistic hand of the Byzantines, Greeks, Romans and Ancient Egyptians may be detected. Of these, perhaps the Byzantine is strongest. However the visual representations are rendered with ‘Coptic’ uniqueness, seen in the choice and manner of depicting the decorative elements. While gemmed crosses appear to have a Byzantine influence and theme, as do other processional and blessing crosses, those with animals of the Egyptian wilderness display more of a local repertoire. Vegetal motifs are generally too obscure or generic to attribute definite influence. Braiding seems have emerged in Egypt before it did in other areas, perhaps with the exception of Armenia, while other geometric motifs are very much part of the ‘Coptic’ design portfolio.

Narrative scenes are not attested, though the crosses are presented both in isolation and in tableaux with a variety of embellishments. It is difficult to know, in some instances, whether the decorative elements accompanying the crosses are intended to be read with them. It is possible where the faunal and vegetal elements are not in very close proximity to the crosses, that they are simply fillers, though this is unlikely. It is tempting to endow all the varied embellishments with significance. Not every decoration needs to have symbolic or cultural significance; some could have been incorporated purely as a matter of convention. Indeed, there is latitude of expression and even a sense of play in some of the representations and this must be taken into account when interpreting the designs. As there is little to suggest why the motifs occur as they do, reliance must be placed on ‘what’ rather than ‘why’. However, that
does not preclude a discussion on possible symbolic significance, bearing in mind cultural and local nuances. Difficulties also arise in attempting to interpret images that are greatly deteriorated, as is the case with many renditions.

An important finding is that there are no crucifixion scenes despite it being mentioned in liturgical texts. The focus, therefore, would appear to be on triumphal and transfigural imagery and on the soteriological qualities of the cross.

An overview of the corpus shows clearly that there is a great freedom of expression and a lack of constraint in the number and types of embellishments shown with the crosses, or indeed how they are represented. This would appear to demonstrate a sense, not only of inculturation where the cross is given a distinctly Egyptian context, but also a feeling of ownership where the artist and those who commissioned the images were comfortable with putting their own stamp on this most fundamental Christian symbol.

The following chapters will expand on typology through the lens of geography and chronology, and will examine the contexts and settings in which crosses occur.
Chapter 5 – Design, Dating & Location
Chapter 5 – Design, Dating and Location

The common thread running through this project is design. In the previous chapter the design of the four basic types and accompanying decorative elements were examined. In this chapter issues of chronology and geography are considered in relation to the designs. The chapter is supported by maps, which provide distribution of the various types. Dating charts are also included with the caveat that there continues to be some ambiguity in relation to chronology.

Dating

Early art historians such as Strzygowski and Wessel were pioneers in their attempts to identify and understand the differences both between ‘Coptic’ and other types of art, and to place it in historical context. While they were limited by the newness of the area of study, as well as their euro-centric view, their attempts to analyse the differences apparent to them, within the genre, were commendable though not necessarily plausible. Strzygowski believed Coptic art consisted of three elements; in spirit and technique he saw an Egyptian influence, the objects and types of representations he believed were Greek in origin, and the motifs mostly Syrian. In fact these delineations are not so clear or even credible. Issues with the need among some art historians to accord influence have been discussed earlier, and suffice to say here that the limitations of our experience or interests define our world view.

Wessel’s Koptische Kunst, originally published around the same time, expressed a similarly genuine interest and desire to understand the genre, but was again limited by his place in time. Not only did they grapple with how Coptic art could be defined, with Wessel according Strzygowski the honour of defining it as all late antique Egyptian art, but also with determining how it could be analysed. Wessel devoted an entire chapter to contrasting the different styles that he perceived within Egyptian Christian art, and came to the conclusion, like Strzygowski, that it was not a unified whole; rather, somewhat poetically, he described it as a ‘reservoir of diverse streams which do not merge into one type’. Again, this is not entirely true as there are congruencies between representations in paint, stone and textiles and a distinct development in certain types of designs. For example, rudimentary interlaced designs

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in stone are more developed in wall paintings but significantly more elaborate in codices.

It is therefore to Pierre du Bourguet that we turn for an analysis that attempted to unify the field, while still identifying four phases in the development of the art of the Copts, an approach that has also been summarised succinctly by Badawy. These delineations, based on successive centuries, are more fluid than fixed. Nonetheless it is helpful to consider how these proposed phases, expanded on below, correlate with the corpus of crosses.

Gabra, meanwhile, takes a different approach, preferring to use historic eras, rather than centuries, as markers. He reminds us that the so-called Coptic period is ill defined, though it is generally thought to stretch from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE to the Arab conquest in 641 CE, broadly the timespan suggested by Strzygowski. He makes the valid point that we do not refer to the pre-Christian era as ‘Pagan Egypt’ and suggests that instead of references to Christian Egypt it would be more accurate to refer to historic eras. This approach may also be of benefit in the study of design. Thus the crosses in the image collection date from possibly as early as the Severan era through Ummayad, Abbasid and Fatimid periods into the beginning of Mamluk rule. It incorporates the eras of Theodosius, and Justinian.

There is little hard evidence of how Christianity spread and how fast. Martin notes that by the mid third century Christianity was not confined to Alexandria but had spread to the delta and to what is now the east coastal area of Libya. As she suggests, the persecution associated with Decius allows us to follow the geographical and sociological expansion of Christianity. By the end of the Diocletianic era, Christian communities existed at Oxyrhynchus, Akhmīm and the Grand Oasis.

However, there are differing views about the rate of change, such as those of Wipszycka who believed the change was rapid, with the new faith dominant by the

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fourth century; and Rémondon who thought it was slower with only the end of the fourth century seeing strong signs of Christianity. Such discussions are relevant in attempting to date the material culture of Egyptian Christians. Bagnall rightly believed that statements such as those of Wipszycka and Rémondon were vague and, controversially, attempted a quantitative method based on onomastic changes to bring more evidence to the discussion. His hypothesis was that the increase in the use of Christian names denoted the growth in the number of adherents of the new faith. While no one disputed that Egypt was a Christian country by the sixth century, and that there was little material evidence prior to the third, the debate was more about the fourth century in particular, and the rate of change. Comparing the second and third centuries to the sixth and seventh, Bagnall noted the prevalence of pagan names in the former and Biblical names in the latter, his hypothesis being that Christians used Biblical names. His theory excited a chain of discussion, with Wipszycka questioning the validity of his method. While not exactly refuting his approach, she urged caution especially in regard to pagan names, which she perceived as neutral. Further, adding clarity to the issue, she noted that it was impossible to hide one’s beliefs in the small, tightly knit communities that people inhabited. Entire villages were either Christian or pagan during the fourth century and it was her view that social pressure played a part in the decisions of people to convert or not. She also did not think that the lack of Christian names denoted a fear of persecution as generally supposed. The published discussions between Bagnall and Wipszycka continued through the 1980s, with not much being added to the debate until Depauw and Clarysse decided to extend Bagnall’s quantitative study, albeit with more recent input. They concluded, eventually, that Christians were a sizable minority by the time of Constantine’s conversion in 313 CE and that by 380 CE when Theodosius decreed it to be the official religion, two-thirds of new born children were Christian. By the mid-fifth century, there was a clear majority of Christians.

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century they believe that pagans were in the minority. Nonetheless, pagans continued to exert influence well into the second half of the sixth century. For example, the pagan schools of philosophy at Alexandria not only endured until the second half of the sixth century but also continued to exert influence over Christian students and intellectuals.

However, the final word on the Christianisation of Egypt must go to Wipszycka who examined the social environments in late antique Egypt that most readily accepted Christianity. Saliently, she notes that we are limited in our information about pagans. It is true that literary texts, including hagiographical material, tell us little about the pagan population. Generally, in both ancient and modern works they are referred to as an amorphous group, without any in-depth attempts to delineate between surely what would have been a variety of ‘pagan’ mores. Whatever these pre-Christian traditions were, Wipszycka reminds us that Alexandria’s pagan cultural elite was still influential in the fifth century and that important families and law makers were pagan, or at best lukewarm Christians, until the sixth century. From this we can surmise that while pockets of Egypt adopted Christianity early, the lines between new and old traditions were blurred for a considerable period.

Returning to design and its evolution in Christian Egypt, du Bourguet and Badawy note the first phase is the forerunner of Coptic art. Of limited relevance to this study because of the paucity of Christian representations, nonetheless, it covers the period of the first three centuries in the Common Era or broadly the period covered by the reigns of Severus, Decius and Diocletian. In this phase pagan elements and styles are attested. As the foregoing discussion has shown, this was a period of uncertainty at best and persecution at worst for the newly developing Christian communities. Christian art from this period is scarce, perhaps not surprising given the political and social situation as well as the increasing spread of Christianity.

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Whether it is true that these early Christians, as Finney argues, had no material culture of their own is difficult to prove with any degree of certainty. As has been noted earlier, visual or artistic representations may not have been a priority for the newly developing communities. Certainly the subject of persecution is a recurring theme in the consideration of this early period. From a study of Christian burials Griggs notes the increase in deaths from trauma during this period, lending weight to the experience of persecution. He does also note the appearance of small metal quadrata-type crosses in head-west burials in the Fayûm, which he confidently states are from the second century onwards. If his dating is accurate, and on the surface it does appear implausible, these would be among the earliest Christian artefacts in Egypt, and would predate the ansate crosses, which are generally believed to be among the earliest representations.

The general thrust of such discussions, and a common assumption, is that it was Christians who were persecuted. However, there is strong evidence from the fourth and fifth century that they engaged in violent and destructive activities themselves. Emmel cites, in particular, two works of Shinûdah where he admits to being involved in the destruction of idols and defends the actions of himself and his followers, which would suggest that the validity of their actions had been challenged. His basic premise, couched in rhetoric, was an absolute abhorrence of graven images. Emmel believes that this type of forceful activity was not limited to the area around Atripe; some of this anti-pagan aggression could have been witnessed as early as the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria. It is clear that there was conflict between Christians and pagans over a fairly long period, but it is unclear whether it happened to the same degree all over Egypt and if so, whether it was in any way organised. Emmel is of the view that there was no uniform pattern.

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Frankfurter also notes the existence of documentary evidence that Christians instigated violence against pagans in the area around Panopolis (Akhmīm) in close proximity to Atripe. Further, and notably, he believes that conversions to Christianity were more the result of the destruction of pagan images, and presumably places of worship, than of discourse. Again, there is no suggestion that this was a uniform approach, and it would seem that there is strong evidence that pagan traditions continued well into the Christian era. As Frankfurter suggests, ancient cultic practices, which need to be seen in a domestic and local context, could not be put aside so easily. Thus not only was conversion not consistent, the practices and level of adherence to more ancient traditions would also have been uneven.

Compromise would therefore have been the reality in an environment where loyalty to earlier customs ran in tandem with the new beliefs. The actuality was that Christians, conflict aside, not only had to deal with their own pagan heritage and associated customs, but also had to contend with living with pagan contemporaries. The past was not far removed in daily practice. The artistic environment, already pluralistic, would have now seen the addition of a Christian design lexicon to existing themes and motifs. Indeed this duality, pagan and Christian, is present in much of the material evidence, especially that of an apotropaic nature. Crosses do not appear to be widely attested in this early period, other than those in the mummy portraits attributed to Antinoë, and in various papyrological documents that included the use of christograms and staurograms. Some of these early crosses have a relatively uncertain origin with similarities to the Ancient Egyptian ankh symbol as well as Latin type crosses superimposed with Roman victory wreaths, as has been elaborated on previously. This synthesis of ideas did not cease at the end of the period, as proposed by du Bourguet but persisted, to some extent, for several centuries.

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Spier, Jeffrey. 2009. *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 219, 220. Spier is one of several who discuss a Roman sarcophagus with scenes of Christ’s Passion. The artefact dates to around 350 CE, and was discovered near the catacomb of Domitilla in Rome. The ‘victory cross’ comprises a Latin-type cross, surmounted with a Chi-Rho within a wreath of laurel. Vatican Museum #31525.
The second phase, labelled as Proto-Coptic art by du Bourguet, is described as extending from the second half of the third century to the first half of the fifth century, and comprises indigenous Egyptian art from pagan and Christian sources. Much of the above discussion about conflict and assimilation of ideas applies equally to this phase, which included the conversion of Constantine, the Edict of Milan, the so-called discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem by the Empress Helena, the recognition of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire and the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon. It is in this period that we see the initial flowering of Christian art in Egypt, especially in places such as the southern oases of Dakhlah and Khârjah. By the fifth century there was a proliferation of ansate crosses, unique to Egypt, in the al-Bagawât necropolis. In this period, broadly, the Nag Hammadi codices were produced, sparsely decorated, but none the less displaying ansate crosses in one of the volumes and bindings. We can also place the mud-brick funerary stelae of Karanis, each with an ansate cross and alpha and omega symbols, in this period.

The third phase, labelled by du Bourguet and Badawy as ‘Coptic art proper’, is defined as having been developed by Christian Copts for their own use. This phase extends from the second half of the fifth century to the end of the seventh century. In terms of historic periods this would include the establishment of the Byzantine Empire, the Justinian era, the closure of pagan temples in Egypt, the Persian and Arab invasions, and the beginning of Umayyad rule. Politically and socially this was a period of much upheaval and change but Christians were sufficiently unaffected to continue to build and adorn churches and monasteries. In this period we see the flourishing of monastic settlements such as Isnâ, Bâwît and Saqqârah. The Kellia monasteries were thriving centres of artistic endeavour during this time and decoration of the church at Dayr al-Suryân had commenced.

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* See Timeline 1 in the Appendix B
It is in the third phase that we see the first flourishing of Egyptian Christian art, with a growing confidence of its own. During this period there was a sense of independence and assertiveness in the visual representations, not just in the themes but also in the manner in which they were expressed. For example, figural art by now displayed those characteristics that make them recognisably ‘Coptic’ including the disproportionate bodies, frontal orientation and large staring eyes. Facial features were made to mirror architectural elements, rather than attempting to depict reality. This is seen, for example, in instances where the arcs of eyebrows were aligned in parallel to the curvature of a niche in which the composition was placed. Bright colours were used in painted wall decorations, replicating architectural features that would otherwise not have been seen in humble mud-brick structures. This confidence and boldness of ideas, and a willingness to demonstrate a uniquely Egyptian Christian design ethic is also evidenced in the painted crosses, highly decorated funerary stelae and elaborate textiles.

It is in this period that an extensive range of crosses was produced at Kellia, Dayr Abū Fānah, Dayr Anbā Shinūdah, the monasteries and hermitages of Isnā, Dayr Apa Jeremiah in Saqqārah and Dayr Apa Apollo in Bāwīṭ. Stelae from Armant and textiles attributed to Akhmim also belong largely to this phase, though such designs persisted for centuries beyond.

Du Bourguet suggests that the fourth phase is defined as the period after the Arab conquest, from the mid-seventh to the twelfth centuries, that is, through the Ummayad, Abbasid and early part of the Mamluk era. It is notable that Christian art and motifs continued to flourish in this era. Ninth and tenth century scriptoria, notably in the Fayyūm, produced excellent illuminated codices, such as those from the al-Ḥāmūlī collection.* The elaborate program of redecoration at Dayr Anbā Antuniyyūs and Dayr al-Suryān, with no diminishing or covertness of Christian themes, occurred well into the Mamluk period.†

Dating the crosses and their decorative elements is not simply a matter of assigning them to the periods suggested above. This is not the least because traditional methods

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† Bolman, 2002, *Monastic Visions*, pp. 74-76. Bolman is of the view that the inclusion of a prominent painted cross in the artistic program of Dayr Anbā Antuniyyūs might have had a “pro-Christian, anti-Muslim resonance”. This appears unsubstantiated. See also Innemée’s updated (2016) entry in the Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia, online only: http://ccdl.libraries.clairemont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cce/id/2137.
of dating, by analogy, have been shown to be an inexact process in the context of early Christian Egypt. There are two factors at play here. The first is to assign a date to the monasteries themselves, and the second is to determine the age of the art and artefacts from those locations. A further impediment is the plethora of objects currently in museum collections around the world where location and context of the finds were never properly recorded. Absolute dating is rarely possible under these circumstances. Reliance is therefore usually placed on relative dating, often resulting in a wide timespan. For example, many ‘Coptic’ textile fragments are dated to between the third and eighth centuries. As Smalley has shown, in relation to Coptic footwear, a typological study is often necessary in such instances where scientific dating methods are not available.* For this project an examination of designs and a development of a typology has provided more clarity, especially in relation to the attested examples of ansate crosses.

One of the challenges of this project has been the identification of the corpus. Degradation of sites, notably in the delta and around Thebes has resulted in a corpus potentially more limited than would otherwise have been the case. The methods of early explorers and excavators has been mentioned before. Briefly, to reiterate, damage was done in the quest for deeper Pharaonic layers and less respect or regard paid to the later Christian strata. Thus sites, buildings and artefacts were either lost or inadequately recorded. This degradation continues to the present, generally in the quest for development such as railways, roads and growing population demands.

Some sites have proved to be more significant for the representations of crosses than others. The rich finds of crosses in areas such as the Fayyūm, Wādī al-Netflix, Scetis and the Khārjah oasis also serve as a reminder of what has been lost, and offer a caution in the analysis of the corpus. This project is clearly limited by the availability of finds at certain sites. It is also true that the image collection, upon which this project draws, will continue to grow as more information comes to light. By necessity, the timeframe dictated by this project relies on information available at the time of writing.

Apart from the degradation or disappearance of sites and their remains, images and murals have, in some instances, been repainted with more ‘modern’ designs, with the

attendant loss of representations from the earlier eras. This is the case in several monasteries including Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl (al-Naqlūn), Dayr al-Suryān and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. In the case of an important image of a figural cross at al-Naqlūn, the image was deliberately pitted so that a subsequent layer of plaster would adhere before being repainted. The uncovered original images are badly damaged and hard to decipher. The work of conservators is difficult and we are often left with incomplete or deteriorated images that cannot be properly analysed. While it is easy to see why painted images might have needed to have been cleaned and restored due to soot from oil lamps, dust and general deterioration, it is less clear why entire images, and in some instances programs, were totally replaced. For example, in the case of al-Naqlūn cited above, it is hard to know why an image of Christ on the cross was no longer considered suitable and replaced with another figurative image, this time of the Virgin and child. Painted images are also often anonymous and undated, leaving little hard evidence of date of production. Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs is one of the unusual examples where an entire artistic program can be dated and attributed to a single person.

The dating of monasteries relies initially on ancient sources, such as Abū al-Makārīm, which refer to particular monasteries and sites. Even here, al-Makārīm was a thirteenth-century monk whose accounts therefore fall outside of the main period of this study. In many instances the locations mentioned are untraceable. In others there are visible ruins and signs of ancient habitation. Where monasteries have been found and systematic excavation commenced, dating has relied on ceramic finds and coins. However, situations arise where both ceramic finds and coinage are from a later era than those suggested by the very early writers. An example of this is the monastery of Apa Jeremiah at Saqqārah. Quibell suggests a foundation date of 470 CE because early sources note that the monastery was in existence at the time of Emperor Anastasius (491-518 CE). However, Grossman notes that none of the extant remains are earlier than the sixth century, with most buildings dating to the seventh and eighth centuries. Similarly, the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bāwīt was said to have been

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Bolman, 2002, Monastic Visions, pp. 74-75.


Quibell, 1909, Saqqara, p. iii of the introduction. Quibell relies on John of Nikiou’s account, from around 630 CE, of the founding of the monastery.

founded between 386-388 CE, but Hadji-Minaglou notes that there is no archaeological evidence to support this dating. The oldest remains are from the end of the sixth century. Further, the use of *spolia* at Dayr Apa Apollo at Bāwīt also resulted in confusion. Assumptions were made, before the site had been well enough excavated, about the dating of artefacts and therefore the monastery, which have subsequently proved incorrect.

Other challenges in dating relate to the fraught history of the monasteries themselves, subject as they were to repeated attacks, destruction and damage. However, if dating of monasteries has proved to be an inexact science, dating of art and artefacts is beset with complexity and is a significant challenge to this project. Methods normally applied to ancient artefacts are not reliable with objects that were excavated in a seemingly random fashion by early archaeologists, with inadequate or no recording of find site and context, such as the exact location of the find within a building or landscape, its proximity to other related and unrelated items and the condition of the item. Assumptions were made by early excavators about objects, as for example with the dating of stone items, which disregarded the fact that they were reused and repurposed *spolia*. For example, it is not uncommon to see crosses and Christian inscriptions added to stone slabs that originally date from pre-Christian times.

Further, as we have seen in the discussion about authenticity, museums have occasionally been duped into purchasing fakes, which are sometimes reworked stone blocks. An exhibition held at Dumbarton Oaks focussed on the topic of fakes and is a demonstration of how many such artefacts came to be in the hands of over-enthusiastic collectors, including reputable museums. Vikan has demonstrated how features can be altered, lines more deeply incised and elements erased all through the friable nature of the indigenous sandstone.

Imprecise dating is evident in most international museums that have collections from Christian Egypt, even where the authenticity of the object is not queried. Many of

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Hadji-Minaglou, 2015, “Bawit”, p. 229. She relies on Rufinus’ account in Chapter 8 of *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*.


these artefacts came originally from private collectors and brokers. Thus we might know when the private owner purchased the object, from which vendor, and when the museum acquired it, but we are left with little or no information about the exact find site, the context within the find site and therefore the correct dating of the object.

Occasionally reliance must be placed on the design itself to arrive at an approximation of find site and date. For example, a particular type of stele may be said to be from Armant because of the iconography associated with it. This is more so when similar designs are seen in nearby locations, for example, Isnā and Armant, as is the case in a number of stelae purported to be from those places.

In the case of stelae it may also be possible to arrive at a date based on epigraphy, especially in funerary inscriptions where the person being commemorated can be linked to a particular time at the monastery. However, Tudor who made a study of Christian funerary stelae noted that even here reliable evidence is missing and dating, at best, is approximate. She suggests the inconclusive nature of dating material is not the least because cemeteries have been disturbed. Archaeological evidence, when present, therefore points to broad periods spanning several centuries.

In the case of textiles the find site is the first problem we encounter. Most textile finds were expeditiously and sometimes erroneously labelled as being from Akhmīm when they could have come from other sites. Akhmīm was indeed a textile centre; Strabo records that Panopolis (Akhmīm) was a settlement of linen and stone workers. Wipszycka suggests textile activity occurred in Akhmīm from the fourth century to the ninth century and that Antinoē is also sometimes listed as a find site for textiles. Fluck agrees that although the archaeological context is lost, Akhmīm was indeed one of the major find sites for textiles. The discovery of cemeteries in the late nineteenth century by people such as Maspero and Wilbour attracted scholars and dealers. Like others, she notes that the sites were plundered, and that the bulk of textile examples in European museums today came from this area. Significantly, she also believes that

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* Tudor, 2011, *Christian Funerary Stelae*, p. 135. She notes that the oldest Christian inscription in Egypt dates to 374 CE in Tell Atrib. She also notes (p. 2) that the majority of Christian funerary tablets, in museum collections around the world, lack accurate dating.


the stated provenance of Akhmim was often added to the find later and therefore needs to be treated with some caution.

Kendrick reports that from 1880 to 1920 a large amount of textile material was unearthed, and that excavators drew conclusions about the finds that would later be refuted. The textiles came from cemeteries in the infertile land beyond the limits of the annual flood. Shallow graves were easily plundered and garments torn from bodies. No records appear to have been made of actual find sites. Museums, perhaps in a rush to build up their collections of a newly opened market, were quick to purchase textile fragments from brokers without requiring adequate documentation. The textiles themselves were generally well preserved in the dry desert conditions until they were exposed, along with the corpses they covered. Artefacts were divided into desirable pieces and sold to competing buyers when the cemeteries first began to be excavated. Further, Persson notes that the salvaged articles that were stained or soiled from having been buried with the dead were often bleached or in other ways cleaned, thus altering the original item.

