

Six Wooden Screen Walls (Iconostases) in Assiut Churches

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Abstract

Screen Wall or Iconostasis (*Hijab*) in the church that separates the sanctuary from the area of prayers. The idea of separation the sanctuary from the area of compression was started in the early church. The Arab word for screen wall (*Hijab*)¹ which literally means curtains but Copts did not prefer to call it Hijab. Some scholars and historians mentioned that the term of Hijab is incorrect translation to Greek word screen wall which means the place for hanging icons its wrongly named as hijab like the hijab of sanctuary of Solomon the church neglects this name as its function was not to hide the sanctuary, the symbolism of screen wall as a part of church refer to the truth of the church as holy icon of Jerusalem it represents with icons celestial case for prayers². This study aims to show the importance of the iconostases according to the analytical descriptive method of the examined iconostases, the material they were made of. This is followed by the analytical study of what was decorated on the iconostases, the Coptic and Arabic languages that were written on the iconostases and the ways of carving on the wood and the floral and geometrical decorations that appeared on these iconostases. The most important results of this paper is that the panels which topped the iconostases are inscribed with Arabic and Coptic writings, it includes some biblical inscriptions, and appearance of geometrical decorations such as the cross pattern and star pattern are the main decorations of the iconostases, floral decorations like olive branches are used in the entrance of the door of the iconostases, the appearance for the new titles such as the Everlasting doors and the king of glory. And the research contains about six iconostases published for the first time.

Key words: Iconostases, Archangel, Assiut, Wood, Dayr Rifah, Dayr Tasa, Saint George, Virgin Mary, Floral decorations, Coptic.

Introduction

Assiut is considered one of the most famous and important governorates in middle Egypt. It dates back to the Pharonic era and it was the capital of 13th nome of Upper Egypt. There are many famous Coptic monuments in Assiut such as al- Muharaq monastery and the holy virgin church at Drunka.

¹Screen has many names as cancelli, kanballed, benta, hierateian, Abaton in the beginning there was no screen on the western church, its sanctuary unroofed to seen then separated between the sanctuary and the nave by adding an upper part which become special to place the icons. For More, See:

الفريد بتلر، كنائس مصر القديمة، ج-١، ترجمة إبراهيم سلامة، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، ص٧٥.

² A.S., Atiya , The Coptic Encyclopedia, V.7, Macmillan, New York, p.23-26.

Assiut was the home of Christian community since at least as early as the great persecution of Diocletian. At the beginning of fourth century, Assiut became one of the most important centers of Christianity in Egypt during the Roman and Byzantine periods. A great number of iconostases are still preserved in the churches, and the eighteenth and nineteenth century churches in Assiut are richly ornamented with artifacts of artistic importance³.

The Descriptive Study: Screen Wall of St. George Church in Abnoub⁴

This screen wall occupies two chambers of the central altar and sanctuary which is dedicated to Saint George (Pl.1). It has three entrances, the southern (Pl.1.A) and northern (Pl.1.B) entrances are closed by a shutter, while the central one is closed by two shutter topped by a wooden lintel in rectangular shape divided into three horizontal parts (Pl.1.C). The upper and lower parts are divided into three parts having inscriptions, the middle one is divided into five sections having inscriptions as follows (Pl.1.C):

The Southern Filling in the upper Part.	
Arabic	ارتفعى أيتها الأبواب الدهرية ⁵ / ليدخل رب المجد ⁶
Translation	O eternal doors arise to enter the lord of glory.
The Central Filling in upper Part.	
Coptic	ξερε πι ερφει ιντε φτ φιωτ.
Translation	Peace is to the sanctuary of god the father.
Arabic	السلام لهيكل الله
Translation	Peace is to the sanctuary of god.
The Northern Filling in the upper Part.	
Arabic	من هو ملك المجد/ الرب العزيز القوى الجبار الليلوبيا
Translation	Who is the king of glory, lord, the exalted in power, the irresistible Alleluia.
The Southern Filling in the Central Part.	
Arabic	شهدت هذه البيعة المقدسة/في عهد/ نيافة الانبا ثاوفيلس الأسقف
Translation	The sacred was built during the era of Anba Sawfelis the bishop
The Central Filling in the Central Part.	
Arabic	هذا هو باب الرب والأبرار يدخلون فيه/ اذكر يارب من له تعب في هذه البيعة المقدسة
Translation	This is the gate of god in which the innocents enter god remember who is toiled and partnered him in the holy church.
The Northern Filling in the Central Part.	
Arabic	نيافة الانبا لوكاس المطران ثم زخرف هذا الحجاب/ في عهد/
Translation	This screen was decorated during the era of Anba Lukas the bishop.
The Southern Filling in the Central Part.	
Arabic	سنة ١٩١٥ - ١٩٣٣ ميلادية
Translation	from 1915 to 1933 A.D.

³ أحمد سليمان عبد العال، كنائس وأديرة محافظة أسيوط منذ بداية العصر العثماني حتى نهاية حكم محمد علي، مخطوط رسالة ماجستير كلية الآداب، جامعة جنوب الوادي، ١٩٩٨، ص ٩٨.

⁴ It's an ancient city which is considered to be one of the largest cities and located in the western bank of the Nile, the word Abnoub contains about two sections Ab and Noub. For more see:

محمد رمزي، القاموس الجغرافي للبلاد المصرية من عهد القدماء المصريين الى سنة ١٩٤٥، القسم الثاني، ج٤، الهيئة المصرية للكتاب، ١٩٩٤م، ص ٣.

⁵ Old Testament, Psalms, psalm 24:7.

⁶ Old Testament, Psalms, psalm 24:8.

The central filling in the central Part	
Arabic	عمل هذا الحجاب المبارك برسم هيكل الشهيد العظيم مارجرس بأبنوب
Translation	This screen made for the sake of the sanctuary of the great martyr mar Gergis in Abnoub
The Northern Filling in the Central Part.	
Arabic	١٦٣٣ ١٦٤٨ للشهداء
Translation	from 1633 to 1648 AM

Screen Wall of Holy Virgin Mary and St. George Church in El-Ghanayem⁷

Material: Wood.

Dimension: 320 cm length and 380 cm width.

The Description:

This church contains about six altars from south to north as follows; the Archangel Gabriel, the Virgin Mary, Archangel Michel, Ibsekheron El Qeileni, St. George and St.Telka- Hemanut.

It noteworthy that the screen wall of this church had damaged, there is a new wooden screen wall that separate between the choirs and the sanctuary of St. George, (Pl.2), while the doorway of original screen wall is closed by pier of wooden shutters (Pl.2.A), each of them has three horizontal parts, the upper and lower ones are similar having four rectangular panels, which contain a simple cross shape.

Screen Wall of Holy Virgin Mary Church at Dayr Rifah⁸

The screen wall of this church consists of one part covering the sanctuary of the Virgin Mary.

Material: wood.

Dimensions of the screen wall: 350 cm length 607cm width.

Southern entrance: 167cm length 74,5 cm width.

Northern entrance: 170 cm length- 74, 5 width.

Central window: 57cm length 57 cm width.

The Description:

This screen wall is considered a masterpiece of all the wooden Artifacts found in the churches of Assiut, this for many reasons the best state of preservation of this screen wall, there are no restorations done for the screen wall so the screen wall still on its origin shape and design (Pl.3).

⁷El-Ghanayem, it's a district of Assiut governorate ,it lies at a distance of about 40 km south west of Asyut its surrounded from north abo-tij district from the east by the sedfa from the south by tema in Sohag governorate. For more, see:

على باشا مبارك،الخطط التوفيقية الجديدة لمصر القاهرة ومدنها وبلادها القديمة الشهيرة، الطبعة الثانية، الهيئة المصرية للكتاب، ١٩٩٠م، ج١، ص٥٤.

⁸ This village situated on the edge of the desert plateau about 3 miles 5 km from Dayr Drunka, this lies not in a monastery in ordinary sense of the word but the use of Pharonic tombs by hermis.

For Further information, See: A.S. Atiya, The Coptic encyclopedia 3,pp.855-56.