The widespread carelessness of this approach in the lack of adequate, or even basic, recording of find site and context, especially involving notable early archaeologists, and the complicity of reputable international museums in this practice, beggars belief.

Increasingly therefore, if find site and actual dating are contentious, we are left to rely on the design itself. An interesting approach is one that Doxiadis, and others before her, have taken in dating the mummy portraits. Based on hairstyle and dress she confidently dates the portraits with ansate crosses, said to be from Antinoë, to the Severan era, though she does admit that it is a contentious issue. She notes that Graf believed the portraits to be Hellenistic and even suggested a pre-Ptolemaic date, a view supported by Ebers, based to some extent on hairstyle and clothes.

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45 Kendrick, 1921, Catalogue of Textiles, pp. 1–3.
47 Doxiadis, 2000, Fayum Portraits, pp. 229–233. Theodor Graf was an Austrian businessman and art dealer (1840-1903) whose main interest was in the exhibition and sale of the mummy portraits. He thought the portraits were Hellenistic and even suggested a pre-Ptolemaic date. Graf engaged an Egyptologist, Georg Ebers, to publish his work, which resulted in booklets primarily to advertise the portraits for sale. Weighing up all the arguments, Doxiadis retains the view that hairstyle and dress are adequate indicators of dating.
Similarly, Rutschowscaya states that the tradition of the painted portrait, such as in the mummy portraits, is foreign to Egypt and from an earlier Graeco-Roman tradition. The practice of creating portraits to honour and glorify the dead meant that the deceased was painted in a flattering way, during his or her lifetime. She contends that such portraits, including hair and dress, were stylised and not representative of the era in which they were painted. If indeed the portraits were romanticised representations of the deceased, or images of how they would have liked to have been remembered, then hair and dress need not be indicators of the date of the painting.

However, Flinders Petrie was one of the pioneers in this field, having excavated the cemetery at Hawara in the Fayyūm in 1888 and again in 1910. It is to him that we owe an early scholarly discussion about the portraits. He believed that hair and beard styles were significant to dating the portraits, and he also took care to analyse the design of earrings and necklaces. An insight from his work underlined the provincial nature of Egypt where fashions could be as much as seventy years behind those in Rome. For example, his view was that women in the provinces were likely to be copying the styles of the wives of high Roman officials, who were in his view already ‘elderly’ and apparently set in their way of dressing by the time their husbands arrived in Egypt. Nonetheless, Flinders Petrie clearly believed that fashion in clothes, hair, beards and jewellery were an indication of date.

In the case of wall paintings the tendency is to depend on the broad range of dates of the monastery or hermitage where they were or are located. It is possible to be more accurate when several layers of plaster are in evidence, each with different programs and themes. Though the work of conservators it has been possible to narrow down the dating of particular layers of plaster as in the case of Dayr al-Suryān, Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs and Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl, where it is possible to see the different layers in situ. Occasionally it is also possible to date wall paintings from style, for example in figural paintings that show a particular type of garment or other detail. This is often less the situation with crosses that sometimes conform to a broadly unchanging type over a period of centuries.

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* The work of Karel Innemée and his team at Wādī al-Natrūn, Elizabeth Bolman and others at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, Dayr Anbā Bishāh and Dayr Anbā Shinṭādah and Wlodimir Godlewski and his team at al-Naqlūn have proved invaluable in the dating and general understanding of the wall paintings at those sites.
Hard stone and marble carvings have generally stood the test of time better than painted images. Funerary stele that carry inscriptions or references to people who can be traced to a certain period, give us a more accurate means of dating. However, international museums have stone and marble stelae, lintels and door jambs, many of which have only approximate information about chronology and provenance. As with textile examples, stelae are often attributed to a particular area based on design, for example, a particular iconography has been designated as being from Armant.

Objects that are found in proximity to other datable items are easier to assign to a period. For example, a wooden box for writing implements from Dayr al-Malāk Mīkhā’īl, can be assumed to be from approximately the same era as the al-Ḥāmūlī codices which can be accurately dated from colophons to the ninth and tenth centuries.\(^{51}\) Smaller wooden and bone items such as pendant crosses are generally grave goods and can be provisionally dated through an analysis of the other finds in proximity, as is the case with the pendant crosses from al-Naqlūn.\(^{52}\) Another example is a bone ansate cross, found at Banī Suef, which is approximately dated by the book of Psalms with which it was found.\(^{53}\)

While the codices from al-Ḥāmūlī can be dated accurately through colophons, the Codex Glazier and the Nag Hammadi finds have been more open to discussion. However, the bindings of Codex Glazier have now been accurately dated through carbon dating to the late sixth century and we can assume, as the bindings do not appear to have been changed, that the codex and its interesting end-piece, featuring an interlaced ansate cross, can also be located in this period.\(^{54}\) Using design as a dating criterion, the use of the ansate cross would also suggest a date not likely to be beyond the sixth century.

The debate about Nag Hammadi continues, along with questions about how the codices were found and the accuracy of the accounts about the exact site and manner in which they were brought to light. Sadly, the illegal market in artefacts has obscured

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\(^{51}\) Depuydt, 1993, *Album of Photographic Plates*, #398

\(^{52}\) Godlewski, 1999, “Naqlun: Excavations”, p. 132 refers to a small pendant cross that was found in a grave with other domestic objects.

\(^{53}\) Coptic Museum Inventory # 12488.

these important details. Lewis and Blount have collated a range of conflicting or barely verifiable accounts of the Nag Hammadi finds. However they agree on a fourth century date based on Athanasius’ festal letter of 367, in which he lists the books of the Biblical canon.† Jennot and Pagels concur with this date. † Lundhaug provides the most detailed discussion about the dating of the codices. He notes that Codex VII contains a letter in the binding cartonnage dated to 348 CE. This means that the binding and codex must be later than that date, but we do not know how much later. It could be as much as a hundred years later. Codex II does not contain any papyrus fragments in its binding and therefore has to be dated by palaeographic means and its similarity with other codices, notably Codex VII. The various proposed dates of the first or second half of the fourth century or even the early fifth century are uncertain, and Lundhaug believes the dating could even be as late as the second half of the fifth century. While it would appear that the codices in their container were buried as a result of Athanasius’ festal letter or the anti-Origenist purge of 399 CE, it is not possible to know the exact date they were hidden. † In their more recent publication Lundhaug and Jennot provide precise dates for three papyri contracts used in the cover of Codex VII and note that this only provides a terminus post quem of 348 CE for the cover. For the codices they now proposes a date of ‘fourth to well into the fifth and even beyond’. † The use of a design of ansate crosses in Codex I of the Nag Hammadi volumes, and on the binding of Codex II lends weight to a fourth to sixth century dating. [ECD021].

Terracotta objects are so ubiquitous around the Mediterranean that, aside from determining the place of origin based on the type of clay, little else can be said about the dating of design. This is not the least because the design of certain objects, such as terracotta lamps, did not vary across centuries. Similarly, while the iconography of pilgrim flasks might point to a location such as Dayr Abû Mînâ, dating is more ambiguous. In fact pilgrim flasks, identical in design to the originals, have continued to be manufactured on a mass scale.

† Codex 1, Plate 1 B and Codex 2’s binding of The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices. 1984. Leiden: Brill. The binding has three ansate crosses.
Overall there are few early records of commissioned art and artefacts, which would provide accurate dating. A notable exception comes from Dayr al-Suryān where we know for sure that the doors of the haikal and khūrus of the Church of the Virgin were commissioned in the time of Moses of Nisibis who presided over the monastery in the early part of the tenth century. We know from invoices that there were two types of imported timber used. Cedar or cypress was used for the jambs, lintels, thresholds and frames while paduk with ivory inlay was used for the decorative panels. The doors can be accurately dated to 926/927 CE. We also know which paintings were commissioned under Moses’ leadership of the monastery, though we do not know who commissioned or painted them. It is possible that wealthy parishioners or supplicants paid for particular panels in the khūrus. The proliferation of medical themes lends weight to this theory. [ECD101] The other instance of dated paintings, at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, has been mentioned earlier.

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* No author, 1911, “The Coptic Monasteries of the Wadi Natrun.”
* Note, for example, the painting of St Colluthos treating the eyes of a patient.
Date and location of the basic types

**Ansate**
[See Map 2, Appendix C]

Of the four basic types only the ansate cross is particular to Egypt and deserves special attention.

As has been discussed, the ansate cross is widely believed to derive from the ancient Egyptian *ankh*, a symbol of life. So firmly held is this belief that it is rarely called into question and is taken as an absolute by various scholars. However, as noted earlier, it is possible that there was also another progenitor: images from Roman sarcophagi of a victory wreath surmounted on a Latin type cross produce a shape very similar to an *ankh*-type cross.

From the attested material, allowing for but perhaps discounting Griggs’ view that *quadrata*-type crosses were attested in second-century graves in the Fayyûm, we can say that ansate crosses are among the earliest to appear in the design lexicon of Christian Egypt. They could be as early as the mummy portraits, loosely designated as being from Antinoë, where the deceased are portrayed with ansate crosses in hand, sometimes along with other iconographical features such as doves that could be construed as Christian. These could be dated to the Severan era based on the view that hairstyle and dress can be taken as adequate evidence of dating.∗

The ansate crosses of the Dākhlah and Khārjah oases would be the next in a chronological sequence. Bowen describes ansate crosses in two churches in the village of Ismant al-Khārāb in ancient Kellis. The village was occupied until the end of the fourth century and the churches are believed to date, from numismatic finds, to earlier in that century. The smaller church had small ansate crosses as part of the apse decoration. The bigger church’s decoration was very deteriorated, with an ansate cross having to be reconstructed from fallen plaster debris in front of the sanctuary. This cross, composed of a round loop in concentric circles and a design of dots, was 21 cm high and is very similar in appearance to crosses found in nearby al-Bagawāt. [ECD135].∗ From the much larger repertoire at al-Bagawāt it is clear that both

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circular and ovoid loops were used. Generally, unlike in the *ankh*, the loops are much larger in relation to the shafts. Decorative elements such as concentric circles, dots and other geometric elements are also attested, denoting a further point of deviation from the *ankh*. Fakhry dated the Khārjah representations to the fourth to fifth century, and more recently Cipriano has suggested a dating of fifth century.

The unusual squat pyramid-like mud brick funerary structures from Karanis inscribed with ansate crosses cannot be later than the fifth century, if Hodak’s view that Karanis was abandoned by the end of the fifth century, noted earlier, is accepted.

Textile examples of ansate crosses from various museum collections have been given an extremely broad span from the third to eighth centuries. This dating is more likely to be based on the textile type rather than the design. Discounting the earlier and later dates, and based on other attestations of this type of cross, these are also probably from the fifth to seventh centuries.

The ansate crosses of Dayr Abū Fānah are likely to be the next in chronological sequence. The design has by now developed from the basic though imaginative renderings in Khārjah and Karanis to more a sophisticated representation, incorporating faunal elements. A gemmed ansate cross is attested at Bāwīṭ, with a likely dating of sixth century.

Relatively early in the repertoire of monastic art, around the sixth century, ansate crosses seem to disappear from the Egyptian design lexicon. This is curious given the widely held belief that they were especially Egyptian in concept and that early Christians in Egypt were hostile to foreign ideas. Indeed, it is surprising that the ansate cross is not more widely attested, acknowledging of course that this is an assumption. As noted earlier, much of what existed in the Delta and other areas in terms of monasteries and visual representations are no longer extant. Care therefore needs to be taken in expressing the view that ansate crosses did not occur in Lower Egypt or that they did not persist beyond the sixth century.

* Clédat, 1904, *Baouit*. Plate XCIII. The gemmed ansate cross appears on the west wall of chapel XXVII.
Allowing for possible gaps in our knowledge about the Delta in particular, it is clear that the bulk of attested ansate crosses are from Middle and Upper Egypt, notably Khārjah oasis, and the area around Asyūt and Minyā, and Bāwṭīt. We also know without doubt that ansate crosses were attested at Karanis on the edge of the Fayyūm oasis and at al-Bahnasā (Oxyrhynchus). There are also examples from Antinoé and Akhmīm if those designated sites can be accepted. There are no attested examples from the Wāḍī al-Naṭrūn and Red Sea monasteries. Nor are there any at Kellia, or in Isnā’s wall decorations, two other sites where there is an abundance of crosses.

Ansate crosses are attested in funerary stelae from Isnā, Idfū and Armant.

Deterioration of sites in the Delta would preclude any further conclusions being drawn about the geographic spread of this type of cross. However, we do know that perhaps a prototype was noted in Alexandria because of the references to resignified ankh-type symbols in the temple of Serapis, but we should note the motivations of Christian reporters and writers here.

There are several funerary stelae with ansate crosses in the Coptic Museum whose provenance and dating are largely unknown, suggesting that they were removed or discovered away from their original sites, and were likely procured through brokers. This is also the case with several examples in the British Museum cited by Tudor. However, stylistic similarities suggest that they were from particular locations such as Armant or Isnā and therefore can be provisionally dated.

Thus, relying on attested examples, and allowing for some leeway in dating, ansate crosses cover the period from the late Severan period to the Justinianic era. It would appear that the type did not persist beyond the sixth century, though this might well prove incorrect. At this stage it would be little more than speculative to suggest why this type fell out of use, but it appears that it did. Modern Coptic designs rarely include an ansate cross, an exception being the logo of the St Mark Foundation for Coptic History Studies in Cairo. Any attempt to procure a crux ansata in Egypt today results in being given an ankh with a distinctly ovoid loop.

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71 See Tudor, 2011, *Christian Funerary Stelae*. Tudor’s images are provided on several plates.

72 The St Mark Foundation explains the derivation of the symbol as being from the ankh. [http://stmarkfoundation.com/about](http://stmarkfoundation.com/about)
Other types – Latin, Greek and Pattée

As was noted earlier, Latin and Greek crosses are ubiquitous in the Mediterranean world, contemporaneous with those attested in Egypt. These crosses themselves are in no way unique to Egypt. Where they diverge, in part, is in the type of accompanying flora and fauna, and the high degree of embellishment. This will be explored in more detail in the subsequent discussion about sub-types.

The simplicity of the design of Greek and Latin types have allowed for their inclusion in designs requiring symmetry such as the lintels and stelae of Saqqārah and Bāwīṭ. [ECD230]. Here they occur with sharply incised palmate leaves, and with flowers in the interstices. At Wāḍī al-NAṭrūn they occur in marble with confronted doves. [ECD400]. At Isnā multiple crosses of this type occur in around doors and windows. [ECD205, ECD206]. The types also occur in textiles and are especially prevalent in elaborated painted renditions.

Latin type crosses are attested relatively early in the Byzantine world and similarly occur quite early in Egypt. The crosses of Kellia would be exemplars. Not only does the design occur early in the representation of processional and other tanged crosses but also persists quite late, into and beyond the Mamluk period. Of all the types, the Latin cross is the most consistent. With the exception perhaps of Khārjah, it is well attested across the landscape. It is still in use in contemporary renditions of the Coptic cross, as well as in hand-made blessing and pendant crosses such as those produced today in Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs.

Factors that might have impacted on the dominance of Latin and Greek type crosses in the Christian world would include the pilgrimage of the Empress Helena to Jerusalem in the fourth century, possibly around 326-328 CE, with the purpose of finding the ‘True Cross’. It is possible that the importance given to this event brought the cruciform shape into prominence.

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* Quibell, 1909, *Saqqara*. Plate XXXIII shows one of a group of blocks from a screen between chambers 1704 and 1706.
* Evelyn White, 1921, “Wady ‘N Natrun”, pp. 54–62. The fragmentary marble panel was recovered from Dayr Anbā Maqār, dating is prior to 819 CE when the church was destroyed.
* Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, *Esna: Vol I*, p. 64. From Hermitage 9 there are two examples of serried rows of crosses around a door and window.
* Drijvers, 1992, *Helena Augusta*, p. 81. Drijvers notes that the legend of the True Cross probably came into being in the second half of the fourth century but that the attribution of the discovery to Helena is not based on historical evidence.
Much has also been written about another fourth century event – the incidence of the so-called ‘cross in the sky’ that occurred in Jerusalem in 351 CE, and was widely seen across the Holy Land. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote about the event in a letter to Constantius II, describing the phenomenon as taking the form of a cross:

“…at about nine in the morning, a gigantic cross was seen in the sky above holy Golgotha, extending as far as the Mount of Olives; not seen by one or two only, but clearly visible to the whole population of the city; nor, as might be expected, quickly vanishing like an optical illusion, but suspended for several hours above the earth…”

The description of this event would suggest that the apparition took a linear form, which could also have contributed to the popularity of quadrata types.

Pattée crosses are not as common as Latin and Greek types in Egypt. There are several examples from Syrian monasteries and ecclesiastical buildings that are very similar, if not identical to some Egyptian pattée crosses. Unfortunately we do not know the dating of the Syrian designs, nor is there contextual information. None the less, the proliferation and near identical nature of pattée designs in Syria provides a visual link to Egypt.

They appear around the same time in artistic representations as Latin and Greek crosses, and are particularly dominant in Isnā’s wall paintings, in various geometric compositions. They also occur in stone at Saqqārah and Bāwīṭ sometimes as part of commemorative stelae. The dating of these monasteries would suggest that the type was in use in the sixth and seventh centuries. However, beyond late antiquity these also fade from prominence while the Latin and Greek types prevail.

Pattée crosses in paint occur in Wādī al-Naṭrūn and almost identically in Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. However the most prolific attestation is in the monasteries and hermitages of Isnā. What particularly sets the Isnā crosses apart is the use of linear elements to provide embellishment. Highly stylised flora and other pendentalia occur in a series

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78 Ferreira, 2004, Simbolos Cristianos. No dating is provided.
of triangles and straight lines. [ECD207].\textsuperscript{79} These geometric motifs are not attested elsewhere in Egypt and do not appear to have been in use in Syria.

While the proliferation of ansate crosses is unique to Egypt and can convey the impression that the country was impervious to external influences, in Latin, Greek and pattée types we see a more global perspective. The Latin types with drapery such as those at Dayr Abū Fānah, Dayr al-Suryān and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs are similar to those at the Arian Baptistry at Ravenna. Ritual or processional crosses, prevalent in paint at Kellia, would seem to be influenced by Byzantine liturgical tradition where gold and silver crosses, studded with gems and \textit{pendantalia} are well attested.\textsuperscript{80} Transfigural crosses, signifying images of Christ Pantocrator, or along with the Four Living Creatures also follow a type known previously in the Mediterranean world. A notable example is the apse mosaic of St. Pudenziana in Rome.

Summarising the chronology of Egyptian crosses, and based on the available evidence, it would appear that ansate crosses were among the earliest representations occurring from the fourth or fifth century, or even earlier if the mummy portraits are taken into consideration. They also cease to appear relatively early. Pattée, Latin and Greek types are contemporaneous, occurring in artistic representations from around the fifth to sixth century. That is not to say that \textit{quadrata}-type crosses did not occur earlier in the Christian era. Naldini provides examples of correspondence from around the fourth century onwards which demonstrates the scribal practice of commencing a sentence with a small cross. This is also attested in papyri and ostraca.\textsuperscript{81} Along similar lines, Hurtado demonstrates how early forms of ansate crosses could be extrapolated from the conventions of writing \textit{nomina sacra}, the tau-rho symbol in particular. Curiously, while he devotes an entire chapter to scribal practices, he makes no mention of the small crosses used in texts and inscriptions.\textsuperscript{82} However, neither Naldini’s or Hurtado’s examples could be considered artistic representations, falling clearly into the realm of scribal convention.

Latin and Greek types persist until the present day. The so-called Coptic cross of modern times is a derivative of these two types, though the trefoil design was not

\begin{itemize}
\item Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, \textit{Esna: Vol I}, p. 70 – replications of the design elements that occur in the interstices of the pattée crosses.
\item See Cotsonis, 1994, \textit{Processional Crosses}. Cotsonis provides several images of gemmed processional crosses that closely resemble those of Kellia.
\end{itemize}
widely attested in the period covered by this project, with a prominent and notable exception at Wādī al-Naṭrūn. [ECD096]. Beyond the seventh century, Latin and Greek crosses become the dominant type.

A key point that emerges from the above discussion is that the apart from ansate crosses, the basic types attested in Egypt are not unique. Latin, Greek and pattée crosses are seen elsewhere in the Christian world in approximately the same era and in more or less the same way. Thus, the singularity of Egyptian design occurs in the sub-types, and largely relies on the motifs that accompany the crosses. A discussion of the chronology and location of the design elements of the sub-type follows.

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* The old church at Dayr al-Baramūs has a large cross with trefoil terminals dated to around the 7th century.
Dating and Location of the Design Elements

It became clear in the early stages of this project that a study of the four basic types of crosses attested in Egypt did not address the richness of the corpus. To analyse the crosses in more depth it was therefore essential to distinguish sub-types. As the divergence of designs stems from the decorative elements, this formed the basis of identifying the eight sub-types.

To reiterate, the eight design sub-types that traverse the basic forms are: ceremonial, vegetal, faunal, geometric, symbols, figural, plain and cryptic. Most of the sub-types can be further broken down, as will be seen. An analysis of the chronology and geography of the accompanying motifs follows.

**Ceremonial crosses**
[See Chart 1 and Map 3]

These can be described as crosses that represent liturgical, processional or theological purposes or constructs. The sub-types are gemmed, ritual, stepped, and draped. These have been classified as ceremonial because they appear to represent a ceremonial or liturgical function. For example, the gemmed crosses are likely to be representative of processional or blessing crosses.

**Gemmed crosses**

Perhaps some of the earliest examples of gemmed crosses occur in ansate form at al-Bagawāt in the Khārijah oasis, painted on walls, notably in chapel 25. These could date to the fifth century. [ECD118]. The gems are suggested by the inclusion of geometric medallions on the body of the cross.

The type occurs plentifully in Kellia in paint. [ECD165]. A fine example from Kellia, one of the few to be preserved, is part of the collection of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria where the gems are depicted in red and green on a gold body. These are several examples provided.

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* Rassart-Debergh, 1989, “Les peintures”, pp. 57–78. These are several examples provided.
The Cross in the Visual Culture of Christian Egypt

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[ECD224]. The Kellia and Suhāj examples are mostly all of Latin or Greek types, many with tongs suggestive of processional crosses. Other attested examples in coloured pigment are from Dayr Abū Fānah, one of which is an ansate cross. [ECD222].

Gemmed crosses in stone occur in Bāwīt and Saqqārah, also dating to sixth and seventh centuries, where the ‘gems’ might originally have been painted but now appear here as incised medallions. The type is attested in Greek, Latin and ansate types but not in pattée crosses as far as it is possible to determine.

Textiles examples are attributed to Akhmīm, of which there are a few examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum. [ECD340]. As provenance is unclear, it is hard to know the dating of textile finds, and speculatively they could occur both earlier and later than the stone and painted examples. The gems are generally circular medallions of various colours including white, purple and green on coloured backgrounds.

Aside from pigment on plaster, stone and textiles, the type is not attested in other media. The earliest dating of gemmed crosses could be fifth century at al-Bagawāt, though most are likely to be from the sixth century. The later date is more probable as gemmed crosses seem to derive from a Byzantine progenitor. Gemmed crosses are attested in Ravenna in the apse mosaic of St Apollinare in Classe, dated to the Justinianic era. They are not attested in later Egyptian examples where braided patterns seem to dominate.