The inscriptions which are written in Arabic and Coptic scripts are still clear. It has two entrances with a communion opening and composed of interlaced panels forming geometrical shape containing an equilateral Coptic cross having pointed triple angels with a pivotal nave in its corners like the fish a gesture of the Christ, (Fig.1). The Central window (Fig.2,Pl.3.A) is closed by two wooden shutters having a geometrical interlaced ornaments forming a cross with four squares around it inlaid with ivory, the spandrels of the arch have Arabic inscriptions in low relief inlaid with ivory:

Arabic	السلام لك يممثلة ⁹ نعمة/ الرب معك
Translation	Peace upon you who is full of grace, god with you.

The arch has a unique piece of shell including the figure of Virgin Mary and Jesus the child (Fig.3). The southern (Pl.3.B) and northern entrances (Fig.4, Pl. 3.C) are closed by one shutter in rectangular shape, and they are crowned by horseshoe arch. The spandrels of arch are decorated with bulbous vase with olive branches.

Inscriptions on the Southern Entrance (Pl. 3.D):

Arabic	سامح واغفر يارب خطاياي
Translation	O god forgive me my sins

Inscriptions on the Spandrels of Arch.

Coptic	τενου]τ μμοκ ωπξχ πενουτ
Translation	Kneel to you, O Christ, our lord

Inscriptions on lintel above Entrance.

Southern filling

Arabic	هذا هو/ باب الرب
Translation	This is gate of god.

Central Filling

Arabic	من ذا الذي يصعد إلى جبل الرب ¹⁰ أو من يقف في طور قدس الطاهراين ¹¹ / النقي القلب وانا بكثرة رحمتك ادخل بيتك واسجد نحو هيكل قدسك ¹²
Translation	Who may ascend into the hill of lord? Or who stand in the holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, O God I can enter your house and kneel towards your holy sanctuary.

Northern Filling

Arabic	وفيه تدخل الأبرار
Translation	And in which the innocents enter.

⁹ The Word mentioned as (يمثلة) and its correction is (يا ممثلة).

¹⁰ Old Testament, psalms, psalm 24:3.

¹¹ The word mentioned as الطاهراين and its correction as الطاهرين

¹² old Testament, psalms, psalm 24:3-4

Inscriptions on the Northern Entrance: (Pl. 3.E):

Inscriptions on spandrels of the arch	
Coptic	ξερει πει ρφει ιντε φτ φιωτ αμην
Translation	Πεαχε βε το τηε σανχτυαρψ οφ γοδ τηε φατηερ Αμεν
The inscriptions on lintel above the Entrance	
Southern Filling	
Arabic	المجد لله في العلا/ وعلى الأرض السلام
Translation	Glory to god in highest heaven, and peace upon the earth.
Central Filling	
Arabic	مما عمل لك برسم بيعت الست السيدة مرت مريم بحاجر ريفه ¹³ / عوض يارب من له تعب وشركه في ملكوت السماوات
Translation	Made for the sake of the lady, the Virgin Mary in Hager Rifah, o god compensates who is toiled and partnered him in the kingdom of heaven.
Northern Filling	
Arabic	في تانى عشر برمهات سنة ١٤٧٨ قبطية
Translation	On 12 Beremhat 1478 Coptic

Screen Wall at St. Mina church in El-Nekheila¹⁴

This screen wall has three parts; the southern and northern one contain a rear chamber, while the middle one covers the central sanctuary which is devoted to the name of St. Mina.

The Southern Screen Wall:

Material: wood.

Dimensions: 340 cm length 329 cm in width.

The Entrance: 187 cm length 84 cm in width.

The two windows: 54 cm length 54cm width.

Description:

It contains square interlaced geometrical units without using iron nails. It is decorated from inside with a simple cross in high relief (Pl.4). The entrance lies in the middle which is closed by two shutters. Each of them has three horizontal panels, the upper and lower ones are similar having a rectangular panel, the middle one has square interlaced geometrical units inlaid with ivory and ebony. The doorway is crowned by a horseshoe arch; the spandrels of arch are decorated with olive branches that executed inlaid with ivory (Pl.4.A). On each side of the entrance is a square window without a wooden shutter and is crowned by a horseshoe arch.

¹³The word mentioned as ريفه and its correction is ريفا

¹⁴ Amelineau mentioned it under the name of Bischany in 933 A.H and appeared in the evidence in 1224 A.H during the Ottoman period and the name changed to be Elnekhela which mentioned in the Old Roznama in 1230 A.H. See:

محمد رمزى، القاموس الجغرافى للبلاد المصرية، ج٤، ص ١٦، ١٧.