While it is easy to surmise that gemmed crosses represent a liturgical function, we have no direct evidence that ansate crosses were ever used in this way. Therefore it is possible to speculate that the gems on ansate crosses are more representative of the precious nature of the cross.

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th centuries.

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89 See, for example, Victoria & Albert Museum #296-1889, also mentioned in Kendrick, 1921, Catalogue of Textiles Vol II. Fig. 11 shows Victoria & Albert Museum #1331-1888.
90 See Cotsonis, 1994, Processional Crosses.
Key Locations: al-Bagawāt, Kellia, Suhāj, Dayr Abū Fānah, Bāwīt, Saqqārah, Akhmīm.

**Ritual or blessing crosses**

There is a strong correlation between gemmed and ritual crosses. The distinction here is that ritual crosses are depicted without gems.

Ritual crosses, both processional and blessing, derive from the same Byzantine source as gemmed crosses. Processional crosses, as the name suggests, are those carried in religious or ritual processions. Blessing crosses are smaller hand held crosses. In Egyptian images it is impossible to tell the difference between processional and blessing types but the distinction is made because both were used in Byzantine ritual and were attested relatively early, perhaps around the fourth century.

Ritual crosses are mostly attested in paint, seemingly copies of three-dimensional objects. They occur infrequently in stone or other materials. In paint they are shown with a tang at the lower end of the vertical shaft, suggestive of a protrusion that may be placed into a stand or holder of some description. Painted crosses with tangs are seen at Kellia, Isnā and Suhāj, always of a Greek or Latin type. They are the dominant type at Kellia, occurring with *pendantalia* or with flora and fauna or with all three elements. Kellia’s crosses are likely to span the sixth and seventh centuries. They are also attested at Isnā from a similar period, though the renditions here are more geometric and less naturalistic than at Kellia. [ECD199].

Notably the ansate cross from Codex Glazier, dating to the sixth century, also has a tang suggestive of a ritual or blessing cross. The incorporation of this Byzantine element into a fundamentally Egyptian cross is unusual.

There are crosses from a later period at the church at Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl (al-Naqlūn) that also have long staffs suggestive of processional crosses. These would date to after the mid-tenth century.

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th centuries, and 10th century.

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Key Locations: Kellia, Suhâj, Isnâ, al-Bahnasâ (Oxyrhynchus), al-Naqlûn.

**Stepped crosses**

These are crosses that are placed on a platform, generally consisting of one or more steps. These are included in the ceremonial category because they appear to have a ceremonial significance in that they are raised above the plane, signifying perhaps placement on an altar or other elevation. Stepped crosses also occur in the Byzantine world, including on coins.

Such crosses are seen at a few sites, notably Dayr Abû Fânah in the apse painting of the main church, and Dayr Anbâ Antuniyûs in the niche of the parekklesion. The dating of the Abû Fânah example is likely to be around fifth to sixth century. Dayr Anbâ Antuniyûs’ example is from the thirteenth century while the building itself dates to the sixth century.  

Stepped crosses are quite widely attested in the ninth and tenth century al-Ḥâmûlî codices, especially in manuscripts 567, 570 and 610. In certain instances it is unclear whether the cross is on a step or on an elaborate serif. There are several other examples where the stepped platform is mirrored in the other terminals.

Thus the date range of stepped crosses is broad, from the earliest example at Dayr Abû Fânah in the fifth or sixth century through the ninth and tenth century at al-Ḥâmûlî to the latest at Dayr Anbâ Antuniyûs at the thirteenth century.

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th century, and 13th century.  
Key locations: Dayr Abû Fânah, al-Ḥâmûlî, Dayr Anbâ Antuniyûs.

**Draped crosses**

Attested examples of draped crosses are from Dayr Abû Fânah, Dayr al-Suryân in Wâdî al-Naṭrûn, Dayr Anbâ Shinûdah, and Dayr Anbâ Antuniyûs. The prototype here would appear to be a purple-draped cross in the Arian Baptistry at Ravenna.

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suggestive of a transfigural cross and which likely predates all the thus-far attested Egyptian examples."

Of the Egyptian examples, Dayr Abū Fānah would appear to be the earliest at approximately fifth to sixth century, very close in date to the Ravenna example. There are two very different examples at Dayr Abū Fānah, both in the sanctuary church. In one the drapery is likely to have been purple or red, now faded to brown, and is hung, almost like a himation over the arms of a simple cross. [ECD219]. This is similar in concept to the Ravenna example. The other is in the apse of the church, where the drapery is deep red, and the design closer to a cape than the himation arrangement. [ECD220]. The cross appears to emerge from the cast off red cloth. The drapery of the Dayr al-Suryān example is plain, green, and more like a cape than a draped cloth on the arms of the cross."

Conversely the drapery of the much later thirteenth century example from Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs is himation-like, across the arms of the cross and painted to emulate a very elaborately decorated textile as has been discussed earlier. To reiterate, the painted textile has parallels with those in the sixth-century Justinian panels from Ravenna though Bolman sees a closer relationship with a later example from St Isidore in Léon."

The ‘cape’ example from Dayr Abū Fānah and those at Dayr al-Suryān would appear to have a Resurrection theme, where the cloth is representative of a shroud that has been cast off.

The date range of draped crosses extends from the likely fifth or sixth century example from Dayr Abū Fānah, which would make it almost contemporaneous with Ravenna’s example, to the thirteenth century example from Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs.

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* Late 5th to early 6th century
* R. Unger’s photo: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deir_Abu_Fana_Court_Fresco.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deir_Abu_Fana_Court_Fresco.jpg)
* Bolman, 2002, Monastic Visions, p. 98. Bolman sees a link between the drapery from Léon (Spain) and that of St Antony. Conversely consider the panels showing Justinian and Theodora with elaborate depictions of patterned and brocaded fabrics.
Approximate date range: 5th to 7th century, and 13th century.

Key Locations: Dayr Abū Fānah, Dayr al-Suryān, Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, Dayr Anbā Shinūdah.

**Vegetal**

[See Chart 3 and Map 4]

Vegetal motifs encompass flowers, foliage and fruit. Floral and foliate designs are plentiful in the corpus and often establish the uniqueness of early Egyptian crosses. The sub-types of this category are specific, generic and tree of life designs.

**Specific plants**

Some of the recognisable and specific examples of plants seen with the crosses include vine leaves, grapes, pomegranates, palm branches, acanthus leaves, laurel and lilies.

Pomegranates are notable in the earlier layers from Dayr al-Suryān and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. Here they appear to sit at the top of a vine pattern that rises from the ground on either side of the cross to encircle it. The design occurs in the same red and green pattern at both sites. Other painted examples of flowers and fruit are often merely an approximation of the plant.

Bunches of grapes are a notable feature of an unusual limestone funerary stele where the orientation of the design is on the longitudinal axis, most stelae taking a latitudinal form. [ECD318]. Unfortunately the provenance of this piece in the Coptic Museum is unknown.

From Saqqārah there are stone examples of clearly and sharply incised palmate leaves and lily-type flowers. [ECD233].

In both paint and in stone, on stelae, and in varying degrees of artistic competence, there are palm leaves and branches. A highly unusual example is a cross from Kellia,
referred to before, that is composed entirely of palm leaves and branches. [ECD303, ECD148].

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th century.
Key Location: Saqqārah, Dayr al-Suryān, Dayr Anbā Antunīyūs, Akhmīm.

Generic plants

Generic vegetal representations are more common than specific types. In these designs it is not possible to identify the flower, leaf or fruit. Such designs are more plentiful at Kellia in paint than the specific types. For example there are unidentifiable plants that spring vine-like from the ground to encompass the crosses. There are also generic floral designs in the interstices of the crosses. [ECD142, ECD170]. At Isnā there are several attested examples of flora reduced to geometric motifs, with no apparent attempt at visual accuracy.

In stone at Saqqārah and Bāwwīt there are as many generic examples as specific.

The ninth and tenth century crosses of the al-Ḥāmūlī codices also display generic vegetal material. These appear as finials in the interstices of the crosses, and occasionally surrounding the crosses.

As noted earlier, this is one of the areas where Egyptian Christian art diverges from its pharaonic antecedent. In the latter case much attention is paid to the detail of flora and foliage. Thus it would appear that the inclusion of abundant but non-specific plants in the Christian images would denote a symbolic significance.

Approximate date range: 6th, 7th, 9th and 10th centuries.
Key Locations: Kellīa, Saqqārah, Bāwwīt, Isnā, al-Ḥāmūlī.

\* Coptic Museum #8554. This also appears in Crum, 1902, *Catalogue général*, Plate XXVII. Also see Rassart-Debergh, 1989, “Les peintures”. The painted cross composed of palm leaves from Quṣūr al-Rubā’īyyāt, kom 233, chamber 2/3, now in the Coptic Museum #12549.

Tree of Life designs

Tree of Life designs predate the Christian era and, as noted earlier, occur in several cultures. In Christian terms the motif picks up both on the tree of life in Genesis, as well as on the ‘tree’ of the Crucifixion. It is not surprising therefore that the designs occur in Egypt, or that they occur along with or conflated with crosses supporting Christian notions of eternal life. They are not widely attested in Egypt, but there are sufficient examples to denote a sub-type.

The motif occurs at al-Bagawāt where the arms of an ansate cross are extended to terminate in a vegetal design reminiscent of branches. This unusual and remarkable rendition is not repeated elsewhere. The dating is likely to be fourth or fifth century and is likely to be one of the earliest examples. [ECD115, ECD123].

A textile example from the Victoria and Albert Museum has a vegetal designs can be described with more certainty as tree of life motif. Whole trees are incorporated into a woven border along with hares and lions. [ECD341].

Kellia’s crosses, which appear with foliage and fauna, have been described as tree of life designs by van Moorsel. This view is not supported by Rassart-Debergh whose study of the crosses here is probably the more in-depth.

There are also funerary stelae of unknown provenance where one or more crosses are incorporated into a foliate design, generally also with fauna. These could be interpreted as tree of life designs.

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th centuries.
Key Locations: al-Bagawāt, Kellia, possibly Akhmīm.

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Genesis 2:9. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. New International Version (NIV).
Acts 5:30. The English Standard Version translates this verse as: The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree”, while NIV uses ‘cross’ instead of ‘tree’. The much older King James Version also uses ‘tree’. The original Greek word ξύλον could also be translated as wood, tree, beam, or pole.
Fakhry, 1951, El-Bagawat, Chapel 200. See also Cipriano, 2008, El-Bagawat, p. 276, for a photograph of this image.
Kendrick, 1921, Catalogue Vol 2. The Victoria & Albert Museum (#1328-1888) listing suggests a date of 4th to 6th century.
Faunal
[See Chart 4 and Map 5]

Faunal motifs occur frequently in the corpus of crosses in early Christian Egypt. As with vegetal designs, it is often in these that a uniquely Egyptian element emerges, generally in the choice of fauna. The sub-types are yoked animals bearing the weight of the cross, venerative fauna shown confronted to the cross, birds perched on the cross, and decorative fauna which are shown in proximity to the cross but which may or may not be related to it.

Birds are used extensively, in textiles, paint and stone. Peacocks and doves are plentiful as would be expected. Eagles are also attested as well as generic or ambiguous birds.

Animals include deer, gazelles and antelopes, lions, hares and a quantity of beasts that could only be described as imaginary. Notably, unlike in Ancient Egyptian art where they are plentiful, there are many Nilotic creatures such as crocodiles and various types of fish that do not appear to be part of the design selection.

Early examples such as those at Khārijah do not have fauna as part of the design scheme.

Yoked animals

This type is not widely attested in Egypt but is sufficiently remarkable to be deemed a type. A fine example of this type occurs in a wall painting at Dayr Abū Fānah where two yoked unicorns flank an ansate cross. In this type the animals are shown with their rear to the cross, but with their faces turned over their backs, seemingly gazing at the cross. The weight of the cross is across their shoulders. A similar example is the Dumbarton Oaks frieze mentioned by Frankfurter where antelopes are ‘bound’ to the cross. The suggested origin of this artefact is Minyā, which is proximate to Dayr Abū Fānah, and is consistent with a sixth to seventh century dating. The Abū Fānah example, being an ansate cross, is more likely to be from the sixth century.

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Approximate date range: 6th century.
Key Locations: Dayr Abū Fānah, Minyā.

Venerative

Venerative fauna includes both animals and birds. These are shown confronted in relation the cross and are described as venerative because of their placement at the foot of the cross, or in the lower quadrants. These representations are notably different to the yoked types in that the fauna do not bear the weight of the cross or even touch it. However in some instances they are shown with heads raised as if gazing at the cross.

Dayr Abū Fānah has an example of such a painted tableau with antelopes flanking a gemmed cross. The type occurs in multiple examples in Kellia, usually expressed quite simply. As noted earlier in at least one example from Kellia the birds cannot be definitely identified. [ECD164]. Dayr Anbā Shinūdah also has examples of crosses flanked by various matching sets of animals.

The type also occurs in stone, mainly on elaborately carved funerary stelae. On some there are multiple pairs of animals, not always matched, in the one composition. The complexity and professionalism of some of these pieces would suggest they were produced in artisanal workshops, suggesting perhaps that they were popular designs and possibly produced in numbers. [ECD328].

In the case of several stelae described as being from Armant, there is a single eagle, usually in a lower register to the cross, with wings outstretched in an orant position. [ECD269]. Some of these are finely carved. Similar examples come from Isnā, suggesting that these could be from sixth to seventh century. Such an eagle with an ansate cross in its beak also occurs in a wall painting from al-Bahnasā (Oxyrhynchus).

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* Crum, 1902, *Catalogue général*, Plate XLV. Coptic Museum #8665.
* Crum, 1902, *Catalogue général*, Plate XLV. Coptic Museum #8659. See also Thomas, 2000, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*, fig. 107.
The Codex Glazier has multiple birds with its elaborate cross, of which the two peacocks can be described as venerative.

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th century and 9th to 10th century.
Key Locations: Kellia, al-Bahnasā (Oxyrhynchus), Fayyūm (al-Hāmūlî).

**Perched**

The sixth century Codex Glazier, from Oxyrhynchus, has a fine example of a perched bird. More than one type of bird is shown in the end piece of this codex, including a perched bird on the lateral bar of the ansate cross and an eagle within the loop, which could be described as perched.

In some stelae, possibly from Armant and Isnā, there are multiple birds and animals in the one composition. While some of these appear to venerate the cross, others are at some distance from the cross and appear to perch in foliage. The dating and provenance of these are not known. Potentially these images, where the central cross is surrounded by dense foliage and perched birds, could be construed as tree of life designs.

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th century.
Key Locations: Kellia, al-Bahnasā (Oxyrhynchus), Armant, Isnā.

**Decorative**

While the term ‘decorative’ is used in this context, the point must be made that design elements seem rarely to be included for purely decorative purposes. Thus, fauna that could be interpreted as decorative are likely to be symbolic. We see this in the Antinoë mummy portraits. The image of a dove in the hands of a young boy could be a decorative device but is more likely to be symbolic of the Holy Spirit and therefore a Christian theme, in addition to the ansate cross that also occurs in the same image. [ECD057].

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Doxiadis, 2000, *Fayum Portraits*. Louvre Museum #6488. A young boy holds a pomegranate in his left hand and a dove and ansate cross in his right.
In certain instances the faunal elements of a composition are too far removed from the central cross to be classified as venerative. In some painted images the quality of the representation is so deteriorated that it is not possible, with any degree of accuracy, to determine the intent of the artist. For example, there could have been vegetal designs between the animals and the cross, providing a stronger visual link than appears in the damaged paintings. Such examples occur at Kellia where birds confront the cross but are seen at some distance from it. It is difficult to determine whether they should be interpreted as one composition. In an example from Shaykh al-Sa’id the painting is too deteriorated to judge whether elements in proximity to the cross are indeed meant to be read as a composite image.

The frontispieces of the al-Ḥāmūlī codices have been mentioned earlier and it is debateable whether the inclusion of crudely drawn animals, along with the sophisticated crosses, are intended as a venerative or decorative device. In some instances there is an animal in each of the quadrants created by the cross. The lower two are positioned in the same plane as the cross while the upper two are sometimes shown with feet to the top or top corners of the page. It is unclear whether these upside down beasts are intended to be decorative or have some symbolic meaning. The crosses themselves cannot be construed as anything other than upright, primarily because of the stepped base on which they stand.

There are three textile examples of a bird with a cross, said to be from Akhmīm, in the British Museum collection. The birds are the dominant element with the crosses relegated to small motifs in the corner of each piece. [ECD342, ECD343, ECD344]. Without seeing these textile pieces in context of an entire garment or furnishing, it is difficult to suggest that these are anything other than decorative.

Approximate date range: 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century, 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Key Locations: Antinoë, Kellia, Fayūm (al-Ḥāmūlī), Akhmīm.

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This point is made in acknowledgement of upside-down crosses, usually associated with St. Peter. Such crosses are not attested in Egypt.
British Museum 1891.0509.77 EA 22867 and 1981.0509.78 EA 22868, both dated to 5<sup>th</sup> century, and purchased from Wallis Budge in 1891.
Geometric motifs

[See Chart 5 and Map 6]

Geometric designs are popular in Egyptian Christian art. They occur in borders and painted ‘tiles’ and other architectural features on walls and floors of monastic and ecclesiastical buildings. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the same design elements occur with some of the crosses.

Crosses are either composed of geometric elements or with design features that are reduced to geometric motifs. They include circular and linear patterns as well as complex interlacing or braiding. Interlaced designs are outstandingly creative.

Circular motifs

The earliest expressions of circular designs are in the ansate crosses of the Khārjah and Dākhlah oases. Here we see the loops of crosses expressed as large circles, sometimes with several concentric rings forming bands, and occasionally dots within these.

From a later period circular patterns are also attested at Isnā, where pattée crosses occur within circles, and the crosses themselves form patterns of convex and concave arcs. [ECD203]. These are further embellished with motifs within the crosses and interstices. Similar crosses from a yet later period are also seen at Dayr al-Suryān and Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. [ECD089].

Approximate date range: 4th to 5th, 6th to 7th, 12th to 13th centuries.
Key Locations: Khārjah, Isnā, Wāḍi al-Naṭrūn, Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs.

Linear motifs

Linear motifs are dominant at Isnā. Here floral and vegetal motifs are reduced to lines, chevrons and triangles as has been captured in Sauneron’s report, which

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Cipriano, 2008, *El-Bagawat*. While the photographs show a realistic picture, the desecration and deterioration of the crosses makes the reading of the images more difficult.
Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, *Esna Vol I*. Plate XXV shows three such crosses in the oratory niche of Hermitage 3.
Author’s photos, February 2015.
provides drawings of these highly stylised elements. These representations are substantially different to the plethora of naturalistic floral and vegetal motifs at Kellia, and are finely imagined. The motifs occur in the interstices of the dominant pattée crosses, as well as on the arms of the crosses. The motifs are unique to Isnâ, which suggests that the artists at this monastic complex were not drawing on a common Egyptian design lexicon at the time. Combined with the number of pattée crosses similar to those in Syria, it could suggest a foreign influence, though this is not in any way proven.

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th-century.
Key Location: Isnâ.

Interlace/braiding

Early forms of interlacing at both Kellia and Isnâ are relatively basic. For example, at Kellia the interlacing can be as simple as two inter-twined lines forming a Latin-type cross. [ECD174]. At Isnâ the braiding is more complex with the outline of crosses filled with many interlaced lines. [ECD197]. Some of these are ritual or processional crosses with pendantalia suspended from the arms. While these crosses look relatively simple in paint on plaster, we know from the sixth century Codex Glazier that monks in scriptoria were already developing complex interlaced designs in colour. This codex would be contemporaneous with simpler braided designs at Kellia and Isnâ and shows a more sophisticated counterpart.

By the time the ninth and tenth century codices of al-Ḥāmūlī were produced, possibly at a scriptorium at Tebtunis, the complexity of the patterns has grown exponentially. Of the twenty frontispieces studied, no two have identical braiding as far as it is possible to determine from the deteriorated images. The designs are almost like textiles in the complex weaving of ribbons of colour to create patterns within patterns. In some the braiding is split to create medallions that hold other motifs. The variations in the designs of the al-Ḥāmūlī examples over the ninth and tenth centuries suggests that there were several people who were capable of producing these works of art. The sophistication of the interlacing contrasts with the more rustic-looking finials in the interstices of the crosses, and certainly even more so with the somewhat fantastical...
bestiary that surround the designs. Most of the al-Ḥāmūlī crosses in the Pierpont Morgan collection are of a Latin type, with steps or elaborate serifs, and it is noteworthy that there are no attested ansate examples from this collection though ansate crosses were known in the Fayyūm, evidenced by funerary monuments at Karanis.

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th, and 9th to 10th centuries.
Key Locations: Isnā, al-Bahnasā (Oxyrhynchus) and Fayyūm (al-Ḥāmūlī).

Repeated designs

The most notable example of a repeated design are the rows of small crosses at Isna arrayed around doors and windows. The simple, geometric form of these small crosses is in keeping with the dominance of geometric motifs at Isnā.\(^a\)

The occurrence of similar rows of crosses in raised plaster in a modern rendition at the entrance to the present church of Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl at al-Naqlūn would suggest that the popularity of the design endured. That said, apart from Isnā, there are no other early attested examples of this type of repeated again. Again, this could demonstrate that Isnā was subject to influences from outside Egypt.

A row of repeated ansate crosses occurs as a decoration on painted drapery from Oxyrhynchus.\(^a\) It also occurs in textiles purported to be from Akhmīm, [ECD337],\(^a\) and in a border design in one of the volumes of the Nag Hammadi codices. [ECD058].\(^a\)

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th century.
Key Locations: Isnā, Akhmīm, Nag Hammadi.

\(^a\) Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972. Esna Vol I. As noted earlier, the report provides recreations of these rows of crosses seen at Hermitage 9, at the doorway to the oratory and around a circular window opening.
\(^a\) Subías Pascual, 2003, La Corona, p. 50.
\(^a\) Codex I, Plate I B, of the Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices.
Symbols
[See Chart 6 and Map 7]

Symbols such as christograms, staurograms, alpha and omega, aediculae and shells are used as decorative elements.

Christograms and Staurograms
These symbols occur in stone stelae from Armant and Saqqārah and in textiles from Akhmīm. The earliest examples are likely to be those at Khārjah, while the few attested in the Nag Hammadi codices would also be from a similar period. At Khārjah they occasionally occur within the loop of an ansate cross, or as an independent motif. [ECD114, ECD116].

An outstanding example occurs at Qusṭ Kellia where an opus sectile staurogram was discovered. Composed of glass tesserae, it is unlike the usual Kellia depictions. The discovery of the remains of this panel in situ show that it was incorporated into a rendered wall after the mid fifth century and probably remained on the wall until the ruin of the building in the second half of the seventh century. [ECD017].

In some stelae a christogram or staurogram is seen in an upper or lower register with either an ansate or another type of cross in the accompanying register. Unfortunately many of these are of unknown or uncertain provenance.

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th century.
Key Locations: Khārjah, Kellia, stelae of unknown provenance.

Multiple crosses
There are attested examples of different types of crosses on the one artefact. On funerary stelae it is common to see two types together, with one being dominant. Generally an ansate cross is juxtaposed with one or more Greek or Latin crosses. Occasionally there is a dominant Greek type with smaller ansates in a different


register. Examples are from Arman and Isnā as well as artefacts of uncertain provenance in museum collections. [ECD265].

Khārjah also has examples of ansate crosses with another type of cross within the loop.

The appearance of two or more types in the one artefact is proof that the types ran concurrently, for a period at least. Generally, as ansate crosses are not widely attested beyond the sixth century, we can assume that where an ansate cross was used the artefact does not date beyond that period. This could be helpful in dating some of the stelae which are, as yet, undated.

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th century.
Key Locations: Khārjah, Arman, Isnā.

Alpha and Omega

The use of alpha and omega alongside a cross is a relatively common device, not particular to Egypt. The symbols occur flanking various types of crosses on funerary stelae and also in paint. [ECD314]. Zibawi provides a sketch of a gemmed Latin cross from Kellia’s Quṣūr al-Ḥijaylah with confronted animals that he describes as rams, though they could be other quadrupeds, and with pendant alpha and omega symbols suspended from the arms.

The pyramidical funerary structures at Karanis have alpha and omega symbols, as do a number of stelae of uncertain or unknown provenance. An atypical example that does not conform the usual style of funerary stelae is from Kom Ishqāw, and is most likely a repurposed tomb from an earlier era that has had Christian symbols added. [ECD291].

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th century.

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Tudor, 2011, *Christian Funerary Stelae*. Plate 420 has an image of a stele from the British Museum said to be from Arman, EA 679.

An example is the grave stele of Rhodia, from the Bode Museum, Berlin, #9666. Alpha and omega symbols flank an ansate cross. Provenance unknown.


Key Locations: Kellia, Karanis, Saqqārah, Kom Ishqāw, stelae of unknown provenance.

Aediculae

In stelae the cross is occasionally placed within a gabled ‘shrine’ or aedicule. This type is attested at Armant, Bāwīṭ, Isnā, Kom Ishqāw as well as examples of unknown or uncertain provenance in various museums. [ECD262]. The device is fairly widespread on Egyptian Christian stelae in a funerary context. The gables and supporting pillars are depicted in varying degrees of complexity and sophistication. Occasionally there are figural and vegetal elements included.

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th century.
Key Locations: Armant, Isnā, Bāwīṭ, Kom Ishqāw.

Shell

The shell is a relatively common motif seen with the cross. As has been explained earlier, the distinction is made here between a conch, such as that seen in the Torah niche of the synagogue at Dura Europos and a more simple bi-valve shell. In Egyptian Christian art it is more common to see a bi-valve shell, which is sometimes highly stylised to resemble a fan or a peacock’s tail. In some sculptural examples it can also resemble the hood of a cobra.

Shells are usually attested in stone. On occasion the cross is couched on the shell, suggestive of a pearl. In other instances the shells appears in the gable of an aedicule. [ECD276]. Examples are from Bāwīṭ, Isnā, Kom Ishqāw and the church of Abū Sarjah in Fustat.

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th century.
Key Locations: Bāwīṭ, Isnā, Fustat (Abū Sarjah).

Tudor, 2011, Christian Funerary Stelae. British Museum EA 1463 is shown on plate 421.
Crum, 1902, Catalogue général, Plate XLVI. Coptic Museum #8671.
Figural
[See Chart 7 and Map 8]

Figural crosses are those that bear a representation of Christ. They fall into two categories; those with the face only and those with the bust of Christ."

*Face only*

There are a limited number of examples, in various media, of a face superimposed on a cross. In some instances these faces are quite generic, beardless, and can only be assumed to represent Christ. A textile example in the Victoria and Albert Museum shows a beardless face that was added to the loop of an ansate cross, though at a later date than the original textile. The dating is not known but it is possible to speculate, because of the use of an ansate cross, that it is from the fifth to sixth century.

Examples of ansate crosses in stone with a face within the loop of an ansate cross are also attested. One, in the Metropolitan Museum shows a generic, beardless face said to be from Akhmīm. It is undated but is not likely to be beyond the sixth century." Another example is of an fifth century copper amulet with a tau-cross surmounted with a face, thought to be Christ, turned to the left, with raised left hand possibly in a gesture of blessing. [ECD041]."

There is also an example of a very amateur representation of an ansate cross in stone with a face, or it could be a whole body. It is unclear whether this is supposed to represent Christ or a monk."

Approximate date range: Unlikely beyond the 6th century.
Location: Akhmīm, Armant, unknown provenance.

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" Victoria & Albert Museum, #259-1890. See Kendrick, 1920, *Catalogue of Textiles II*. The face is thought to have been added to the piece later.

" Thomas, 2000, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*, fig. 110.


" Crum, 1902. *Catalogue général*, Plate XXX. Coptic Museum #8576
**Face and Bust**

There are not many attestations of this type of image in Egypt. Two appear at Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl (al-Naqlūn) and one at Kellia’s Quṣṭur al-Rubbā‘īyyāt, from the fifth to seventh century. The Naqlūn images are after the early ninth century, therefore much later than similar Byzantine examples. Another example is seen on one of the al-Ḥāmtūl frontispieces now in the Pierpont Morgan collection. [ECD079].

Approximate date range: 5th to 7th, 9th and 10th century.

**Plain crosses**
[See Chart 8 and Map 9]

Among the hundreds of embellished crosses are a few that occur without any decoration, and are also recognised as a sub-type. Generally these are on simple domestic objects such as combs (Antinoē) [ECD384], plates (Kellia) [ECD005], containers for writing implements (al-Ḥāmtūl) [ECD378], and small pendant crosses of wood and bone (al-Naqlūn), [ECD018]. Plain crosses are also seen on terracotta lamps and metal ware. They are also attested on book bindings, and in modest architectural features such as a plaster cross in a bakery at Dayr al-Baramūs [ECD048], and a small so-called window aperture from St. Epiphanious, [ECD389]. Plain crosses were also used as grave markers.
In the Khārijjah oasis they are attested in numbers, including a plain red ansate cross on the side of a baptismal font at `Ayn Jallāl, [ECD136].” Plain crosses also occur, in small numbers, on stelae, in contrast to some of the highly decorated examples.

The earliest of the plain crosses would be at the southern oases. The later ones would include the pencil box from al-Ḥāmūlt. An interesting example of plain crosses are the tenth-century wooden doors at Dayr al-Suryān and the iconostasis screen at several monasteries and churches. While the wooden inlay crosses themselves are plain and simple, the composite patterns created by them are complex.

Approximate date range: 4th to 10th century.
Key Location: Khārijjah, Wādī al-Naṭrūn.

Cryptic Crosses
[See Chart 9 and Map 10]
These are motifs that some have interpreted as crosses, though there is sufficient ambiguity to question their intent.

Six pointed motifs
There are several examples from Saqqārah and also from Isnā of six-pointed figures either within a circle or without. These could be interpreted as floral designs or wheels, and are sometimes described as rosettes.” However, several notable people including Quibell, and Sauneron, regard these as crosses without proffering an explanation as to their view. Sulzberger’s opinion that these were conflations of I and X signifying the Greek iesous Christos is entirely plausible and would make sense seen in proximity to crosses.”

In Saqqārah such motifs appear on lintels often flanking a more conventional cross. [ECD241].” On occasion the design is seen within the loop of an ansate cross. [ECD322].” Such motifs are also well known in a Syrian context where they occur on

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2 Sauneron and Jacquet, 1972, Esna Vol I. Plate XXV. Hermitage 7, cross #49.
3 Sulzberger, 1925, “Le symbole de la croix, p. 397.
4 Quibell, 1909, Saqqara. Plate XLV.
5 Crum, 1902, Catalogue général. Plate XXII. Coptic Museum #8531.
ecclesiastical buildings. Their intent is inconclusive though, as noted earlier, they could also be stylised christograms.

Approximate date range: 6th and 7th centuries.
Key Locations: Isnā, Saqqārah.

*Ansate with ‘wings’*

Included under the heading of cryptic crosses are those ansate crosses with elaborately flaring arms and distinctly triangular vertical shafts, which could be construed as human or heavenly beings. A particularly notable example occurs at Isnā on a stele, where there are two such motifs side by side. [ECD272]. This type of image occurs on several other stelae, where it seems to be a popular design, but is not seen to a great extent in pigment on plaster, with the exception of a few at al-Bagawāt. The inclusion on funerary stelae would suggest that they are crosses, though in these designs we see an elaboration almost to the point of abstraction.

Approximate date range: 6th to 7th century.
Key Locations: Isnā, Armant.

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* Ferreira, 2004, *Simbolos Cristianos*. Fr. Romualdo provides several examples of such images.
* Crum, 1902, *Catalogue général*. Plate XXIX. Coptic Museum #8567.
Summary

The first part of this chapter dealt with general issues of dating of crosses in Egypt with a focus on the four basic types and the primary locations where they are attested. The problem of absolute dating, resulting from inadequate documentation and recording, and questionable excavation methods, has meant that reliance often has to placed on design or inscriptions to arrive at an approximate date. A further complication is the way in which artefacts have been sourced by various international museum collections. The corpus and the extent of our knowledge about sites are such that visual representations are accorded a fairly wide date range, sometimes with a span of several centuries. Apart from early attestations at Dākhlah and Khārijah, the bulk of the corpus is from the sixth and seventh century based on the timespan of the monasteries in which the representations occur.

There are some notable exceptions where an exact date is known, such as the purchase and installation of the doors to the khūrus and haikal of Dayr al-Suryān in Wādī al-Natrūn, and the artistic program of the Great Church at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. Another exception is the collection of frontispieces from al-Ḥāmūlī in the Fayyūm, which are accurately dated by their colophons to the ninth and tenth century.

The second part of the chapter elaborated on a typology based on the design elements, resulting in eight sub-types, each with further variations. The locations in which the designs occurred were noted and an approximate date, based on what is known about the timespan of the monasteries was accorded. As such, there is room for speculation and error, which may be remedied as more details emerge in the future.

As things stand, the analysis has confirmed that there is no one dominant type of cross, though certain locations appear to have a preferred type. Thus, we have a proliferation of ansate crosses at al-Bagawāt, tanged crosses at Kellia and pattée designs at Isnā. These three sites have the most abundant collection of crosses, and contrast to others such as Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs where, despite the elaborate draped cross, the focus is more on figurative representations. Among the attested funerary stelae, while many are as yet of unknown provenance, there are design similarities with those attributed to Armant and Isnā.
A final analysis of the designs that remains to be done is one of context, where the locations and settings of the crosses are examined to give as comprehensive picture as possible of the corpus. This is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 6 – Design in Context

The focus of this chapter is on context and setting, where this information is available or can be speculated. It considers why crosses were incorporated into the most seemingly mundane of objects as well as into formal settings, leading to an exploration of the possible functions that the cross fulfilled in Christian Egypt.

Van Moorsel, writing about representations of the cross at Saqqara, cautions about focussing on detail without placing it in context and adds that this is seldom possible as excavations have failed to provide the complete picture. This has been a perennial problem for any analysis of the material culture of Christian Egypt, and has proved to be the case for this project. The issue of the cavalier approach taken by early explorers with regard to Christian sites and artefacts, and the need for various amateur excavators and brokers to meet the demands of the market for antiquities, has been discussed earlier. Objects not actually plundered have been found scattered within ruined monastic complexes leading to conjecture about their exact original location and therefore context. Suffice to say that many items have found their way into international museum collections without adequate contextual information.

The issue of context is complex and multifaceted. Indeed, as van Loon notes, to deal properly with context needs an inter-disciplinary approach as no one person can be an expert in all areas. We need to bring into play experts in art, architecture, archaeology, theology, liturgy and hagiography. We also need geographers and historians. This art historical study on the design of crosses has been limited by the dearth of textual material on how the cross was used in liturgy and ritual in Egypt. Apart from a few anaphoras, there is little mention of crosses and how they were used in ceremonial situations. It has also been limited by issues of dating and provenance alluded to earlier. There is a gap between the information that one might wish was available and what is actually known.


Thus this chapter focuses on the settings in which the crosses occur, as a means to understanding context. It also considers the uses to which the crosses were put, noting as Belting suggests, that images often reveal their meaning by their purpose.

The range of objects on which crosses are seen is extensive, occurring in varying degrees of rusticity and refinement. The crosses themselves vary in their representations. In wall paintings, they range from rudimentary to elaborate and are attested in monasteries, hermitages, chapels and churches. They are abundant on funerary stelae, following a typology that varies from simple to ornate. They also occur in codices, sometimes as simple borders quite ancillary to the text, and at other times as striking frontispieces. As Bolman suggests, these visual representations had a purpose other than mere ornamentation. They had a strong spiritual and sometimes mystical element, with repeated themes and motifs responding to the needs of monastic and lay communities.

Crosses are also attested on the most commonplace of articles as well as more formal ritual objects, and on rustic items of personal adornment as well as on expensive ornaments. The range of items that includes crosses is more extensive than would be seen in a modern western context; for example it would be rare today to see crosses on crockery and storage utensils.

The basic issue, therefore, guiding this chapter is the subject of design in the various contexts and settings in which the cross is attested. While it might be seen to be reasonable practice to place crosses on liturgical and ceremonial objects, and in churches and sacralised spaces, the intention of lay people and monks in incorporating the symbol into domestic and everyday items that do not have a venerative function is initially perplexing to the modern observer.

The key point is that crosses were used in all manner of situations from the everyday and mundane to the ceremonial and ritual. The placement of a cross on an object did not necessarily sacralise it, though van Moorsel felt that painted crosses, specifically in relation to those at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, were used to consecrate images of

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saints. However it is clear that crosses did serve as markers of Christian faith and hope, or the promise of blessing and protection.

The crosses and their settings are analysed by contrasting representations in and on secular and sacralised objects and spaces. As Brooks Hedstrom notes, the usual spatial distinction of sacred and profane is forced in a monastic context. It cannot be used here in attempting to understand context and setting. The practicalities of monasticism generated a particular type of life. Differences were apparent in the most elemental ways of living such as in food, dress and dwelling space. The choice to analyse the representations of crosses by a different measure, that of secular and sacred or sacralised is admittedly also blurred and potentially problematic, in that we cannot know how these states were perceived in regard to monastic spaces. However, there are sufficient notable differences in the objects and representations to suggest its validity as a point of divergence.

An adjunct to the distinction between sacred or sacralised and secular as an acceptable means to examine the corpus, is the consideration about the iconic nature of some of Egypt’s crosses. An icon generally suggests a figurative representation, though as Ouspensky notes, it is not simply an image, decoration or scriptural illustration. An icon is more than that; it is an object of worship for some or of contemplation at the very least. Crosses were held in particular reverence across the Christian world; for example Mango cites the letter of Nilus of Sinai’s to Prefect Olympiodorus where he talks about the distraction of too much decoration in churches. He recommends the use of a single cross in the sanctuary as a symbol to focus the mind on hope and salvation brought through Christ. In other words, the cross was a reminder of Christ himself.

The corpus shows that Egypt’s crosses did not suffer a lack of what might be perceived as distracting decoration, given the tradition of embellishment. Plain crosses were uncommon. Figural crosses, that is, depicting the body of Christ were extremely rare. Thus to a casual observer the crosses could be regarded as aniconic.

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However it is clear that these superficially aniconic images performed, in some instances, the role of an icon. For example, crosses painted on walls in churches and monastic settings fulfilled, to some extent, an iconic purpose in that they were a focal point for prayer and devotion, especially where they occurred in the east-facing oratory niches. Notionally, they are not likely to have qualified as icons, but the transfigural quality of some of the representations give the impression that in many instances the crosses did actually represent Christ. This is especially the case in the draped crosses, which appeared to follow the Ravenna tradition, while not actually being enthroned as in the Arian Baptistry prototype. Processional crosses might also be regarded as embodying this transfigural quality, with Christ at the head of the procession. Therefore, one could assume that the number of representations of gilded and gemmed processional crosses in the oratory niches and elsewhere at Kellia, for example, embodied this iconic quality.

It is notable that early church fathers sanctioned the use of the cross specifically because it was not a figural image. Justin Martyr noted in Chapter IX of his First Apology that idol worship was folly, but in Chapter LV noted that the cross is the greatest symbol of Christ’s power.¹ We cannot know if this meant that an iconic use of the cross was approved. Meanwhile Cyril of Jerusalem in his Catechesis IV urged his audience not to be ashamed of the cross, even though others may want to hide it, the true believer should seal it openly on the brow, make the sign (of the cross) when eating and drinking and on every possible occasion because he who was crucified has risen and sits at the right hand of the father. And later, he stated that the indestructible foundation of one’s faith should be the cross.²

Thus, while Cyril, Tertullian and others urged veneration of the cross, there does not appear to be specific mention that it actually embodied Christ, though clearly it was a reminder of Christ’s Passion, Resurrection and Ascension and the associated themes of hope, deliverance and salvation. The edict of Theodosius II in 427 CE, which decreed a cross should not be carved or painted on the ground lest anyone disrespect the symbol, and by association Christ, by walking on it again shows that such representations were more than just decorative motifs.³

³ Mango, 1986, Byzantine Art, p. 36.
The notion that the cross could have taken the place of an icon in Egypt is borne out in several anaphoras, where the cross is imbued with qualities that would normally be associated with Christ or God. The point must be made, though, that the number of specifically Egyptian texts on the cross are limited and Byzantine theology does not necessarily apply to Egyptian Christianity.

Belting’s proposition that images best revealed their meaning through their use would take into account human beliefs, superstitions, hopes and fears. The individual culture in which the image played its role becomes more important in determining purpose than the image itself. On this basis, while the cross in itself, especially in its usual non-figural representations in Egypt, would normally be considered aniconic, there are instances where it would seem to take the place of an icon, thus imbuing it with iconic qualities. Though it was not always the case, the context in which it was used allowed it to be considered transfigural, an embodiment of Christ himself. Belting’s point is that while the image remains the same, the context brings different meanings and this is borne out in the following pages where we consider the situations in which the cross was ‘used’.

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* See Appendix D.
Part 1: Secular objects and settings

Admittedly, there is a high degree of subjectivity in determining what might be considered secular or lay in regard to the corpus of crosses. Under this heading are what might be considered everyday and domestic articles, personal belongings such as textiles, jewellery and items used in industry or manufacture. They include talismanic objects though this could be contentious because of the hazy line between superstition and religion. Funerary items might also, in some instances, be considered secular. In other words, these are things that did not necessarily have a ceremonial or liturgical function while not precluding a spiritual dimension.

Everyday objects

A monk’s life of contemplation, despite its supposed austerity, did not preclude everyday necessities, however abbreviated these might have been. This is borne out in the number and range of everyday items, with no apparent ceremonial function, found within monastic complexes. Lamps needed to be lit, food had to be prepared, eaten and stored, and other domestic chores undertaken. Thus, among the material finds there are simple terracotta lamps, utensils associated with food, and storage vessels such as amphorae and pots.

We are generally led to believe that monks lived in great frugality, partaking of food only sparingly, generally not more than once a day unless they were infirm. Bākhūm, in a lesson on compassion, is described requesting food to be brought to a sick monk. While such anecdotes underlie the ascetic life, the occurrence of elegant, imported crockery, even if used infrequently, belies this austerity. It is possible that such vessels were reserved for visiting dignitaries or perhaps even for ceremonial use, it is also possible that some monks retained expensive possessions from their pre-monastic lives, in contravention of the rules of poverty imposed on them. As Sr. Benedicta Ward notes, the story about Macarius the monk and Macarius the tribune

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* Veilleux, Armand. 1980. *Pachomian Koinonia: The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples, Vol 1*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications. The Boharic Life of Pachomius, Ch. 48 and the First Greek Life of Pachomius, Ch. 53 both include this anecdote, culminating in a lesson on compassion. The Boharic Life, however, tells that Pachomius (Bākhūm) himself was ill at the time but refused food. See pp. 71 and 332 of Veilleux’s volume.
demonstrates that while some divested themselves of personal wealth before adopting a monastic life, others took on the trappings of their former lives ‘into the desert’.

Parry notes, drawing in this instance on Chrysostom, there is a paradox between Christian teachings that disparage worldly goods and the glorification of God through the giving of wealth on the other. Largess towards churches and monasteries could be regarded as a form of religious merit, though it would appear in the monastic situations under consideration that some assets at least were possibly retained for personal use. The implication that attachment to material objects hindered spiritual development does not appear to have been a consideration in Egypt, though admittedly this is a generalisation.

We do not know to what extent the materiality of monastic life differed to that of lay people. Brooks Hedstrom notes the occurrence of wills, contracts and bills of sale in a monastic context which would tend to suggest that it did not differ greatly. Giorda notes that while the last words of monks, both oral and written, were a common way to communicate rules and customs for the continuity of the monastic community, there is evidence of wills bequeathing property from papyri dating to the sixth century though property ownership was attested as early as the fourth century. Monks could dispose of their material wealth via testament either to the monastery to elsewhere. Where a monk died intestate and without relatives the property went to the church or monastery to which they belonged.

Whether personally or communally owned, as Goehring notes, excavations have shown that monastic cells were not always as simple and austere as we have been led to believe. Utensils, such as those described above, suggests that monks, if not wealthy in themselves, retained some lavish paraphernalia of their earlier lives.

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Among the terracotta and clay objects, a platter from Kellia is notable. Discovered in hermitage 227 of Quṣṭūr al-Rubāʾiyyāt, it is said to be from Cyprus. A pattée cross was stamped into the underside of the vessel prior to firing. [ECD005]. This object is interesting if for no other reason than it shows that the monastic and ecclesiastical sites were open to external influences through trade and travel, and indeed Ghica notes the proliferation of churches on major roads and transport routes. Writing about al-Naqlūn, Brooks Hedstrom notes the discovery of imported wares, also from Cyprus, in the hermitages, pointing to possibly wealthy occupants who owned or had access to expensive glass vessels for everyday use. Similarly, Wipszycka, also referring to al-Naqlūn, notes the presence of high quality ceramics from North Africa including painted vases, *terra sigillata* and glass vessels. She further remarks on the ‘luxurious’ quality of hermitages at Kellia, and to a lesser degree at Isnā. 

Similar examples of fine crockery come from Dayr Epiphanius in the form of Samian ware (*terra sigillata*) of indeterminate origin. These are of fine-grained clay, dark red in colour, with a lustrous red iron-oxide wash. Several of these have stamped staurograms on the base, suggesting that they were not intended as decorative elements, as the designs would not have been visible in the normal course of use. [ECD015]. Two possible functions can therefore be suggested; one is that they were intended as blessing devices for the food, or secondly they were talismanic in purpose. Arguably, though, it is a fine distinction between an invocation to bless and another to protect.

An amphora of unknown date discovered in Chapel XVIII at Bāwīt has a pattée cross in red pigment on its ‘belly’. Another pot from Wādī Sarjah, dated to between the fifth and seventh centuries, is of light coloured clay, 26 cm high, with a cross in black

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pigment described as a ‘geometric motif’. [ECD003]. In these two cases the motifs are more obviously visible than on the plates mentioned above. The vessels themselves are quite commonplace and the designs relatively small in relation to the size of the receptacles and therefore not especially decorative. These crosses could either be identification or branding marks, or could also represent visual supplications to bless or protect the contents.

Bread stamps with crosses are fairly widely attested in wood, terracotta and metal. Galavaris notes that the use of leavened bread allowed for a design to be impressed on an unbaked loaf. He suggests that such stamps were used for decoration, though he does not mention that they were also used for identification in domestic situations where bread was baked in communal ovens. Thus a family might have had a particular design that identified their loaves. He believes that on early bread stamps Christian symbols were necessarily cryptic, and that the use of crosses became more overt as Christianity was more firmly established. The stamping of one or more crosses into an unbaked loaf would likely have elevated the bread to a special status, especially in Eucharistic use. A terracotta bread stamp with crosses in the British Museum is dated to between the fourth and seventh centuries. At approximately 6 x 7 cm, it has two flat faces, each with a different design. One side has a series of nine squares, each with a X-shaped cross. The reverse has a large Greek cross within a circle. Formed of dark brown Nile silt with mica particles, this would most likely have been used in the baking of liturgical bread (eulogia). Other bread stamps, without crosses, denote they were used more for domestic situations.