The Inscriptions on the lintel above the Entrance (Pl.4.B):

The Southern Filling	
Arabic	عوض يارب من له تعب
Translation	O god compensates who was toiled.
The Central Filling	
Coptic	ξερει πι ερωει ντε πτ ξερει πι αγιοχ πιλοθεοχ
Translation	Peace be to the sanctuary of god peace be to saint phelothas
The Northern Filling	
Arabic	سنة 1581 قبطية
Translation:	1581 Coptic

At the top of screen wall, there is a row of new icons which represent the apostles' of Christ.

The Middle Screen Wall:

Material: wood.

Dimensions: 350 cm length 450cm width.

Entrance: 204 cm length 110 cm width.

Two windows: 40 cm length 40 cm width.

Description:

It has a square panel contains an equilateral cross which has pointed projections in each side with a medallion like the first screen wall made of wood inlaid with ivory (Pl.4.C). The entrance lies in the middle and it is closed by two shutters, each of them has horizontal panels, the upper and lower ones are similar having a rectangular panel, while the middle one has a square interlaced geometrical ornaments which decorated from inside with a simple cross inlaid with ivory and ebony. The doorway is crowned by a horseshoe arch; the spandrels of the arch are decorated with olive branches that executed in inlaid with ivory (Fig.5). The doorway is encircled by a frame of crosses.

The Inscriptions on lintel above the Entrance (Pl.4.D):

The Southern Filling	
Arabic	عوض يارب/ من له تعب
Translation:	O god compensates who is toiled
The Central Filling	
Coptic	ξερει πι ερωει ντε πτ πιωτ εθουαβ ξερει αβα Μινα ντε νι παιατε
Translation	Peace be to the sanctuary of the Holy Father, peace be to saint Minia the wonder worker.
Northern Filling	
Arabic	سنة 1582 للشهداء
Translation	1582 AM

At the top of screen wall there is an icon represents the last dinner and it is topped by cross.

The Northern Screen Wall (Pl.4.E):

Material: Wood

Dimensions: 334cm length 389 cm in width.

Entrance: 187 cm length 84 cm width.

Two windows: 54 cm length 54 cm width.

Description:

It is similar to the southern one in the same church; except the doorway has side windows which are closed by two wooden shutters decorated with geometrical ornaments.

The Inscriptions on the lintels above the Entrance:

The Southern Filling	
Arabic	عوض يارب/ من له تعب
Translation	O god compensates who was toiled
The Central Filling	
Coptic	ξερει πι ερωει ντε πτ ξερει πι αγιοχ
Translation	Peace be to the sanctuary of god, peace be to saint
The Northern Filling	
Arabic	سنة 1582 قبطية
Translation	1582 Coptic

The screen wall has two icons; the southern icon represents the Virgin Mary, Saint Mark in the other side. The screen wall is also topped by an icon represents the judgment of Christ.

Screen Wall of St. John the Baptist Church in Dewinya¹⁵.

It has four parts; each of them occupies a rear chamber except the third screen wall in the south, which occupies the sanctuary, which is devoted to the name of Virgin Mary from south to north as follows:

First Part:

Material: Wood.

Dimension: Screen wall: 243 cm length, 310 cm width.

Entrance: 155 cm length, 70 cm width.

Two windows: 46 cm length, 30 cm width.

¹⁵**Dewinya:** Village in Assiut governorate. It lies at the North West bank of Abu-teeg. Its origin from ancient village called Tokh. For more See :

محمد رمزي، القاموس الجغرافي للبلاد المصرية، ج٤، ص ٢١، ٢٢.

Description.

It has a square geometrical interlaced unit without using iron nails. The internal decoration is a simple cross in high relief in addition to the same decoration on the side of screen wall (Pl.5). The entrance door lies at the middle which is closed by two shutters, each of them has three horizontal parts, the upper and lower one are similar having a rectangular panels, the middle one has a square geometrical panels inlaid with ivory and ebony. The entrance is crowned by a horseshoe arch, the spandrels are decorated with a circle containing a hexagonal star inlaid with ivory in low relief (Fig.6), and in addition to a Coptic inscriptions read as follows (Pl.5.A):

Coptic	ξερε πι ερφει ιντε φτ φιωτ
Translation	Peace is to the sanctuary of god the father.