Aside from objects relating to food storage and consumption, there are numerous examples of terracotta lamps with crosses either incised or raised in relief. These are held in many international museum collections and are generally of unknown provenance and date, an issue complicated by the fact that the design did not change over a period of centuries, and was common throughout the Mediterranean world. The Brooklyn Museum has at least two such basic lamps, one with an ansate cross.

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inscribed in slip on its underside, and another with a very rudimentary Latin cross with forked terminals incised into the inside of the open reservoir. [ECD011, ECD012]. Arguably, in the former case the cross would not have been visible while the lamp was in use, and in the latter the cross would have been obliterated with the use of oil and a burning wick. This underscores the concept, as with plates and other objects where crosses were not visible when the object was in use, that it was perhaps more important for the user to know that a cross was present than to actually see it. Thus, the act of incorporating a cross into domestic design seems to have become part of the fabric of daily experience.

That said, there are also lamps with more obvious decorative crosses. For example, among the British Museum’s collection is a brown clay lamp with mica particles, described as Aswan Relief Ware, with a pattée cross in raised relief. [ECD010]. The Louvre Museum has among its collection a terracotta example described as from the Byzantine era, with a relief cross in raised dots. Such lamps with raised relief crosses are more overtly decorative though presumably the function of providing blessing or protection remained the same.

A particularly unique object that Winlock and Crum describe as a wooden window aperture is from the monastery of Dayr Epiphanius. It is described as a cross-shaped opening carved out of a circular block of sycamore, 21 cm in diameter and 6 cm thick, and in the ‘spirit of dynastic windows’. [ECD389]. Such an aperture, if indeed it was such an object, presumably itself not more than 10 cm across, would not only have shown a small cross-shaped glimpse of light when looked at in daylight, but could also potentially have thrown a cross-shaped beam across the wall or floor of the room. Its construction is rough, but while its function is ordinary, the cross-shaped opening and ray of light would surely have been a constant religious reminder to the room’s occupants. Unfortunately, we do not know what type of building it came from or its context. Efforts to learn more about this object and its likely function have proved fruitless. However, crosses on or near windows and doors are well attested and are known to have performed an apotropaic function.

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*British Museum #1888.0609.1
*“L’arte copte en Égypte,” Exhibition catalogue, p. 143, fig. 136 (b). Louvre Museum #AF1260.
Generally, from the attested examples it would seem that crosses on everyday objects are comparatively simply rendered, even where the object on which it is placed is relatively expensive. This suggests that the symbol, and significance, of the cross itself was important, not the way in which it was shown or even where on the object it was placed.

**Personal objects**

A wide range of personal articles is attested. These differ from everyday objects in that they are more obviously of an individual nature including textile fragments that are likely to have come from garments, items of personal adornment and articles for private use.

So-called Coptic textiles are well known and regarded for their vibrant use of colour and interesting motifs, and were very attractive to private collectors and museums. Unfortunately, as has been discussed earlier, many museum examples were acquired piecemeal with provenance and context open to conjecture. For example, most textile fragments are loosely attributed to Akhmīm and it is mostly speculative whether they came from garments or other larger textile pieces such as wall hangings. Shrouds and body wrappings are more likely to have been unadorned. While the larger and more elaborately patterned fragments are more likely to have come from furnishings, care must be taken not to be too prescriptive.

As noted earlier, a complete garment would, potentially, depending on cost and status of the wearer, be adorned front and back with embroidered *clavi* of different lengths, decorative borders and medallions. Many such decorative pieces were deliberately separated from the original garment or furnishing and found their way into museum collections piecemeal.

Maguire believes that textiles operated on two dimensions; obviously to clothe the wearer but also to deflect evil and attract ‘good’. The motifs were not simply for decoration; they were assurances, albeit hopeful, of protection and security. They were also used, in a talismanic way, to attract abundance. The notion of abundance could relate to material wealth as well as to health and other personal circumstances.

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34 Dimand, 1930, “Coptic Tunics”, p. 239.
This desire for profusion, in whatever form, would explain to some extent the scenes associated with Nilotic bounty or classical cornucopia imagery alongside crosses.

Some textile fragments do appear to have a clear talismanic function. An example is an item that was exhibited in 1941 as part of the Brooklyn Museum’s exhibition on Pagan and Christian Egypt. The sixth-century yellow wool artefact, of unknown provenance, is unusual in that it comprises the entire front of a tunic. An embroidered pendant Greek cross on a coloured necklace forms part of the embroidered design. The orant nude female figure, above the cross, with red heart-shaped objects in her hands, lends weight to a talismanic function of the overall theme and shows an interesting juxtaposition of new and old thinking.\[ECD367\]. If the stated sixth-century date is accurate, the composition supports the view that Christianity ran in tandem with other beliefs as late as this period, and potentially well beyond.

More commonly than the whole tunic mentioned above, textile fragments are harder to analyse as the entire design program can no longer be viewed. The designs echo wall paintings and sculptural designs in the use of decorative borders, flora and fauna along with crosses. One of several items in the Victoria and Albert Museum includes a woven woollen band from a tunic, with circular motifs, a rabbit and a lion, a tree of life and a Greek cross, all designs that are seen in wall paintings and stelae.\[ECD341\]. Here we see that crosses were incorporated into designs that could otherwise have been construed as pagan, or at least ambivalent. It is only the cross that is a definitely Christian element in such designs.

In three fragments in the British Museum, said to be from Akhmîm, the crosses are surprisingly secondary to more dominant image of birds, which themselves are otherwise unremarkable.\[ECD342, ECD343, ECD344\]. The birds are shown in various shades of blue, grey and brown. In the top corner of the square pieces are small gold crosses within wreaths, one of which is an ansate cross. It is hard to draw any conclusions about these pieces without seeing the entire garment(s) from which they were taken. The similarity of the pieces may indicate that they came from the same garment or furnishing, or workshop, or equally that a dominant bird with a small cross was not a unique construct. Indeed in some stelae eagles are shown with small

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* “Pagan and Christian Egypt”. Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, p. 81, #255.
* British Museum BM 1891, 0509.78 EA 22868, and BM 1891, 0509.77 EA 22867, both purchased from the Wallis Budge collection.
crosses in their beaks, however in these three textile pieces the birds are not eagles and the crosses are placed in the background.

A woollen fragment from the Coptic Museum that shows an elaborate composition of an ansate cross with a christogram within its loop, together with a gemmed cross and confronted birds beneath an arch, is sufficiently elaborate to fulfil a decorative function. [ECD354]. The panel seems almost too elaborate to have comes from a garment and potentially it could have belonged to a furnishing fabric such as a wall hanging. If this was the case, its function would be similar to that of a wall painting.

Several simple gemmed crosses occur on textile fragments including some in the Victoria and Albert, British, and Brooklyn Museums. [ECD339, ECD340]. Speculatively, these textile crosses replaced Christian-themed jewellery that perhaps wealthier people might have worn. Their purpose was likely to have been apotropaic.

Possibly the most interesting and mysterious of the textile fragments in the Victoria and Albert Museum has been mentioned before, and consists of an ansate cross that has had the later addition of a face within the loop of the cross. [ECD338]. The gemmed cross is elaborate itself, flanked by two vases with floral elements and encased in a rectangular vegetal border. Faces within the loops of ansate crosses are attested on funerary stelae but without knowing the context of this item – whether it was one of several similar medallions on a tunic or a single central motif – it is not possible to suggest the purpose of the image. The beardless face is most likely to be a depiction of Christ, and its later addition to the textile suggests the repurposed use of the textile, perhaps in a funerary context.

A conclusion we can draw from the highly decorative textile fragments mentioned above is that they were used by lay people, not monks. Shinūdah’s rule 472, as outlined by Layton, suggests that conformity was important; monks and nuns were not allowed to wear their own garments but had to don what was given to them by the monastery. Moreover there were strictures about what could be worn and when. Clothes worn during life had to be used until they were threadbare. Bakhūm’s rule 81

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\* Kendrick, 1921, *Textiles, Vol II*. Victoria & Albert Museum #296-1889 and #1331-1888. See also [ECD349, ECD357]
stated that a monk was allowed two linen tunics apart from the one being worn. He was also allowed a long scarf, a goat-skin, shoes, two hoods, a belt and staff."

Krawiec notes that clothing was an important marker of identity. Monks had to be perceived as beautiful as a result of their vocation but drab in dress." This is borne out in wall paintings, for example from Bāwīt where monks are portrayed wearing simple vestments, adorned only with basic crosses. [ECD210, ECD211].” There was little room for flamboyance or singularity, not the least in appearance. Innemée’s detailed description of monastic garments draws mainly on depictions in paintings and sculpture and focuses more generally on the nature and number of garments than any embellishment in particular. He does, however, note that the hood or cap was embroidered with crosses, and that the scapular might also have had crosses on the front.« The analabos, which took the form of a long strip of cloth wound in a cross-shape across the body, could not be regarded as a visual representation of a cross.

Generally, it would seen that monastic garments were too simple to have been attractive to collectors as, based on the colourful medallions depicting a range of designs, none appear to have survived into museum collections.

Personal objects are also attested in wood. An example is a wooden tablet, thought to be from Antinoë and currently in the Louvre Museum. The dating is unknown. It was excavated by Gayet and consists of a tamarisk block, slightly hollowed on one side to enable the addition of wax for writing. The covers have a design of what could be described as saltire crosses, which is not one of the basic types attested in Egypt. [ECD383]." However, given the X shape used in christograms, and the potential link with nomina sacra, these designs could be read as crosses. The provenance and context of the tablet are unknown, but we can assume that it was owned, or at least used, by a Christian scribe.

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Clédat, 1904, *Baouit*. Plate XXXVI, shows the southern wall of Chapel XII – two monks with crosses on their garments. Also p. 74, fig. 45 shows a painting of a monk with a cross on his garment, from Chapel XVII.

Innemée, Karel C. 1992. *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*. Leiden: Brill, p. 119. Dr. Maria Mossakowska’s dissertation on the topic of monastic garments would have been a valuable source document, but at the time of writing is still in the process of being published by the Institut français d’archéologie orientale in Cairo.

“L’art copte en Égypte”, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 66, fig. 40. Louvre #AF 1190.
In a similar vein to the writing tablet is a wooden box for writing implements, recovered from Dayr al-Malāk Mīkhā’īl in the Fayyūm. The dating of the ninth to tenth century, and the location of the find, places it in the same context as the codices from al-Ḥāmīlī, and we can be more certain that this is likely to have belonged to a monk in a local scriptorium. [ECD378]. The box has a sliding cover with a small cross, carved into the lid. It is possible that such crosses on writing implements were intended as blessing devices for the work of the scribes, or as a reminder of the sacred work of scriptoria.

Less immediately obvious is the purpose of the small cross on one side of a wooden comb that was recovered from a man’s tomb by Gayet at Antinoé in 1904. [ECD384]. Indeed it could be considered somewhat irreverent to have as banal an object as a comb inscribed with a sacred symbol. However there is another possibility, other than domestic or personal use, with this item. Potentially, this could have been a liturgical comb, with examples usually in ivory widely attested in the Byzantine world. In a similar vein, given that the comb looks not to have been used, it may have fulfilled a funerary function. Alternatively, it was simply a new comb without any ritual function, and was one of several crafted as merchandise for Christian purchasers.

Also in wood are small pendant crosses, such as one found during the 1999 excavations at Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl (al-Naqlūn) in the Fayyūm. Dating to around the twelfth century this rustic item was recovered from a grave on the western periphery of the site. [ECD376]. Godlewski also noted the retrieval of an ivory pendant cross, also dating to the twelfth century, from around the neck of a female corpse. [ECD018]. Rutschowscaya describes a rough-hewn wooden pendant cross in the Louvre Museum’s collection. It is not stated but can be assumed that it also was retrieved from a grave. She refers to it as an ansate cross, though as discussed earlier, this is uncertain. What is clear is that it was a meant to be worn as a pendant. [ECD391].

Quibell’s 1912 report contains an image of a small bone or ivory pendant in the shape of a pattée cross. He noted it and other items were found at various locations at the

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* “L’art copte en Égypte”, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 141, fig. 132. See also Louvre # E 12571.
site of Dayr Apa Jeremiah at Saqqārah and that the objects were of well-known types. We can assume from this that other similar pendants were also found, though their recovery is not noted specifically. [ECD019]."

The conclusion from these finds is that small bone, ivory and wooden pendants were in use in Egypt in the sixth and seventh and as late as the twelfth century at least. As Quibell’s finds are not described as grave goods, but are likely to be so, it would appear that the living as well as the dead wore such crosses either as markers of Christian identity, as talismans or as personal reminders of their faith. The talismanic function of wearing a cross during one’s life would have continued into burial and the life beyond.

Also in the realm of personal adornment, but more expensive and decorative, is a pair of silver earrings from the Byzantine era. Chains hang from a filigree ball with five suspended ornaments, four flat discs and a cross. [ECD045]." This is certainly a more sophisticated item than the wooden and bone pendants and may not have had any function outside of adornment of a Christian nature. The character of the artefacts would suggest a Byzantine origin, or at the very least influence, though it would appear that such items were crafted in Egypt.

The portability of small trinkets such as rings, pendants and earrings casts doubt on the exact place of origin, though as we have seen from finds of glass beads, fragments of precious stones, gold wire as well as moulds for pendants, that craftsmen and artisans did produce jewellery in Egypt.

More relevantly, the elaborate, even ostentatious, and costly necklaces are examples of the use of expensive gold jewellery with Christian symbolism. One can assume that they were sufficiently well known or observed to have been the source of inspiration for embroidered and woven necklace designs on textiles.

Pilgrim flasks, of which there are numerous examples in various international collections, are also classified as personal items. These small, unglazed, terracotta articles, in Egypt usually associated with Abū Mīnā, have been found in various

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53 Quibell, 1912, Saggara. Plate LIII.
54 "L’art copte en Egypte”. Exhibition Catalogue, p. 212, fig. 258. Louvre Museum # E 11900.
locations around the Mediterranean and beyond, underlining to some extent the popularity of pilgrimage.

Vikan notes that these and other pilgrim devotionalia were considered receptacles of power by virtue of their origin. Valued above all as amuletic, they were believed to preserve pilgrims on their journeys. Such objects were purchased, or otherwise obtained, both as personal souvenirs and as gifts, and were filled with holy oil or water, more likely the former. Vikan believes that the holy oil was drawn from a large alabaster pot set below the altar of Dayr Abū Mīnā’s sepulchral church.

The flasks from Dayr Abū Mīnā show the saint with the legendary camels on the obverse and usually a pattée cross in relief on the reverse. A similar flask with an ansate cross is in the Coptic Museum’s collection but does not carry the iconography associated with the saint. As such, the provenance and context are unknown, though it is likely it had a similar function. Kötzsche-Breitenbruch suggests that such narrow-necked, small, unglazed receptacles were of little practical use as containers for anything; both water and oil would seep through leaving little if anything of the contents on a pilgrim’s long journey home. She believes the flasks, rather than the contents, were taken home as souvenirs and reminders of the act of pilgrimage itself. There is some merit to this view, however the pilgrim would most likely have believed that the container, which was the repository of contents believed to have had a talismanic or curative function, or both, was therefore also imbued with powers that elevated it to a special status. Certainly the survival of pilgrim flasks in such numbers would suggest that there were manufactured in tens of thousands, underlying their popularity as a memento.

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57 Russell, Norman. 1980. The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto, translated by Norman Russell. Trappist, Kentucky: Cistercian Publications. There are references to holy oil used for healing, for example, I:12 where John of Lycopolis gave oil to the afflicted and effected healing; I:16 where holy oil is rubbed into the body to result in a cure.


59 One such example is from the Victoria & Albert Museum, # C.79-1973. It is dated as 580-650 CE.


Talismanic objects

From the discussion above it is clear that personal objects such as jewellery and other items of personal adornment and use, and garments with certain motifs had a talismanic as well as decorative and sometimes practical function. However, there are other items such as amulets that are wholly and unambiguously apotropaic.

Amulets were used to seek healing, provide protection against harm, evil and adversaries and to obtain success in a range of spheres. Extant examples occur on ostraca, wood, metal, stone and other materials. The use of amulets, and their preparation by people versed in creating them, predated Christianity and was common practice in the Mediterranean world. The inclusion of apparently Christian elements such as nomina sacra, crosses, christograms and staurograms grew as the religion gained in currency, though it can be difficult to isolate these specifically in an environment of religious plurality, especially prior to the fifth century."

De Bruyn makes the point that ‘lived’ religion does not always follow the rules set out by leaders. Authorities might have been opposed to superstitious practice such as the use of amulets and incantations, but there is clear evidence that talismanic objects were widely used."

A limonite amulet in the British Museum displaying the sacrifice of Abraham on the obverse and an ansate cross on the reverse is labelled as originating in Karnak, though the find site was Cyprus. Limonite is a red mineral stone found in the Eastern and Western Deserts in Egypt and especially near Farāfrah, which lends weight to its Egyptian origin, though not as certainly as does the ansate cross. The museum has dated the amulet to the late fifth century, a date that could be considered reliable as it concurs with the use of the type of cross. [ECD335]." The themes of faith and deliverance that derive from the Abrahamic trope align with the object’s amuletic purpose.

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* British Museum #OA9440.
Bonner notes the existence of a very similar red stone amulet in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. He describes it as crudely carved and from the ‘Coptic Period’ and notes that the obverse has an orant figure with ‘two quadrupeds with heads turned over their backs’. He believes this composition to be of Daniel with the legendary lions. The reverse has an ansate cross and includes the inscription ‘eis theos’. The dating, at between the fifth and sixth century, and general appearance of this amulet is similar to the British Museum example and consistent with the span of the ansate cross. [ECD334]. The iconography of animals flanking a cross is also a familiar theme in early Christian Egypt, and in this instance, if the composition can be interpreted as the familiar Daniel narrative, then this would also carry the same themes of faith and deliverance as the first amulet.

Vikan comments that pilgrims were driven by a need to see and touch holy objects, people and places. As such, amulets were often themselves artistically and attractively designed, for display as much as for personal use. This is borne out by Kotansky who explains that engraved gemstones, such as the two described above, are of a particular category in that magical intaglios, unlike seals, which are similar in shape and size, were written orthographically and not in mirror image. The implication here is that the amulets were intended to be worn openly, so that the letters and designs could be easily read, interpreted and possibly even admired.

Bonner’s collection also includes what he described as a fifth century bronze amulet of unknown provenance, believed to be Egyptian, which has a tau-shaped cross with flaring arms, surmounted with a bust of Christ. The obverse, not shown in his catalogue, is of a nimbed rider piercing a prostrate female, with a lion in the lower register. [ECD041]. While Bonner has identified the figure over the tau cross as Christ, there are a number of examples of a bust atop a pillar, which are more accurately associated with Symeon the Stylite. This particular example is not dissimilar to a Stylite-type amulet, and in fact Vikan notes that Symeon’s pillar was

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* Bonner, 1950, *Studies in Magical Amulets*. Plate XVIII shows both obverse and reverse. The amulet is also displayed on the Royal Ontario Museum website. ROM 2010-11707-55 and 949X161.22.
* Crosses at Kellia and D. Abū Fânāh appear with flanked animals. The al-Ḥāmūlī frontispieces also depict animals, as do many sculptural examples. See also Frankfurter, 2004, “The Binding of Antelopes”, p. 98. Frankfurter notes that framing the cross with animals and foliage was typical in the Coptic repertoire and suggested the glorification of the cross, which by the 6th century had achieved magical power in Egypt.
occasionally conflated with the cross. Kotansky clarifies that bronze, usually being an alloy of tin and copper, would have been unsuitable for an amulet, which apparently required the use of a pure metal. He also notes that copper is commonly mistaken for bronze because of the greenish patina that occurs on both. This suggests that Bonner’s ‘bronze’ amulet mentioned above is more likely to be copper.

In the realm of amulets, mention must also be made of magic inscriptions with crosses. One such example is a stone ostracon from St Epiphanius in Thebes. The inscription includes what could be a staurogram, and is dated to between the seventh and eighth centuries. [ECD332]. Such depictions indicate that crosses, or types of crosses, were used in spells and incantations that were not Christian in origin.

In the same vein, Meyer and Smith provide several examples of small crosses employed at the beginning of healing spells. These are more likely to correspond with scribal convention, rather than being intrinsic to the spell. However, an example of an exorcism spell contains a stylised crucifixion image that is more obviously part of the invocation.

It is clear therefore, from actual amulets and magical spells, as well as from garments and other personal items, that the cross in Egypt had a strong apotropaic function. Christians placed their bodies, possessions and domestic spaces under the protection of the cross.

**Funerary items**

It comes as no surprise, given Christianity’s emphasis on life after death, that crosses proliferate on funerary objects and structures. These include mummy portraits, coffins, grave markers, tombs and stelae. As well as engaging with soteriological and resurrection themes, more prosaically these crosses served to mark the identity of the deceased as Christian. However, rather than being simple depictions, the crosses and accompanying motifs are often elaborate and complex.

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The earliest of the funerary items includes so-called mummy portraits, said to be from Antinoë and the Fayyûm. As in the case of most textiles said to come from Akhmûm, we cannot be certain of their origin. The use of Christian iconography generally identifies the faith of the deceased. Doxiadis lists a few in her collection from the Louvre Museum, and the Benaki Museum in Athens. All these show stylised and occasionally sophisticated images of the deceased with ansate crosses, and have been dated by her to the second to third century. This dating is much earlier than the other Egyptian ansate crosses and, as noted in an earlier chapter, could be more related to the resurrection-themed crosses on several sarcophagi from the Roman period. There has been some discussion about whether the motifs are crosses or earlier ankh symbols. The inclusion of other symbols such as doves could suggest a Christian provenance.

Yet another wooden item in the Louvre is a grave marker with very abbreviated arms. It has no provenance, but is dated to the tenth century from the inscription. At approximately 42 cm high, the lower portion is without marking or inscription suggesting that it was intended to be embedded in the ground. Among the wooden items in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology in London are many fragments described as grave markers. Mostly they are not entire or even recognisable as crosses. One of the few whole examples is a plain cross from Fayyûm, composed of two wooden pieces joined by what appears to be a single nail, and with a spiked lower terminal for ease of placement in the ground.

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Rutschowsczyka, 1986, *Catalogue des bois*. Items #338 and #339. *ECD385, ECD386*


Petrie Museum, #UC45023. Said to be from Fayyum.
From Karanis in the Fayyum there are unusual funerary structures that Buzi describes as truncated pyramids. These are short mud-brick edifices plastered with clay, arranged in the cemetery in parallel lines but at irregular intervals, over shallow graves. The cemetery was identified as Christian from the crosses around the necks of the mumified deceased, apparently not from the mud-brick structures themselves. These ‘pyramids’ are decorated with roughly drawn ansate crosses, one of which has alpha and omega symbols in the lower quadrants. [ECD054]. Not only are the structures uncommon, their decoration is basic compared with later stone stelae. However, the simplicity of these structures is in keeping with the plain wooden grave markers mentioned above. Karanis was abandoned by the mid-fifth century, which provides a terminus ante quem for these structures. 

All the above examples have relatively simply expressed crosses and demonstrate that the most basic of cross designs were used to denote a Christian burial. These were in no way artistic; their function was practical and one essentially of identity.

Among the more decorative funerary monuments are two re-used tombs to which Christian symbols have been added. Both are in the Gabbari cemetery in Alexandria. One has a wreathed Greek cross with alpha and omega added to the original pre-Christian monument, flanked by vases with lush foliage of a similar design to those seen on textiles and wall paintings. The other has a Greek cross surmounting an arch in which a christogram, flanked by two lamps, has been painted. [ECD228, ECD229].