On each side of the entrance, there is a small window in a rectangular shape without wooden shutters.

The Inscriptions on the lintel above the Entrance (Pl.5.A):

The Southern Filling	
Arabic	المجد لله
Translation	Glory to god
The Central Filling	
Coptic	ξερε πι αθιοπωροχ μ & πα πορο γεοργιοχ
Translation	Peace be to the martyr, the struggle, my lord, king Gaorgious.
The Northern Filling	
Coptic	μ & πα
Translation	in 1548

Second Part:

Material: Wood.

Dimensions: Screen wall 249 cm length, 248 cm width.

Entrance: 145 cm length, 63 cm width.

Two windows: 46 cm length, 46 cm width.

Description.

It has square geometrical interlaced units without using iron nails. The internal decoration is a simple cross in high relief (Pl.5.B). The entrance door lies at the middle which is closed by two shutters, and it is crowned by a horseshoe arch. On each side of entrance, there is a small window in a rectangular shape without wooden shutters.

Third Part:

Material: Wood.

Dimensions: Screen wall 291 cm length, 338 cm width.

Entrance: 173 cm length, 88 cm width.

Two windows: 47 cm length, 47 cm width.

Description.

It is resembled to the southern screen wall (Pl.5.C). The doorway is closed by two shutters having different ornaments each shutter has three horizontal parts, the upper and lower ones are similar having a rectangular panel, the middle one has a geometrical units which represent zigzag decoration, entrance is crowned by a horseshoe arch and the spandrels are decorated with a Coptic cross inlaid with ivory (Fig.7).

The Inscriptions on the lintel above the Entrance(Pl.5.D):

Southern Filling	
Arabic	هذا هو باب/ الرب وفيه يرتلون/ الابرار سنة ١٥٣١
Translation	This is agate of god in which the innocents intone. In 1531
The Central Filling	
Coptic	*! πι ερφει ιντε φτ φιωτ ! μιξαηλ πι αρξη αγγελοχ
Translation	peace be to the sanctuary of god the father peace be to the archangel Michael.
Arabic	السلام لميخائيل ريس ¹⁶ الملائكة.
Translation	Peace be to Archangel Michael
The Northern Filling	
Arabic	المجد لله في العلا/ وعلى الأرض السلام/ وفي الناس المسرة
Translation	Glory to god in highest heaven and peace be upon the earth and the joyful for the people.

Fourth Part:

Material: Wood.

Dimensions: Screen wall 243 cm length, 290 cm width.

Entrance: 156 cm length, 54 cm width.

Two windows: 40 cm length, 45 cm width.

Description:

It has the same decoration of the first part in the church, (Pl.5.E). The outer edge of the entrance arch is decorated with small triangles; the entrance is decorated with Coptic cross inlaid with ivory.

The Inscriptions on the lintel above the Entrance:

Southern filling	
Coptic:	μ & πα
Translation	in1548
Central Filling	
Coptic	αγιοχξιρ φλαυποχ
Translation	the chosen Saint Philopos
Northern Filling	
Coptic	ξερε πι
Translation	peace be to

¹⁶The Word mentioned as (ريس), and its correction is رئيس .

Screen Wall of Archangel Michael Church in Dayr Tasa¹⁷.

This screen wall contains about three parts; each of them occupies a sanctuary, one occupies the southern sanctuary that dedicated to the name of Virgin Mary, the middle one is dedicated to Archangel Michael and the third part occupies the northern sanctuary devoted to St. George.

The Southern Screen Wall

Material: Wood.

Dimensions: Screen wall 300 cm length, 364 cm width.

Entrance: 163 cm length, 83 cm width.

Two windows: 55 cm length, 48 cm width.