Several striking stone stelae have, probably because of their elaborate designs, found their way into various international museum collections. These are generally from a later period than the Karanis structures, and would appear to have been plentiful. Unfortunately, many of these lack provenance. Recent studies such as those by Thomas and later Tudor have added to our knowledge of inscriptions and have provided excellent surveys of the corpus, but have not added to our overall knowledge of find site or dating.
Of those whose origin is known are two from Ras el-Gisr at Saqqārah. Both have finely executed wreathed pattée crosses and were catalogued by Quibell. [ECD245].^84 The first has an inscription in Coptic that refers to Apa Jeremiah and the Trinity.

While the norm in decorative funerary stelae is a composition of crosses and other motifs on a rectangular limestone or sandstone block, there are at least two noticeable exceptions. From Bāwīt is a stele, itself in the shape of a cross, covered in inscriptions. [ECD247].^85 A similarly unusual stele, thought to be either from the Fayyūm or Khārijah, is composed of four almost separate triangular pieces containing a pattée cross within a circle. The interstices of the cross align with the triangular pieces creating the illusion of an extended X-shaped cross. [ECD289].^86 These unusual artefacts suggest that while the bulk of attested stelae display decorative surfaces, in the case of these two the stone has been cut carefully into geometric shapes that form the basic design element.

More artistically carved is the type of stele attributed to Armant. These generally are of two types; the first has ‘winged’ ansate crosses or a quadrata-type cross within a wreath beneath a gabled aedicule. In the Coptic Museum, there is a particularly elaborate stele with three aediculae. The upper register has a larger aedicule with a pattée cross in a shell, beneath which are two confronted birds, possibly peacocks. The arch above the aediculae is filled with gazelle-like animals confronting the cross. The lower register has two arched aediculae, each with an orant eagle. [ECD276].^87

The second type from Armant is usually more elaborately carved in two registers; a wreathed cross commonly occurs in the upper register while the lower features an eagle with wings in an orant position, almost appearing to hold the wreathed cross. [ECD266, ECD268, ECD269].^88

Armant stelae are relatively numerous and are similar in general appearance to equally elaborate examples from Isnā. In contrast to the wall paintings from the hermitages of Isnā, which are simply executed, the stelae, as in the case of those from Armant, are the work of professional stonemasons. A fine example from Isnā has very exaggerated winged ansate crosses with foliate designs in the loops and triangular

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^84 Quibell, 1908, Saqqara. Plate LXII.
^85 Tudor, 2011, Christian Funerary Stelae. Plate 413. See also British Museum # EA1339.
^86 Tudor, 2011, Christian Funerary Stelae. Plate 411. See also British Museum # EA1757.
^87 Crum, 1902, Catalogue général. Plate XLVI. Coptic Museum #8671.
^88 Crum, 1902, Catalogue général. Plates XLI, XLIV, XLV. Coptic Museum #8638, 8658, 8659.
The Cross in the Visual Culture of Christian Egypt

bodies. [ECD272]. Such decoratively stylised ‘winged’ ansate crosses, where lateral arms are considerably wider at the terminals than at the interstices, show creativity and latitude of expression. [ECD256, ECD252].

Staurograms and christograms also occur in the Armant type. In one example from the British Museum, a christogram in a foliate wreath occupies the upper register while two ansate crosses flank a Greek cross in the lower register. In another, a christogram occupies most of the stele, with two small crosses above the tympanum. [ECD265, ECD259].

From Oxyrhynchus there are at least two examples cited by Thomas. One is a niche with tympanum with a meander border below which is a wreathed Greek cross flanked by acanthus leaves. The other is of an ansate cross with a floral design in the loop and again with flanking acanthus leaves. [ECD286]. Crum lists several similar stelae of unknown provenance, all in the Coptic Museum, that are ansate crosses with floral motifs within the loop. [ECD321, ECD322].

Finally, as noted previously, there are a few stelae with human figures, including an ansate cross from Akhmēm, with a face within the loop, very similar to a textile also said to be from the same location. It is unclear who the face is supposed to represent, though it would be safe to presume it would be either Christ or a saint. [ECD278].

Not all stelae are highly designed or precisely executed. There are others that are fairly rudimentary in their motifs and workmanship. Most of these also would have come from workshops, albeit of a less high quality. Cost would certainly have been a factor in the choice of workshop, design and execution. At the lower end of the spectrum there are also examples of stelae that can be best described as amateur. One such example is of what could be a conflation of an ansate cross and a human figure. The composition is ambiguous and execution crude. The standard inscription of ‘eis
*theos*’ together with ‘Makarius’ tell us little; was this the stele of someone called Makarius or a reference to the saint? [ECD324].

From the above we can surmise that stone stelae ranged in cost, based on design and execution. Amateur or professional, they demonstrate that crosses were an integral part of the artistic program. Unlike the wooden markers that have survived, in the stone examples it is clear that form was at least as valuable as function. The similarity of themes from particular locales should come as no surprise though the stelae, in some instances, are so decorative that it is easy to forget their role as reminders of life everlasting.

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[Crum, 1902, *Catalogue général*. Plate XXX. Coptic Museum #8576.]
Part 2: Sacred and sacralised objects and spaces

Brooks Hedstrom cautions against the belief that all religious material in a monastic context should be considered sacred. This is clearly borne out in the previous section where domestic items occur in a monastic context. In terms of locus, it is near impossible to know whether all monastic spaces were perceived as sacred or not. Monks certainly lived in spaces and settings that were different to those of lay communities. We do not know, except in allegorical terms, how these spaces were perceived.\footnote{Brooks Hedstrom, 2017, The Monastic Landscape, pp. 63, 64.}

In considering the occurrence of crosses in monastic settings the distinction between sacred and profane is of little use. It is more instructive to consider the contrast between sacred and that which is made sacred, or sacralised, through use or convention.

There are spaces that are intrinsically sacred through consecration, such as parts of a church building used by the baptised. There are other spaces that might come to be regarded as sacred through association, for example the cell of a particularly saintly monk, or one who was known to have particular mystical abilities. The importance of pilgrimage, to visit particular sites or monks, underlines the desire to connect with this notion of sacred, or at the very least sacralised space.

Similarly there are objects that might be considered intrinsically sacred such as vessels used during the Eucharist, books of the Bible and other objects with a liturgical function.

The issue of sacralised objects is somewhat different. These could be items of a ceremonial nature, or in some instances tools of trade that have been elevated to a special status, perhaps because of the work of the owner or simply for superstitious or reverential reasons.

In the context of this project, the sacralised categories include codices, which were mostly religious in content, monastic spaces and ecclesiastical buildings. While undoubtedly there were private and domestic spaces within monasteries, monastic
spaces could generally be regarded as sacralised. The spatial geography of monastic Egypt has been the subject of much discussion, and while not necessarily agreeing with the view that God occupies certain locales, it is true that certain places have a greater symbolic significance than others. However, care must be taken not to impose modern western views of what constitutes public and private.

**Crosses in codices**

There are many examples of small crosses inscribed in textual material such as business contracts and orders as well as in personal correspondence. The crosses generally occur at the start of sentences and the context here is not necessarily religious. Crosses are also seen in magical texts including papyri and ostraca. These are what could be described as secondary crosses, as they are not central to the letters or texts, nor could they be regarded as artistic representations. These are excluded from this discussion other than to note that they exist as scribal practice.

Unlike the much later al-Ḥāmilī codices, the Nag Hammadi collection is sparsely decorated. One exception is the front flyleaf of Codex I, with its ornamental row of ansate and Latin crosses. [ECD058]. In appearance, this border is very close to a textile example, purportedly from Akhmim and possibly dating to the same approximate period as the codices. [ECD337]. The codex itself contains apocryphal and gnostic texts and this raises the issue of the use of the ansate cross in such a context.

Codex II of the Nag Hammadi collection has no crosses within the volumes, the contents of which are also outside of the canonical Biblical texts. This codex has three ansate crosses, each different, on the leather binding. One appears on the triangular flap and two on the central part of the binding. [ECD021]. These crosses are not especially decorative or outstanding, other than the fact that they are all slightly different and quite unsophisticated in execution, and are more in keeping with the unadorned nature of the manuscripts. The remaining Nag Hammadi codices have no artistic representations of any description. The focus, it would appear, is almost

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* See, for example, Naldini, 1968, *Il Cristianesimo in Egitto*. In particular letters 91, 95 and 96.
entirely on the textual context. Generally, given the non-canonical content of the Nag Hammadi collection, it is not surprising that there are few crosses.

The inclusion of ansate crosses with apocryphal and gnostic material in the above examples is interesting but inconclusive. Certainly the widespread use of this motif in places such as Dākhlah, Khārijah, Dayr Abū Fānah, and in funerary stelae attributed to, *inter alia*, Armant, Isnā and Asyūṭ would indicate a more mainstream Christian use of the symbol. This is borne out in possibly one of the most famous images of an ansate cross from the endpiece from Codex Glazier, part of the Pierpont Morgan collection. Unlike the al-Ḥamūlī codices, this image is of an interlaced ansate cross, with a processional or blessing tang, and assorted venerative birds including confronted peacocks, perched doves and a bird that could be an eagle within the loop. The codex is thought to be from Oxyrhynchus and contains a partial copy of the New Testament book of Acts, chapters 1:1 to 15:3. The use of such an elaborate cross on the endpiece with its rich symbolism underlines the importance and sacredness of the text within the codex.

While the sixth century Codex Glazier’s cross is detailed and decorative, those of the ninth and tenth century al-Ḥamūlī codices are much more so. At least some of these are likely to have come from the same scriptorium in the Fayyūm, though there is an indication that others could have been presented to the monastery from elsewhere. Many of these frontispieces have an elaborate interlaced cross, some in very complex designs though unfortunately some of the designs are too deteriorated to examine in any detail. These are all Latin crosses, accompanied by a range of actual and fantastical flora and fauna. The codices cover a range of Biblical texts, both Old and New Testaments, as well as homilies and other religious miscellany. The purpose of these elaborate crosses on the frontispieces, which would have taken time and effort to execute, doubtless underlines the importance and confirms the sacred nature of the texts, and the serious nature of the work of the scribes, illuminators and indeed the scriptoria.

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*Suciu, Alin. 2012. “Sermo de Cruce et Latrone, p. 183 mentions that according to a cryptogram the manuscript was copied and received as the monastery *ex dono*.  
Crosses in domestic monastic spaces

While the notion of a monk living in isolation away from population centres is a popular construct, the proximity of monasteries to villages and urban areas belies the notion of Egyptian monasticism being a desert phenomenon. Most monasteries were within the fertile Nile valley. The title of Derwas Chitty’s book draws on this idea of the desert being a ‘city’ in itself; it was not the unpopulated wilderness of popular imagination. Of course there were monks who did actually withdraw to the desert. St Anthony was one such and is believed to have encouraged monks not to loiter outside the cell for fear of losing one’s interior watchfulness. Living in solitude, however that was perceived, is believed to have delivered monks from various conflicts.

Palladius mentions the importance of the cell to the extent that monks were admonished to remain within to resist temptation. These sorts of injunctions, taken prima facie, can bolster the view that all monastic cells and hermitages were indeed solitary and private places, and in some cases they undoubtedly were. Equally likely the monk’s cell was the allegorical desert, a place of inner withdrawal where one could grapple with one’s demons. Whether in a hermitage or in a coenobitic monastery, the cell was the core of a monk’s spiritual life, of prayer and contemplation and a place where God was actively sought. It was also a place of work and, in some instances, it was where visitors were received.

Brooks Hedstrom suggests that the assumed sacrality of monastic space attracted visitors and pilgrims. The spiritual life and endeavour of the monk caused the cell to be inherently different to the space outside; it was not consecrated as a church might be, but was considered sacred nonetheless. Hermitages, or more specifically, notable or special monks within them, were sought by pilgrims.

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*Chitty, 1966, The Desert a City.
*Lowther Clarke, 1918, The Lausiac History of Palladius, 16:1–6
*Lowther Clarke, 1918, The Lausiac History of Palladius, 18:10 has an account of Macarius of Alexandria having three cells; one at Scetis, one in Kellia and one at Nitria. Two were small windowless spaces where he sat in darkness while the third was larger and allowed him to receive visitors.
monasteries were driven by the belief that the sanctity of holy places was transferable through physical contact. It was important to see and touch, a notion that continues in modern Coptic practice.

This highlights the complex nature of private spaces in the monasteries and whether they can be understood through modern, western constructs. If, as Georgia Frank also suggests, pilgrimage was practiced visually but also tactilely, then it is possible to imagine that there would have been incursions, attempted or actual, into what a modern observer might regard as a private place to make a physical and visual connection with the sacralised space.

Aravecchia provides a practical spatial analysis of the hermitages at Kellia. Most of these followed a particular type where there were public and private spaces in the one hermitage. The private cell(s) of the senior monk were the least accessible and innermost areas of the complex, regulated through the construction of passageways and doors, while areas such as courtyards, vestibules and oratories were potentially more communal. However, the boundaries of private and public, as would be understood in a modern context, are somewhat irrelevant. More important would have been the reputation, fame or other attributes of the monks whose attention was sought, along with their willingness to engage with pilgrims and intermediaries.

With the sacralising of eremitic space, and the engagement in spiritual work and contemplation, it should come as no surprise that rooms were decorated with crosses, both as a reminder of Christ’s Resurrection as well as the holy nature of monastic endeavour. The wide range of painted crosses in hermitages, especially in oratories and their prayer niches, in vestibules and indeed in inner cells attests to this venerative and contemplative approach. The talismanic function of the cross is also clear in anecdotes, for example, where Abba Longinus heals with the sign of the cross, and another instance where Abba Poemen makes the sign of the cross over a child to rid

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114 Veilleux, 1980, Pachomian Koinonia. Chapter 19 of the Bohairic Life (p.41) notes that when John, brother of Pachomius visited him and became a monk, they practiced 'great asceticus, carrying the Cross of Christ according to the word of Paul, “at all times we carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (1Cor 4:10-11).
Images of the cross were therefore a constant reminder of religious purpose.

In some instances, renditions of crosses on walls are crude and amateur, almost or actually in the realm of graffiti. In other instances, there are relatively elaborate, well-executed and possibly expensive paintings. It would appear that the presence of the cross was of more importance than how beautiful it was in appearance. Of course, some were particularly decorative versions suggesting access, both monetarily and actually, to professional painters and artisans.

Goehring draws our attention to the elaborate decorations in the private spaces at Kellia, noting floors painted to resemble carpets. He hypothesises that monks could have used personal wealth to adorn these private spaces, presumably meaning their cells. This would not have been the case in the early, fourth century monasteries, which were indeed simple. However, sixth and seventh century examples from Kellia would suggest that ornate eremitic spaces were another indication, apart from relatively expensive material possessions, that monastic life in practice by this time was far removed from the Antonine ideal that we are led to believe was the norm.

The importance of the cross as a symbol is particularly evident at Kellia, where they are numerous, richly imagined and usually professionally painted. Kellia’s crosses, as mentioned earlier, are almost all, across all the hermitages, shown with tangs, suggestive of hand-held blessing or processional crosses. These representations accord a certain formality to the symbol, alluding perhaps to the transfigural nature of a cross, borne high at the head of a procession.

Kellia’s Quṣṣūr al-ʿIzaylah’s hermitage 90 has a diverse array of paintings in private and public spaces. Chamber 7, a cell, is unusual in that it has a bed composed of masonry, possibly for the use of an infirm monk. Two crosses within this cell are basic and amateur, one possibly even incomplete as it is shown in outline without further adornment. A third cross is a more complex braided design with a tang and vines emerging from the base, but overall the crosses in this cell are rudimentary.

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If this was a space for the elderly or infirm, the crosses were likely to be contemplative and to invoke healing, or at the very least a peaceful end.

By contrast, chamber 3 in the same hermitage, designated a vestibule, and therefore possibly a more communal space within the hermitage, has a rich array of elaborate paintings including the depiction of well-executed flora and fauna. Some of the vegetal designs are detailed enough to recognise specific types of fruit. [ECD171, ECD176, ECD178].

A cross in chamber 10, described as a cell, is relatively elaborate and from the building plan could have been the room occupied by the senior monk’s acolyte. [ECD172]. The impressiveness of the design is surprising, if indeed the room was occupied by a junior monk. Speculatively, if the disciple or acolyte who occupied chamber 10 was independently wealthy, it might explain the impressive nature of the cross in his room, especially in comparison to the substantially poorer representations in chamber 7, the ‘sick’ cell.

Quṣṭur al-‘Izaylah 19/20 is a conjoined hermitage creating a comparatively large complex. It has some excellent examples of gemmed and vegetal crosses in chambers 2 and 3, classified as vestibules. One in particular depicts a gemmed processional cross, flanked by two confronted birds, possibly doves or quails. [ECD164]. Descoeudres notes it is striking that certain cells in hermitage 19/20, of which chamber 15 is an example, were more richly decorated than the oratory. [ECD182]. For example, chamber 15 has a striking example of an elaborately braided cross in red and green pigment encircled by vines and with floral designs in the interstices. Again, it is clear that the occupant of chamber 15 had access to painters, either professional or semi-professional.

Quṣṭur al-Rubā’iyyāt was one of the more important centres in the Kellia complex and is believed to have had an ecclesiastical centre with gemmed crosses in its repertoire.

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* Kasser, 1999, “Qoucour el Izeila”. Plates 66.5 and 66.6, hermitage 90, chamber 7.
* Kasser, 1999, “Qoucour el Izeila”. Plates 71.3, 55.1, 54.3.
* Rassart-Debergh, 1989, “Les peintures”, pp. 72, 74, 76. Rassart-Debergh sees these as doves, but they are ambiguous and more likely to be quails. This point has been raised earlier in Chapter 3.
Almost all are also accompanied by floral or foliate designs including one in hermitage 233, composed entirely of palm leaves, that has been salvaged from the site and is now in the Coptic Museum. [ECD148].

Generally, the designs at Kellia in a variety of locations are relatively elaborate and mostly exuberant and costly, being the work of professional painters. The time and effort that went into producing these crosses highlights the importance of this symbol over other Christian iconography at this site.

That said, at Kellia, and to a greater extent at Isnâ, there are also a number of crosses that could be best described as graffiti. Some of these could also be preliminary or incomplete designs; there is insufficient information to say for certain. Examples of these include a red pigment processional cross on the southern wall chamber 2 of hermitage 90 of Qusâr al-Izaylah and a hastily drawn cross without much attention to detail on the southern wall of chamber 16 of Qusâr al-Rubâ’iyyât’s hermitage 24. [ECD168, ECD156]. Another example is a depiction of two small potent crosses, roughly sketched, from the western wall of chamber 8 of Qusâr al-Rubâ’iyyât’s hermitage 195. [ECD155].

By contrast to the elaborately imagined and painted crosses of various sites at Kellia, the crosses of Isnâ, though plentiful, are far more the work of skilled amateurs. Some of Isnâ crosses are especially rudimentary in execution. In the oratory niche of hermitage 3 a central pattée cross in red and black pigment is positioned within a banded circle. Two identical crosses sit below and flanking the central cross creating a simple composition. Also in the oratory of hermitage 3 is another pattée cross within a banded circle, but this time flanked by two birds, one facing the cross and the other facing away but with its head turned towards the cross. This too is relatively inexpertly rendered. The southern oratory of hermitage 4 has a small sketch of a cross on the western wall. It has unusual chevron terminals, showing that even amateur crosses did not lack creativity, and is apparently accompanied by an inscription.

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translated as ‘forgive me’, which unfortunately is not shown in the archaeological report. [ECD198]. These amateur and rudimentary expressions of faith are in ways more touching than the elaborate painted crosses of Kellia and Suhāj.

In contrast to the untidy or inexpert drawings, from Isnā we also have clear indications of the apotropaic use of the cross. Hermitage 9’s example of neat rows of multiple Greek crosses at the door leading to the oratory, suggesting a guardian or talismanic purpose. [ECD206]. Such crosses were also noted around windows and, from the unpublished photographs in the archives of the Institut français d’archéologie orientale, were sometimes used at the entrance to hermitages.

It is also safe to assume that the crosses that occur in the oratories of hermitages, especially in the eastern niches, were painted or placed there for purposes of veneration and to focus the mind. Much like an icon, here the cross bridges the divide between human and divine. This certainly seems to be the flavour at both Isnā and Kellia.

The purpose of graffiti crosses is harder to determine. They could be expressions of faith, or talismanic, or both. They could be the personal expression of individual monks or they could also, in the cases where they are drawn in outline, be preliminary designs for discussion and development with fellow monks. For example, a roughly drawn Latin cross, composed entirely of circles stacked to form the horizontal and vertical arms, is in chamber 1888 of Dayr Apa Jeremiah at Saqqārah. While it is highly unlikely that this unusual design referenced, as Quibell suggested, a metal cross at S. Agnello at Ravenna, it would seem to show that monks were experimenting with designs and ways in which they could render a symbol that was clearly important to them. In this instance, and with other apparently incomplete designs, it is impossible to know if it was intended as an aid to prayer or as a talisman or as a rudimentary design to be developed later into something more sophisticated.

Somewhat different in purpose, complexity of design and execution are some stone floor slabs, from Dayr Apa Jeremiah at Saqqārah. One of these, in room 773, commemorates Apa Jeremiah. Quibell notes that room 773 was a chamber of some importance from the decoration on the walls and floor denoting it was a communal,
though not necessarily ecclesiastical space. The inscription on the slab describes it as the place where Apa Jeremiah sat, and the slab might have originally been the location of his cell. The design, reminiscent of those at Isnā, is a decorated pattée cross. The other two stone slabs have commemorative inscriptions listing names of various holy men and women and are decorated with pattée crosses.

Such commemorative pieces were possibly commissioned by benefactors either within or outside the monastery and as such would have occupied shared spaces as arguably such pieces were for communal viewing. In fact, Quibell notes that, in the instance of the slabs commemorating Enoch and Philotheos, the slab was from the floor of the mandara south of the church. [ECD234, ECD235]. The purpose of the cross on such slabs would be the same as those on funerary stelae – as a focus on the hope and belief in a life everlasting.

Finally, it is not simply painted or graffiti crosses that occurred in private spaces. Certainly many personal objects, such as those mentioned earlier, would also have been used or stored in private chambers, but in this regard we are limited by our knowledge of the extant artefacts.

**Crosses in monastic churches and chapels**

The following section is focused on spaces that were entirely public or communal, such as chapels and churches. They are generally characterised by more formal or elaborate architectural pieces commissioned from professional workshops, as well as a few outstanding paintings. However, some chapels are little more than cells or rooms that have been enlarged to create a space for a small gathering. These tend to be decorated with wall paintings rather than architectural features. Unsurprisingly, there are several crosses in churches and chapels, though they are not always the dominant feature. For example, in the Red Sea monasteries the emphasis is on figurative paintings rather than on crosses.

Many architectural pieces, such as friezes, capitals and pillars, have found their way into museum collections with little background information. The intricacy, and

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*Quibell, 1909, *Saqqara*, Plate XLIV. Inscription #14 on p. 33. See also p.11 for the description of room 773.

*Quibell, 1909, *Saqqara*. Plate XLIV for the Apa Jeremiah stone, and Plates XLVI and XLVIII for the other two.
therefore costliness, of the work suggests they are from formal or communal spaces. Occasionally, though, even when the site is known, the exact location of the find is still often a matter of conjecture, as the buildings that housed them are no longer extant. Sometimes the artefact has been moved within the site, or to a nearby location. An example is a limestone architectural feature from Bāwīṭ consisting of a central cross over a christogram, surrounded by a circular motif of interlacing and vegetal decoration. It is in the Museum für Spatantike und Byzantinisch Kunst in Berlin and the exact context of the find is not known, though it can be assumed that it came from a space that was, if not ecclesiastical then at least formal. Another limestone piece, depicting two angels carrying a wreathed cross, is in the Coptic Museum and was acquired at Dashlout, near Bāwīṭ, and is therefore presumed to be from Bāwīṭ.

[EC248, ECD249]. It is unlikely to have been from a hermitage and therefore can also be assumed to be from a more formal setting. Palanque’s report on Bāwīṭ shows a limestone capital with a Greek cross, possibly gemmata over an orant eagle or dove, more likely the former. Again, in such fragmented pieces context is hard to determine. [ECD250].

Quibell’s 1909 report mentions various elaborate items from Dayr Apa Jeremiah at Saqqārah which would have to be from the realm of formal or official spaces. One such item is a carved stone screen from between chambers 1704 and 1706. The rooms are described as being separated by a screen of columns and piers; the latter being a large room with central pillars. The screen is from the eastern face of the entablature and consists of a Greek cross within an elaborate wreath, carved in relief. The wreath is encompassed by a well-executed design of palm or acanthus leaves. [ECD230]. Another two stone examples are from chamber 712, a small room north of the church with limited access. They are a Greek cross with five medallions and floral design in the interstices from the eastern wall, and another elaborate pattée cross in a wreath from the western wall. [ECD231, ECD232].

In Quibell’s later report are mentions of three objects of interest whose original location and context is only speculative. One is a stone pilaster capital with a simple...
and elegant pattée cross within a foliate wreath. It was found in the refectory and was originally a door jamb, though the exact original setting is not known. The second is a finely carved stone pillar, 1.8 m high. The mid section has a cross, though most artistic effort is reserved for the elaborate fluting and raised foliate designs. It was found in a brick chamber south of the southern church. The third piece is a stone frieze that was originally in the main church but was found reused in another wall. It takes the form of a Greek cross, within a wreath, alongside acanthus scrolls of the same circular profile. The work is particularly finely executed. [ECD237, ECD238, ECD239].

With such architectural pieces, the purpose of including a cross in the design seems, superficially, to be purely decorative, especially where the cross is not the dominant feature, as in the case of the elaborate pillar mentioned above. However, it would be rare for a symbol such as the cross to have no significance. More likely, as in the case of wooden inlay doors and screens, the design and its attendant symbolism simply become integrated with the fabric of the building.

There are two items of note in Rutschowscaya’s catalogue of objects in the Louvre Museum. One is a pair of wooden panels from a door or screen, each with a central cross. The twelfth-century panels are finely executed and could have been used in a formal space, such as a church. The other is also a wooden panel but with an unusual design of an ansate cross, where some liberty has been taken with the motif. Described earlier, the loop of the cross is formed by carved ribbons, in raised relief, and the frame of the triangular base extends through the loop into either a saltire cross or the letter Chi (X). [ECD390, ECD392]. These pieces are decorative and, given their possible use on doors, are likely to have had an apotropaic or guardian function.

A simple moulded plaster cross, affixed to a cistern wall from Dayr al-Baramūs in Wādī al-Natrūn, comes as a contrast to ornate examples in public spaces. A bakery for liturgical bread was found to the east of the main church, along with a small cistern. The cistern measures just 1.75 x 1.5 m with an average height of 1.9 m. It consists of four vaulted parts supported by a central square pillar and is coated with a red, waterproof plaster. The cross, in relief, is at the level of the waterline and Innemée

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*Quibell, 1912, *Saqqara*, See Plate XXXV, item 1 for the capital, plate XXXVIII, item 3 for the pillar and plate XL, item 3 for the frieze.

suggests that the cistern held water for liturgical purposes. [ECD048]." The cross is a plain, unadorned Latin type and is of the same colour and texture as the wall. The purpose of such a cross would most likely be to bless and protect the water.

In some churches crosses can be identified by exact location, for example in the apse, sanctuary, khūrus, nave, and narthex. Where the buildings and wall paintings are not extant we have to rely on archaeological reports for the position, and in some instances this is not provided. Thus there are several crosses from unspecified locations within churches.

There are two early examples of crosses as apse decorations from al-Bagawāt in the Khārıjah oasis, from chapels 24 and 25. In the first there are three ansate crosses in the domed ceiling of the apse. In chapel 25 a partially erased christogram and ansate cross, possibly gemmed, appear over the apse. [ECD129, ECD133]." As with most of al-Bagawāt’s crosses, these are simply expressed in red pigment.

Also from an apse is the draped cross from Dayr Abū Fānah. The cross itself is interlaced, and its place in the apse would suggest it is transfigural in conception. [ECD220]."

Zibawi describes an image of a draped cross in the apse of the church at Dayr Anbā Shinūdah at Suhāj from a slightly later period. It is unlike the example mentioned above at Dayr Abū Fānah in that the painted fabric is draped over the arms of the cross. Zibawi describes it as a Deesis, though it lacks the majestic quality of such images." It is more likely to represent a transfigural type. [ECD227].

A rather different item from within a sanctuary is a wooden altar, originally from the church of Abū Sarjah in Fustat and dated to the fifth century. This is also notable in that it is one of a few items from a non-monastic church. Only eight of the original twelve torsaded columns remain. The spandrels feature shells, each with a central cross. [ECD375]." The crosses are not especially dominant in the overall design, and

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\[Innemée, 2005, “Excavations at Al-Baramus”\].

\[Cipriano, 2008, *El-Bagawat*, p. 264, fig. 132 for the image of chapel 24, and p. 174, fig. 82 for the image in chapel 25\].

\[Leroy, 1975, *Les peintures d’Esna*. See Plate II. For a more recent colour image see commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DeirAbuFanaChurchInside.jpg, photo by R. Unger\].


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Chapter 6 – Design in Context
while not lacking in significance would appear, in this instance, to have more of a decorative function.

The outstanding example of a cross within a sanctuary would be in the *parekklesion* of the Great Church at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs at the Red Sea, dating to the thirteenth century which with its censing angels and ‘tree of life’ inscription would seem to be transfigural in conception. [ECD094].

From within a *khārus*, there are several wall paintings from al-ʿAdhrā church at Dayr al-Suryān in Wāḍī al-Natrūn over a period of a few centuries. Both Innemée and Parandowska note that paintings covered four periods from the seventh to the eighteenth centuries. Innemée notes that the second phase itself spanned the seventh to twelfth centuries. Many of these paintings have crosses with dominant figurative elements. For example, St James is one of the figures flanking a gemmed cross on the north-east wall of the *khārus*, over the entrance to what used to be the northern pastoforion. The cross is against a blue background and the composition is enclosed in a wreath of red motifs. The gestures of the confronted figures, one of which is unidentifiable, towards the transfigural cross are those of veneration. [ECD100].

By contrast, another example from the southern wall of the *khurus* is of the medical saint, Colluthos, who appears to be examining the eyes of a patient. [ECD101]. The lower register has two pattée crosses, which are secondary to the figurative element. The role of prayer, and supplication for healing, is denoted by the crosses.

Notable also at the al-ʿAdhrā church at Dayr al-Suryān are the tenth-century wood and ivory inlay doors, both between the *khārus* and *haikal* and the nave and *khārus*.

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4. Innemée, 2004. “A Newly Discovered Painting of the Epiphany in Deir Al-Surian”, p. 61–66. Innemée believes that the door to the pastoforion was enlarged to create a *haikal* out of the space and the inclusion of St James is a reference to the Syrian liturgy. The head and inscription identifying the second saint was lost during the 13th century renovation. These details are from the 2016 update of the Coptic Encyclopedia, online version. See: http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/edm/ref/collection/cce/id/2137.
5. Innemée, 2003, “Mural Painting in Egypt”.

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Each of the panels of the doors contains various designs of crosses created in ivory inlay. The inclusion of these decorative crosses, which are different to the designs found in iconostasis screens, are in keeping with the consecrated location.

From the nave or central spaces within churches and chapels there are several examples of painted crosses. The bi-colour consecration crosses at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs, beneath figurative paintings of saints, mirror similar motifs at Dayr al-Surjūn. Three examples from Dayr Abū Fānah are notable. One is the remnant of a draped Latin cross, possibly on a stepped platform. The cross has braiding in red and yellow. A dark red or brown fabric, possibly originally purple, is draped over the arms of the cross, unlike the apse painting where the red drapery is floating behind.

The other two examples from Dayr Abū Fānah, revealed in Buschhausen’s excavation, have been reconstructed by Cappozzo. One on the south wall of the church is a gemmed ansate cross with a circular loop and elongated transverse arms, flanked by vegetal elements and two unicorns, decorated with ribbons and medallions. The other is a gemmed Latin cross planted on a small mound from which plants arise on either side. The cross is flanked by two antelopes. [ECD221, ECD222].

Frankfurter suggests, in relation to a similar sixth to seventh century example, that the device of using flora and fauna to frame the cross denotes adoration or veneration.

The use of animals flanking the crosses is also similar to those at the tomb chapel of Dayr Anba Shinūdah. [ECD223, ECD224, ECD225]. However, it is also likely that the collocation of the cross with flanking animals suggests its dominance over the beasts of the wilderness, which in an Egyptian context denoted the forces of evil.

Items such as the more elaborate lamps and candelabra are likely to have been from the main body of a church. One such example is described as a bronze polycandelon from Bāwīṯ. It consists of a cross within a circular rim that has holes for the insertion of suspended lamps. It is approximately 51 cm in diameter and has three suspension

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No author, 1911, “The Coptic Monasteries of the Wadi Natrun.” Innemée also writes about these doors in several articles. One set has been restored.

See commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DeirAbuFanaChurchCourtFresco.jpg for a photo by R. Unger.


Bolman et al, 2010, “Shenute and a Recently Discovered Tomb Chapel”. See figs. 5, 6, 8.
rings. [ECD028]. It is unlikely that such objects were meant to be venerative in themselves, but demonstrate the importance of the motif in even relatively simple architectural features.

From a narthex of the church at Dayr al-Malāk Ghubriyāl is a painted image of a cross, featuring a bust of Christ. The bust is nimbed and beardless, very similar to the other image of Christ at the same monastery. Concentric circles with geometric designs are a feature of this image that occurs on the western wall. [ECD084].

A marble panel, recovered from the remains of the church at Dayr Anbā Maqār in Wādī al-Natrūn is a beautifully executed pattée cross with flared arms and concave terminals. The lower vertical arm is slightly longer than the upper. Two birds are shown in the lower interstices of the cross with heads raised towards it. The cross itself stands in an arch of finely carved relief designs. [ECD400]. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact location within the church of this panel. The quality of execution suggests that it might have been a benefactor piece, from a professional artisanal studio.

Particular note must be made of an unusual opus sectile from Kellia Quṣṭr ʿIsā 1. The glass tile composition is unlike the usual Kellia crosses, and consists of a staurogram within a wreath, flanked by two chalices. It was found in pieces and reassembled. Its original location is speculative but it is believed to be from Church 61 and the costliness of the piece suggests that it would have in a prominent public location. [ECD017].

Van Loon describes the decoration of the so-called Tomb of Werirni at al-Shaykh Saʿid, south of Dayr Abū Ḥinnis. The re-purposed Old Kingdom tomb was enlarged to create a larger chamber, which she believes had a liturgical function. Fragmentary paintings include a unicorn and an ansate cross. Chamber 23 of Dayr Abū Ḥinnis has a stele with an ansate cross flanked by vegetation and columns in the north-eastern

\[\text{[ECD028]}
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\[\text{[ECD084]}
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\[\text{[ECD400]}
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\[\text{[ECD017]}
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rock face. Hooks in the ceiling, presumably for lamps, adds to the view that this was also used as a church or chapel. [ECD292].”

Finally, there are several examples of ansate crosses in the chapels of al-Bagawât in the Khârjah oasis that have been recreated in drawings by Fakhry and photographed by Cipriano. Some of these flank or are between windows, such as those in chapels 49 and 109, suggesting an apotropaic function. Others are in or around niches, for example, chapels 134, 109, 194. Some are little more than graffiti or dipinti. The volume in which the crosses occur at this site and the simplicity of the expressions are a reminder of the faith of the early occupants.”

Also from the Khârjah oasis is a baptismal font from 'Ayn Jallâl. It has a well-preserved and strongly drawn ansate cross in red pigment.” The use of an ansate cross here is interesting as presumably the newly baptised would have been marked with a more conventional sign of the cross.

With the varied examples of crosses within churches, it can be safely assumed that their purpose was broadly devotional. In some cases, the crosses are transfigural in concept, that is, representative of Christ himself. Others are representative of processional or ceremonial crosses. Some, such as those in Dayr al-Suryân’s khârûs are little more than decorative features in the narrative program, albeit of a spiritual nature. Others have a more venerative or commemorative purpose. In comparison to the crosses in private spaces where an apotropaic function is clearly present, in public spaces the bias is towards a worshipful use of the symbol.

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Summary
The chapter has attempted to examine the settings in which the crosses occurred and the purposes that they fulfilled. The scope of the project has not allowed as in-depth an exploration of context as would have been ideal. The crosses were analysed by distinguishing between secular, sacred and sacralised spaces and objects, though admittedly the lines between these are arbitrary and blurred. This is especially the case in objects of a personal nature, such as a pencil box, that was probably used in the creation of sacred codices. Can this be regarded as a sacralised object or does it retain a secular function? A similar situation arises with pilgrim flask. It is likely that such objects held religious or spiritual significance to the user, even though they might not have been formally sacralised. Thus the distinction is probably more a modern construct and may not have had the same relevance in earlier times, but the contrast is maintained as a suitable counterpoint.

This analysis has made clear that designs did vary between domestic or secular objects, and those in sacralised and sacred spaces. Generally, as is attested even on relatively expensive imported crockery, the crosses on secular objects are usually simply expressed, and not by any means prominent. This is seen on storage vessels, terracotta lamps, small pendant crosses in wood and ivory, the pencil box and comb. The emphasis is not so much on richness of decoration as on the inclusion of the cross as a blessing or talismanic device.

This, however, is not the case with textiles, funerary stelae or more expensive jewellery which are still considered to be secular. In the case of the former, the colours and designs are rich and vibrant. The garments and furnishings were meant to be seen and enjoyed, perhaps even remarked upon. Textile designs are strongly linked to equally elaborate wall paintings and jewellery. The crosses appear in decorative and sometimes complex composite designs. These also would have had a talismanic function, perhaps as Maguire suggests of attracting abundance, as well as warding off evil.

Funerary stelae display a range of designs ranging from simple to complex. Those attributed to Armant and Isnā are especially intricate which is likely to have contributed to their survival into museum collections. The function of the crosses here is more in the spiritual realm, with themes of resurrection and life eternal most likely. Arguably that could have been achieved through simple representations so here, as
with the textile examples, there was a clear element of display and showiness. Perhaps
the status of the deceased, and the ability or willingness for the surviving family
members to pay, was marked by the degree of ornateness on his or her stele.

In the case of codices, the Nag Hammadi collection was sparsely decorated, while the
later, sixth-century, Codex Glazier displayed an elaborate cross. Of course, the non-
canonical contents of the Nag Hammadi collection might also point to a lack of
crosses. The small number of ansate crosses in these two volumes is notable and
raises the issue of whether these were regarded in quite the same way as those in more
conventional or orthodox usage. The Glazier codex, in turn, is not as complex as some
of the examples from the ninth and tenth-century al-Hāmūfī codices.

In the case of sacred and sacralised spaces, ornate designs tend to be the norm, except
in the very early representations such as those at al-Bagawāt. Generally, designs in
sacralised spaces are more decorative and complex, particularly in certain monasteries
where the cross is dominant, such as in Kellia. The palette in paint is rich both in
monasteries and in churches, again with the exception of early examples such as at al-
Bagawāt where most of the crosses are in red pigment. Carved stone architectural
features are also richly patterned and professionally executed. Most of the crosses in
such spaces would perform a venerative or contemplative function, as an aid to
focussing the mind on the divine. In this regard the crosses would perform a similar
function to a figurative icon of Christ.

The proliferation of crosses on such a variety of objects and locations, both secular
and sacralised, sustains the conclusion that the cross was a vital symbol to the
Christian believer in Egypt. While figurative images proliferated in churches, there
are striking examples of where the cross is the dominant motif.

In summary, to underline the holiness and importance of the symbol, the cross was
used in veneration, commemoration, apotropaically to ward off evil as well and to
guard, as a device to focus the mind on the divine and to mark a space as sacred. In
interior cells of monks, which were places of withdrawal and contemplation, they

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*The gap of some 400 years between the Codex Glazier and the al-Hāmūfī manuscripts might suggest
that later representations are always better developed and more progressed. This is not always the
case in so-called Coptic art. For example, the bestiary of al-Hāmūfī is significantly more crude
and amateur than that of Kellia.*
were a point of focus. In churches, they were often transfigural, replacing Christ himself in the image.

The following and final chapter will address the issue of the evolution of design and bring together the various threads of this project.
Chapter 7 – Findings & Conclusion
Chapter 7 – Findings and Conclusion

Robin Jensen’s new book contains a line that encapsulates the emotional impact of the cross on and in Christian Egypt, hopefully made apparent through this study of the design of this important symbol. She says that whether it is ‘beloved or feared, revered or denigrated, misconstrued or mystical, the cross endures’. Certainly it was beloved, revered, and imbued with mystical qualities by the Christians who painted it on walls, built it into architectural features and placed it on the most domestic and basic of objects. Not only did it endure through the predominantly Christian period, but did so well into the Islamic era, and in fact still survives today in Egypt, albeit under some constraint.

This was a study that had not been undertaken before, and it was my intention that it would add to the body of knowledge of early Christian visual expression in Egypt. It remains now to examine to what extent the goals, stated in the introduction, were achieved, to distil the main findings and to point the way to possible future research.

The research goals were broadly stated and are summarised here:

1. Survey monastic sites and museum collections with a view to identifying significant representations of crosses from the period under consideration. Create an image database that would allow a typology to be developed and an analysis of the designs to be undertaken.

2. Analyse the varied designs of the crosses, including an exploration of possible symbolism and influences. Examine the designs in relation to geography and chronology, further developing the typology.

3. Explore the relationship between the viewer and representation, taking into account the possible uses to which the cross was put. This would include a study of the nexus between form and function.

Achievement of project goals

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Survey, image collection and typology

A quest for existing academic compendia of crosses, Egyptian or otherwise, proved fruitless. The development of a typology and analysis of the designs could not commence until sufficient images had been collected. To this end archaeological and other scientific reports were studied, along with other relevant published material in the form of books, journal articles and reports. International museum collections and catalogues were trawled for images, and in some instances colleagues kindly sent me images that I might not have otherwise found. Any errors and omissions in the corpus for analysis are mine alone.

Using proprietary software, I designed, constructed and began to populate a searchable and interactive database called the Egyptian Crosses Database as an adjunct to this thesis. It continues to exist in that form, and currently consists of around 430 images. The image collection will continue to grow through further research and as more artefacts are made available on museum websites, or come to light through published reports of excavation teams. For ease of transmission, the bulk of images from the database were extracted into a more accessible format, which is provided as a supporting document to this thesis. A smaller collection of images specifically referred to in the thesis is contained at Appendix A. As, at this stage, the image collection is for study purposes only, copyright has not been sought and circulation of the document is therefore very limited. However, many images, especially from museum collections, are already in the public domain.

A key point in relation to the database, and subsequent corpus for analysis, is that there is a degree of subjective evaluation in what I have determined to be ‘significant’ crosses, as outlined earlier, bearing in mind that no such analysis appears to have existed previously. The time constraints of thesis preparation and submission were a factor in deciding what could be included, which resulted in the exclusion of secondary images, that is, where the cross was not the central feature. For the same reason the period of study was also limited to, broadly, between the fourth and twelfth centuries.

The survey of crosses across the monastic landscape has been completed to the extent of the information available. The development of a typology, based on design elements, resulted in the identification of four basic types of crosses, with eight sub-
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types. Each of the eight sub-types is further categorised by compositional and accompanying motifs.

The survey and analysis enabled the types and sub-types to be mapped against monastic sites, and for maps and charts to be created, the latter showing the approximate time spans of the relevant monasteries. These are contained in Appendices B and C and provide a clear picture of the distribution of types along a time continuum.

**Design influences and symbolism**

As the project progressed it became apparent that influence was not as important as originally envisaged. The initial citing of influence as a goal was based on early readings of authors who seemed to want or need to attribute artistic inspiration to, variously, Ancient Egypt, the Greeks, Romans and Byzantines. Others saw design similarities with Persia and Syria. This need to ascribe influence does not arise, to the same extent, in the study of western Christian art. There seemed, especially at the time when the study of ‘Coptic’ art was relatively new, a belief that because it did not conform to a western sense of artistic worth, it was somehow borrowed in concept and naïve in expression. While influence did need to be explored, as the project developed it was clear that the corpus is unique, and worthy of recognition as a type by itself and without being necessarily seen as entirely derivative. Eventually, whether influence can be directly attributed or not, and in some cases there are clear non-Egyptian antecedents, the crosses are a representation of the prevailing visual culture of Christian Egypt.

Symbolism was explored to the extent that it was possible. Much of what can be said about symbolism is speculative because there are scant written records about what particular things meant in an Egyptian context. Indeed there are few mentions of ‘art’ as such. In some instances it is clear from the decorative elements what is supposed to be represented, for example, a painted cross with a tang, rendered in yellow (gold) and with embedded coloured lozenges signifying gems, is certainly a representation of a ceremonial or processional sub-type, but to suggest the reasons for the use of red and green and not any other colour is mere speculation.
Similarly, the foliage shown on each side of the processional crosses is, for the most part, too generic to suggest specific symbolism other than the general themes of abundance, growth and renewal. Surprisingly, the instances of recognisable vegetal designs are few, and where provenance and context are not known, any meaning that can be attributed is mostly hypothetical.

The inclusion of fauna was a popular device, generally shown in pairs confronted to the cross. Some birds and animals are identifiable, some are ambiguous and some clearly fantastical. Was there some symbolic intent in these motifs, or were these simply decorative? While it is unlikely that they were purely for ornamentation, it is hard to state definitively to what extent ornamentation and meaning were intertwined. Broadly we might know that, in an Egyptian context, the beasts of the wilderness represented the forces of evil, but the meaning of much of the rest of the bestiary is an educated guess.

In certain types of crosses the meaning is clearer. For example, draped crosses have two possible meanings depending on how the drapery is shown. Slung, shawl-like, over the arms of the cross, much like a himation, the cross would appear to be transfigural and a representation of Christ. This is certainly the sense one derives from the draped cross in the Arian Baptistry at Ravenna, which could well be the prototype for the Egyptian examples. In other instances where the fabric is floating behind and away from the cross the meaning is more likely to be in the context of the Resurrection, that is, in the casting off of a shroud.

In the end the question must be asked whether peripheral symbolism, like influence, is all that important. Given the number of generic fauna and flora, I lean to the view that many of the accompanying design elements are more decorative than symbolic. However, the act of ‘decoration’ of a symbol of deep religious significance can also be regarded as a form of worship.

What became abundantly certain through the course of this study is the centrality of the cross itself in the visual expression of Egyptian Christians. There is no doubt, from the number of representations, the effort put into envisioning the designs, the attention to detail in execution, the rich chromatic palette and the overall quality of artisanship that the worth of the motif to the producer and, where relevant, commissioner of the image was beyond doubt.
Relationships with the motif

As was noted earlier, it is the relationship with a motif that gives it meaning; without this transactional element the cross is nothing more than a design without any spiritual or ideological foundation. The Christian response to the cross, based on the producer’s and viewer’s understanding of Christ’s Resurrection and attendant themes of hope, deliverance and salvation, render it more meaningful than, for example, a dove or a fish. It is this deep meaning that attaches to the cross in particular, that ensures that it is the fundamental and most enduring symbol of Christianity. It is also true that a study of non-Christian responses to the cross in design would result in a different outcome.