Description:

It contains a square geometrical interlaced panels without using iron nails, decorated from inside with a simple cross in high relief, The entrance lies in the middle, which is closed by two shutters. Each of them has three horizontal panels, the upper and lower one are simple having a rectangular panel in vertical and horizontal panels with zigzag decoration. The doorway is crowned by a horseshoe arch, and the edge of arch is decorated with crosses inlaid with ivory (Pl.6). On each side of the entrance, there is a small window in a square shape closed by a wooden shutter that is crowned by a horseshoe arch. The entrance is topped by a wooden lintel divided into two parts having Arabic and Coptic inscriptions, the inscriptions were destroyed because of the wrong restorations except some letters as follow (Pl.6.A):

Arabic	السلام لمريم العذرى. السلام للملاك السلام لهيكل الله الأب الصالح
Translation	Peace be to Virgin Mary, Peace be to the archangel, peace be to the sanctuary of god the good father.

The screen wall is topped by a six figures representing six apostles.

The Central Screen wall:

Material: Wood

Dimensions: Screen wall 300 cm length, 280 cm width.

Entrance: 175 cm length, 78 cm width.

Two windows: 50 cm length, 41 cm width.

Description:

It is decorated with a polygon with cross shape (Pl.6.B). The polygon consists of a pivotal nave the symbol of fish and figure has 12 sprocket emblems of apostles. The entrance lies in the middle encircled with a frame of crosses, closed by a pier of shutters, each of them has five horizontal parts, the upper and lower are similar having an oblong panel with the Latin letter x like the cross of saint Andria including three parts, the entrance is crowned by a horseshoe arch, the edges of arch are decorated with a half crosses and spandrels are decorated with a chandelier shape inlaid with ivory (Fig.8).

¹⁷Dayr Tasa: Amelineau mentioned that, it was Tasi and it supposed to be in Akhmim. For More, See: محمد رمزى، القاموس الجغرافى، القسم الثانى، ج٤، ص٣٦.

The Inscriptions on the lintel above the Entrance(Pl.6.C):

The Southern Filling	
Arabic	هذا هو/ باب الرب وفيه/ يدخلون الابرار
Translation	This is the gate of god in which the innocents enter
The Central Filling	
Coptic	ξερει πι ερφει ιντε φτ ξερει μιξαηλ πι αρξη αγγελοχ
Translation	peace be to the sanctuary of god, peace be to Archangel Michael.
The Northern Filling	
Coptic:	πι ερφει
Translation	In 1561 Coptic.

The Northern Screen wall:

Material: Wood.

Dimensions: Screen wall 245 cm length, 354 cm width.

Entrance: 152 cm length, 81 cm width.

Two windows: 34 cm length, 34 cm width.

Description:

It consists of square interlaced panels; each panel contains a triple with a pivotal nave in its corners, (Pl.6.D). The entrance lies in the middle which is closed by two shutters, the entrance is crowned by horseshoe arch with a spikenard flower on the edge, and the spandrels are decorated with a crosslet inlaid with ivory.

Inscriptions on the lintel above the Entrance (Pl.6.E):

The Southern Filling	
Arabic	المهتم بهذا الحجاب/ القس يوحنا
Translation	The one who cares for this screen the priest John.
The Central Filling	
Coptic	ξερει πι ερπει ντε π̄τ ξερει πι αθιοποροχ μ & πιλοπατηρ μερκουριοχ
Translation	Peace be to the sanctuary of god, peace be to the struggler, the martyr, the lover father, Margourious.
The Northern Filling	
Coptic	in 1541

Analytical Study:

The monasteries and churches in Assiut gave us a full idea about the various ornaments and inscriptions, which made the region replete with soul and life. The ornaments are the soul of art, moreover, when the product is full of ornament, it attract the sight, the attention and rejoice the heart, so the ornaments are very important.¹⁸

¹⁸ G. Garitte, *Constantin, 'ev'equē d'Assiout'*, in M. Malinine (ed.), *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum* (Bulletin of the Byzantine 1950, pp.227-304.

The Raw Material:

Wood is the material, which is used in these iconostases. A number of woods were imported from the Middle East, such as the Pine, which was used to carve some friezes, beech, cedar (Another reflection of Mediterranean contacts beyond the Mamluk domains of Egypt and Syria lies in the material of the wooden panels. From Lebanon, cedar wood was long imported into Egypt. It can be assumed that this trade continued throughout the Middle Ages.), spruce, lemon wood, and oak¹⁹.