Relationships with the cross in Christian Egypt are evidenced in several ways; in how and where it was used, and the functions it performed. This study showed that it was used in venerative or meditative, commemorative and talismanic ways, sometimes in a combination of two or more of these modes. In several instances it was hard to determine what the primary function might have been, and indeed whether this was even relevant. Where does veneration end and superstition begin? The line between the two is blurred, more so in a time and culture than embraced magical ritual with as much enthusiasm as worshipful practice. We know from the collocation of symbols on various surfaces, that Egypt’s pagan past was not that distant in time or place from its then Christian present.

What became very clear was a sense of ownership of the symbol that allowed the artist or artisan to create something to his or her taste, and by extension perhaps that of the wider community. There was a fair degree of latitude in how the types were expressed, and in the range of design elements used, whether they were simple geometric motifs, complex interlaced patterns or mythical beasts that drew upon a vivid imagination. While there were local and geographical variations, such as the predominantly geometric floral rendition at Isnā, such freedom of expression suggests that there were few restrictions or rules imposed on the producers of these images, or that if there were proscriptions they were ignored in favour of a sense of personal possession of the symbol and what it meant.
This ‘ownership’, evidenced through being willing and able to put one’s personal stamp on a design of the cross, could itself be regarded as an act of veneration. If the symbol meant little there would have been less impetus to adorn it with decorative motifs. The act of embellishment speaks of a sense of proprietorship and adoration of the cross, and equals the rich imagery of the anaphoras of the cross. The notion of ownership is also tied to inculturation. It is clear from the corpus that the design elements accompanying the crosses have a particularly Egyptian Christian flavour, mostly strongly seen in the choice of fauna.

Extending the theme of relationships, an attempt was made to examine the contextual difference between the occurrence of crosses in secular and sacralised or sacred objects and spaces. However, these distinctions are modern constructs and we can surmise that in reality the lines were indistinct, especially in monastic settings from which the corpus mostly derives. In the end the dichotomy between secular and sacralised became more a study of domestic, everyday and personal objects, some of which came from non-monastic settings, contrasted against those with a clearer religious or ritualistic function.

**Design Evolution**

An assumption was made at the start of the project that the design of crosses in Egypt would evolve and that the study would be able to pinpoint when and why these changes occurred. However, after the collation of in excess of four hundred images, a superficial view of the corpus, over the span of centuries, could seem to suggest that there was not much that happened by way of design evolution. The same themes and motifs crop up in different media; the same generic flora and fauna appear in the same ‘poses’ in relation to the cross. It would be relatively easy to claim that the designs remained static. The point must also be made that the word ‘evolution’ would tend to suggest a continual forward movement with underlying beliefs about ‘improvement’, however that might be gauged.

In reality there was change, albeit in sometimes quite subtle ways, and not always in a forward movement.

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1 See Appendix D.
A clear and outstanding example of a theme being developed over a period of centuries is witnessed in the braided crosses. The designs that started out relatively simply at Kellia and Isnā with a few intertwining lines, evolved over a span of three to four hundred years into the highly complex and sophisticated renditions, observed in the codices from al-Ḥāmūlī in the Fayyūm. Time and talent were invested in these later images which show a freedom of expression within a particular design framework.

Similarly, the designs of draped crosses developed from the simpler examples at Dayr Abū Fānāh and Dayr al-Suryān to the polished and schooled rendition at Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs. The issue here is perhaps not so much about design advancement as perhaps an indicator of resources invested in a cohesive and sophisticated artistic program. It is evidence perhaps of monks and others travelling and trading in ideas. It is also indication of investment in professional Christian art in an era by which Islam had become dominant.

While the two examples above are what could be termed a change for the better with the passage of time, there are instances where renditions became more rough and less polished. For example, while at Kellia and Suhāj there are well-executed examples of fauna, even where they are ambiguous, by the time the al-Ḥāmūlī manuscripts were created the depictions of animals very much coarser and more vague. The contrast between the apparently hasty renditions of animals and the refined crosses is startling. We do not know if this was demonstrative of a general loss of skill or whether it was particular to the scriptoria that produced the manuscripts.

More importantly, a reverse evolution is noticeable in the design lexicon of Christian Egypt itself. This is most clearly and poignantly seen in the apparent decline in the use of the ansate cross, for which no reason has yet been found. This curious change, which has to be accepted to be the case until evidence is found to the contrary, is significant because the crux ansata is the only cross with an Egyptian antecedent, even allowing for the influence of the so-called Resurrection crosses on Roman sarcophagi. Why did the motif fall out of favour? Can we assume it was because the very Egyptianness of it somehow held pagan connotations in a growing international Christian world?
Finally, the subsequent domination of the Latin-type cross is a development in itself. By the ninth century it was the dominant type, in line with the rest of the Christian world. While this might be an indicator of greater movement and exchange of ideas across the Mediterranean world, it is possible to hypothesise that the growing Islamisation of Egypt pushed local Christians to identify more strongly with other Christian communities.
Summary of findings

There are several observations arising from this study, the key ones of which are listed below.

1. The analysis of the images showed that there are four basic types of cross in Egypt in the period under study (ansate, Greek, Latin and pattée) and eight sub-types, based on the decorative elements. These have been designated ceremonial, vegetal, faunal, geometric, symbolic, figural, plain and cryptic with most being broken down into further categories. The four types and eight sub-types have been mapped across the Egyptian monastic landscape, and along a timeline.

2. The ansate cross was the earliest to appear in visual representations, for example, in mummy portraits said to be from Shaykh Abādah (Antinoë), and more certainly at Khārijah and Dākhlah. While they could be as early as the third century, they are definitely attested from the fourth century.

3. Cross-type symbols such as staurograms and christograms were used as nomina sacra in scribal practice prior to the Constantinian era. The staurogram resembles an ansate cross but is not thought to be an antecedent.

4. The ansate cross is more prevalent in Upper and Middle Egypt, with no attested occurrences in Lower Egypt. Given its use in the Fayyūm, it is quite likely that it was in use in the delta, but the loss of material evidence from Lower Egypt does not allow for any certainty.

5. No type is dominant in Egypt in the period under study. Apart from the ansate cross, which is unique to Egypt, all other basic types occur elsewhere in the Christian world in the same period.

6. Contrary to prevailing view that the ansate cross derived entirely from an indigenous source, the ankh, there is another likely progenitor in the Roman ‘Resurrection’ crosses seen on carved sarcophagi. This is especially the case in the early mummy portraits where the deceased are shown carrying ansate crosses. The roundness of the loops, and instances where they are not contiguous with the tau shape, suggest a relationship with the Resurrection crosses, where a wreath is super-imposed on a Latin-type cross. Given the early date of the mummy portraits, it is very likely that this so-called Resurrection cross is also an antecedent of the ansate cross.

7. It would appear that the ansate cross ceased to be used after the end of the sixth century, though we must consider that it survived in locations that are no
longer extant. It also appears on several textile examples which have only very approximate dating, and therefore care must be taken in stating that it ceased to be used altogether after the sixth century. There is, at this stage, no proven explanation for the discontinuation of the ansate cross.

8. By the ninth century the foremost design for Egyptian crosses was the Latin type. The dominant type in Byzantium and Jerusalem was the Latin cross, which could have been significant for this change. Perhaps it is also relevant that the physical signing of the cross, which is mentioned as early as the third century by Hippolytus and Tertullian, takes a linear, arguably Latin, form both in eastern and western traditions. Processional crosses, likely to have been used in liturgy and ritual were also of the Latin type, perhaps contributing to the dominance of the motif. The modern Coptic cross with its trefoil terminals is based on the Latin type.

9. Notwithstanding the discussion that influence is difficult to attribute with any degree of certainty, it is clear that certain sub-types appear to demonstrate a strong Byzantine influence. Processional crosses, well attested in the Byzantine world by the fifth century, would be in this category, as would the draped transfigural crosses of which the prototype appears to be in the Arian Baptistery in Ravenna. However in both these and other instances, the accompanying design elements render the representations uniquely Egyptian.

10. It is rare to see an Egyptian cross in a narrative context. They are either shown alone or in a tableau with decorative elements. For example, there are no attested crucifixion scenes, which were evident in western Christian art by this time.

11. There are no attested crucifixes. Of the few examples of figural crosses, Christ is shown in face and bust only, with eyes wide open, signifying life rather than death. Images of suffering and death are not attested. This is in line with the anaphoras which focus on the redemptive and soteriological qualities of the cross and indeed the Resurrection.

12. The contexts in which the crosses were used were venerative (for worship or meditative practice), commemorative (such as in funerary contexts), and talismanic (as a protective device). They need not have been limited to one function. In personal use, such as in garments and jewellery they could be decorative, apotropaic as well as a demonstration of faith. At Isnā protective crosses in serried rows were made into a design feature around doors and
windows showing a link between form and function. Similarly there are crosses in wooden door panels.

13. Crosses were produced in a wide range of materials and objects, ranging from expensive to cheap. The unpretentiousness of surface and representation was not an indication of the worth of the symbol; on the contrary the inclusion of the cross on everyday objects underlined its importance and value to the owner and user.

14. Iconoclasm had little or no effect in Egypt, certainly on the crosses, which continued to be produced in various media throughout the period of this study. This is perhaps not surprising as Egyptian Christianity did not follow the Byzantine template. If there was any hiatus in the production of crosses, the problems of dating mentioned earlier would preclude any ascription to the Byzantine iconoclastic movement.

15. There is little evidence in the corpus, which extends until the twelfth century, of any significant Islamic influence. Crosses continued to be produced in monastic contexts with bold use of fauna. They were also used, in a secondary sense, on and with representations of monks, saints and the Deesis. It is much later, beyond this period, that an Islamic design principle is attested.

16. Notably, Christian art did not just survive but flourished well beyond the Arab conquest. However, this project’s corpus mostly derives from representations within monasteries and hermitages. Therefore the findings must be understood in the context that monasteries were immured from whatever strictures might have been in place in the general community as the dominance of Islam grew. Christians remained in the majority for some centuries but by the twelfth century this was no longer the case, which makes the cohesive decorative program of Dayr Anbā Antuniyūs (and in this instance the draped cross) more remarkable. To that extent the monasteries were oases of Christianity where visual expression flourished.

17. Design evolution is more apparent in some types, for example, the braided crosses which start relatively simply and, over a period of a few hundred years become highly complex and creative.

18. Overall the project showed that the cross is often overlooked in the study of Christian art, generally. Jensen’s new book is a welcome addition that goes a long way towards filling this gap, though her focus is mainly on western
Christian art. There were several instances where archaeologists and art historians focussed their attention on describing figurative elements at various monastic sites, failing to document the existence, except in passing, of the crosses. There are also examples where crosses are mentioned but no images have been provided. Paradoxically, the ubiquitous nature of the motif which leads to it being overlooked as a design feature masks the fact that it is also the most fundamental symbol of Christianity.

19. Finally, the study of the Egyptian crosses reinforces the view that ‘Coptic’ or Egyptian Christian art is a valid genre in itself. While it is regarded as such formally, the need of art historians and scholars to attribute influence seems to stem from the view that it is derivative, the sub-text being that it is not as creative and not as good as western Christian art. However, the corpus under study showed that Egyptian Christian art is unique and recognisable and to that extent has a style and expression of its own, and not just in its figurative representations. This is evidenced by unique motifs such as the ansate cross, and the inclusion of particular fauna, especially the beasts of the wilderness and fantastical creatures. It is particularly notable for its elaborate braided designs. It is also remarkable for elements that have been excluded from the design lexicon, such as full-body crucifixes and crucifixion scenes.

Future research possibilities

This project has highlighted that there are several areas that could be pursued to give a broader and deeper knowledge of the cross in the visual culture of Christian Egypt.

Following the art historical theme, the relationship between ‘Coptic’, Byzantine and Syrian art is of interest, as is the period beyond the twelfth century where the impact of Islam on crosses, in particular, would be an interesting avenue to explore, especially in terms of design evolution. For example, do faunal elements continue to be used or, as is attested in a silver Bible cover from a later period, is the cross incorporated into a more Islamic-type visual expression.

Additionally, a study of the impact of the Crusades on Egyptian Christian art would have merit, as would an investigation into the earliest western influences. The dominance of the Latin cross beyond the ninth century, and the development modern-day Coptic cross, would be a related line of enquiry.

An especially perplexing issue that would benefit from further exploration is the apparent loss of the ansate cross, given its indigenous nature, from the Egyptian design compendium. A closer examination of the dating of textile fragments might throw some light on whether the ansate cross did in fact persist, at least in textile design, beyond the sixth century.

The braided crosses are of particular interest. They pre-date the Hiberno-Saxon crosses of Ireland and Britain, though not the khachkars of Armenia. A study of these Armenian crosses in terms of the nexus between date and design would prove an interesting study, as would an exploration of the highly stylised Ethiopian crosses.

The link between Egypt and the British Isles has been speculated on without any proof of the connection. A wider study of the evolution of the design of braided crosses could throw some light on a possible link.

A connected area of interest is the Pictish stones in Scotland, dating to around the eighth century, which display images of the Egyptian saints Antony and Paul in conversation, along with the standard Egyptian iconography of the raven and the

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*Coptic Museum #1526, 18th century Bible cover from Sitt. Barbara, Fustat.*
shared loaf of bread, not usually seen in Britain. While this suggests that a link existed between the two areas, it is as yet unknown whether one or more itinerant monks were responsible for this transmission of ideas, whether there was a wider monastic community with links to Egypt, or indeed why these particular saints and the story of their meeting captured the local imagination.

Lastly, the database that was developed for this project provides an excellent basis for images to be added, with a view to supporting any future work, including those areas listed above. To that end I hope it, and this project, will be a useful resource for scholars and researchers.

Conclusion

Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, says in the foreword to Christopher Irvine’s book that the Christian faith has always been enacted by physical acts, gestures, rituals and dramas of transformation. Christian art, he notes, is not about decorative extras or helpful illustrations, rather it is an enacting of the faith, a means by which we are brought into the mystery being celebrated:

This has certainly been the theme that has emerged most clearly from this study. From the most humble expression of thumbprints in mud-brick wall, or a quickly incised pencil box, to the most elaborate and expensive stele, painting or glass composition, the crosses, in all their variations, were a means of expressing faith in whatever form that took. Even in its apotropaic use, it was still an expression of hope and faith.

In modern times ‘art’ is often used for art’s sake. Religious visual expression is no longer of great importance. It is the written word that carries authority, more so than a painting or sculpture. But for the people of Egypt, moving from a pagan past to a Christian present and on to an Islamic future, visual representations were a means of personal and communal expression. It was something that the ordinary person could control and make their own. It was a communal cultural expression but it was also ultimately a personal expression of faith with all its attendant themes.

Cases in point are the 8th century Dunfallandy stone in Perthshire, the 8th century Ruthwell cross in Dumfriesshire, and the stones from St. Vigeans near Arbroath.

For those who need words to confirm the importance of the cross to Egyptian Christians, the florid language of the *anaphoras* give us this without any doubt, where the cross is likened to a helper, protector, purifier, destroyer of demons, companion of those in the desert and curer of ills. It is the miracle worker and life giver, bringing relief, joy, salvation and blessing. In other words, it embodied the divine.

At the beginning of this thesis I drew on Cyril of Jerusalem to set the scene with words from his Discourse on the Cross, foreshadowing the iconic use of this aniconic symbol:

‘it was the wood of the cross that removed the middle wall of partition which was between us and God our Father, through Jesus.’

In conclusion, I turn again to Cyril of Jerusalem for the final and most apt words to capture the depth of relationship that Egyptian Christians had with the cross:

‘Nothing is done in the world without the cross.
No church is built without the cross.
No altar is dedicated without the cross.
No sacrifice is offered up without the cross.
No bishop or clergy is ordained without the cross.
None is baptised without the cross.’

The Cross in the Visual Culture of Christian Egypt

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**EXHIBITION CATALOGUES**


THE CROSS IN THE VISUAL CULTURE OF CHRISTIAN EGYPT

APPENDICES B, C AND D

Appendix B – Timeline Charts
Appendix C – Maps
Appendix D – Anaphoras
APPENDIX B

Timeline Charts
Evidence of Christianity
Severan reign

Decius persecution
Diocletian

Constantine's conversion
Edict of Milan
Monastic movement begins
Council of Nicaea
Helena's pilgrimage
Pagan rites forbidden
Cross in the sky
Theodosius - Christianity becomes the official religion

Council of Constantinople
Serapaeum destroyed

Council of Ephesus
Council of Chalcedon & schism
Byzantine rule

Justinian
Pagan temples closed

Sassanid conquest
Byzantine reclaim of Egypt
Arab invasion

Ummayad
Abbasid
Abbasids
Copts convert to Islam

Abbasids
Fatimid
East & West Christendom split

Fustat burned
Fatimids

Mamluk rule

Conversions to Islam

CENTURY

180
193-211

249-251
284-285

311
313

320
325
326
341
351

379-395

381
391

431
451
476

527-565
535-537

619
629
642

661-750
750-

830
-969
969-
1054

1168
-1171

1250
1321

Chart 1

Historic Events and Monasteries Timeline
Ceremonial Types

Kellia, Suhāj, Bāwīt, Saqqārah, al-Bagawāt, D. Abū Fānah, Akhmīm, Isnā, Suhāj, Kellia, al-Bahnasā

Ravenna (S. Apollinare in Classe)

D. al-Malāk Ghubriyāl

Al-Hāmūli

D. Abū Fānah, D. Anbā Antuniyūs

D. Abū Fānah, D. Anbā Shinūdah

Ravenna (Arian Baptistry)

D. al-Suryān, D. Anbā Antuniyūs
Chart 3
Faunal Types

CENTURY

Yoked

Venerative

Perched

Decorative

D. Abū Fānah, Minyā

Kellia, al-Bahnasā

D. Abū Fānah, Armant, Isnā

Kellia, al-Bahnasā, Armant, Isnā

Kellia, Bāwīt, Akhmim

Isnā, Armant

Al-Hāmūlī

Chart 4
Isnā, Khārjah, Wādī al-Natrūn
Isnā
Isnā, al-Bahnasā
Al-Hāmūlī
Isnā, Akhmim, Nag Hammadi
D. Anbā Antuniyūs
Khārjah, Kellia, Armant
Khārjah, Asyūt, Armant, Isnā, Several stelae of unknown provenance
Karanis, Kom Ishqāw, Saqqārah
Isnā, Bāwīt, Armant, Kom Ishqāw
Abū Sarga, Bāwīt, Isnā Kom Ishqāw, al-Bahnasā
Face only
Face & Bust
Akhmim, Armant, Isnā, Stelae of unknown provenance
Constanza carnelian
Kellia, Karnak (amulet)
S. Apollinare in Classe
Palestinian ampoulae
D. al-Malāk Ghubriyāl

Chart 7
'Ayn Jallāl, Khārjah, D. al-Baramūs (Wādī al-Natrūn)  
al-Naqlūn, Fayyum

Chart B
Cryptic Types

Rosette

Winged Ansate

Isnā, Saqqārah

Isnā, Armant
APPENDIX C

Maps
Ceremonial Types

Map 3

- Gemmed
- Ritual
- Stepped
- Draped
Faunal Types

Map 5

- Yoked
- Venerative
- Perched
- Decorative
Geometric Types

- Circular
- Linear
- Interlaced
- Repeated

Map 6
Figural Types

- Face only
- Face & Bust

Map 8
Cryptic Types

Map 10

Rosette
Winged Ansate
APPENDIX D

Selected Anaphoras
Ps-Theophilus

The cross purifies the man that pursues the energies cast forth from it.
The cross is the holy mystery.
The cross is the consolation of those who are in distress because of their sins.
The cross is the straight way, not leading astray those who walk on it when they are estranged.
The cross is the high tower which receives those who are running to it.
The cross is the ladder which raises the man to the sky.
The cross is the garment which the Christians are wearing.
The cross is the helper of the poor and the help for those who are distressed.
The cross is the one who has destroyed the temple of the Jews, opened the Church and crowned it.
The cross destroyed the demons (and) cast them away in fear.
The cross is the stability of the ships that are sailing in beauty.
The cross is the establishment of the priests that are in the house of God with wisdom.
The cross is the immutable judge of the apostles
The cross is the lamp of gold whose holy flame is shining
The cross is the father of the orphans, taking care of them.
The cross is the judge of the widows, wiping out the tears from their eyes.
The cross is the consolation of the wanderers.
The cross is the companion of those who are in the desert.
The cross is the ornament of the holy altars.
The cross is the sweetness of those who were bitter.
The cross is the help of the man in the moment of his necessity, when he goes out from the body.
The cross is the governor of the compassionates.
The cross is the administrator of those who have put their care in it.
The cross is the chastity of the virgins.
The cross is the fortified wall.
The cross is the physician who cures every sickness.

**Hymn to the wood of the Cross**

The wood of incorruptibility,
The wood of forgiveness of sin,
The wood of the healer,
The wood of the life-giver,
The wood of the fruit-giver,
The wood of relief,
The wood of gladness,
The wood of joy,
The wood of salvation,
The wood of blessing,
The wood of life,
The wood of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who has been hanged on the wood of the Cross.

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The Hymn of the Cross

The cross is the one who makes a man young again after he grows old, signs him through the holy baptism by marking him with the oil and Christ’s seal. The cross purifies the man that pursues the energies cast forth from it. The cross is the holy mystery. For when they seal the bread and the chalice on the holy table and they accomplish them, it is not anymore bread nor wine but it is holy body and blood. The cross is the consolation of those who are in distress because of their sins. The cross is the straight way, not leading astray those who walk on it when they are estranged. The cross is the high tower which receives those who are running to it. The cross is the ladder which raises man to the sky. The cross is the garment which the Christians are wearing. The cross is the helper of the poor and the help for those who are distressed. The cross is the one who has destroyed the temple of the Jews, opened the Church and has crowned it. The cross destroyed the demons (and) cast them away in fear. The cross is the stability of the ships that are sailing in beauty. The cross is the establishment of the priests that are in the house of God with wisdom. The cross is the immutable judge of the apostles. The cross is the lamp of gold whose holy flame is shining. The cross is the father of the orphans, taking care of them. The cross is the judge of the widows, wiping out the tears from their eyes. The cross is the consolation of the sojourners. The cross is the companion of those who are in the desert. The cross is the ornament of the holy altars. The cross is the sweetness of those who were bitter. The cross is the help of man in the moment of his necessity, when he goes out from the body. The cross is the governor of the compassionates. The cross is the administrator of those who have put their care in it. The cross is the chastity of the virgins. The cross is the fortified wall. The cross is the physician who cures every sickness.

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...May the cowardice flee away from us, because of him who suffered in the flesh, having established the victory sign of the cross.

...May the wrath and the [remembrance of evil flee away] from us fearing him who nailed the record of our sins on the cross with himself. (Excerpts)

Vienna, KM inv K8586b: Prayer of inclination before communion. Western Thebes, 7th century

Maravela et al comment that the text is almost identical to O.Crum 6.5

BKT VI 7 2: Prayer of inclination before communion and intercession for the congregation. P.Berol 6751, possibly Fayyûm, 7th century.6

...[having established] the victory sign [of the cross]; vainglory (through him) who was hit and flogged, and he turned [not] his face from the disgrace of the spitting; envy and murder and hatred and dissent [through] the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (Excerpt)