The Techniques:

The wood resources of the country were in the regions of al-Bahnasa, alAshmonain, Akhmim, and Qus. The shortage of wood was accentuated from the fourth to the seventh century, probably owing to the general poverty of the country under Byzantine rule²⁰.

Byzantine elements, such as the vine and vase motifs, as well as depictions of Mamluks early period are found in this screen. The main role of the geometric carving is to draw a border around each panel as to make the panels appear more clearly and highlighted. The luxury trade, using imported wood, was essentially centered in Alexandria. Domestic areas had to depend on local supplies.

Methods of Executing of Decorations on Screen Walls.

The Copts carpenters used different methods in manufacture and decoration of wood work artifacts most of these methods were known since the Pharonic time, Carving is the earliest and most common techniques of wood working, Artists usually carve the area around the motifs by sinking the background in order to emphasize the visually of the motifs. Besides the carpenters also use painting to reveal the details of the decorations techniques such as piercing and joining, inlaying, Khart, are highly used in woodworking, wooden objects are extensively used in Copts churches due to the easiness of their manufacture and their religious significance²¹.

Floral Ornaments:

The Coptic artist interested in the floral ornaments that inspired through the surrounding environment which including the trees ,plants and grass that contain fruits ,vegetables and beautiful flowers dominated on his mind and dazzle his sight and were used in their different technical, paintings and pictorial themes²².

¹⁹ سامية محمد عطية البلتاجي، دراسة فنية لمجموعة الأخشاب في الكنائس والأديرة المصرية من القرن ٥ م وحتى القرن ١٢ م، مخطوط رسالة دكتوراه، كلية الآثار، جامعة القاهرة، القاهرة، ٢٠٠٣، ص ٩٩.

²⁰ سامية محمد عطية البلتاجي، دراسة فنية لمجموعة الأخشاب في الكنائس والأديرة المصرية، ص ١٠١.

²¹ سعد زغلول عبد الحميد، العمارة والفنون في دولة الإسلام، منشأة المعارف بالإسكندرية، ١٩٩٧، ص ١٤٤.

²² جمال هرمينا بطرس، الزخارف النباتية في المخطوطات القبطية من القرن الرابع إلى القرن التاسع الميلادي، مخطوط رسالة دكتوراه، كلية الآثار، جامعة القاهرة، ١٩٩٩، ص ٧٧.

Nard (Spikenard- Valerian) Flower (Fig.1, Pl 3.B,3 C). It is a precious, beautiful and aromatic flower that used in herbal medicine, its aromatic extracted from a little plant grow in al-Himalaya mountain, and it is a liquid used by the Indian to heal the disease, Mary the sister of Al-azer embrocated the foot of the Christ by this liquid and poured it on his head of six day before the Easter as a sign of her hospitality to the Jesus who returned his brother from the dead²³.

Carnation flower²⁴: It is found in a unique and marvelous example on the spandrels of the iconostas entrance in the church of the Virgin Mary hewn in the rock in Rifah, it is a vase including a stem with a pointed lanceolates ended with tulip and carnation flower in low relief inlaid with ivory, on the spandrels of screen wall entrance in the church of virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah.

Olive branches²⁵: An ornament a symbol of Athena –Minerva that helped the olive tree to proliferate olive and surrounded it by her protection that signed to peace and prosperity ,as kind of sacred or holy to this tree, the Greek were depicted it in various wall-paintings and put on coins of Athena .in addition to, it was used in making the olive wreath for the victories and a crowns for the kings and emperors because it was a honorable of the Greek to depict or sculptor a statue wearing a crown of olive (Fig.4,5).

Geometrical Ornaments: The geometrical decorations were the most important elements which had found on the screen walls particularly the crescent or cross decoration, circles, stars.

Circles: the circle is often used in ornamentations as a fundamental form, from early Islamic times circles were used to define the compositional structure of a surface decoration. As the circle had a religious and symbolic meaning of infinity to Christians²⁶, The circles refer to the eternity and often found on the spandrels above the portal in the iconostas of the churches inlaid with ivory and emblem of communion or Eucharist which the symbol of the Christ,(Fig.6).

Crosses (Fig.7,8).: Cross is a symbol of the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ, the writings of the church fathers indicate the use of the sign of the cross as a part of the service of the sacrament, the Coptic cross, the Coptic cross take the form of a small circles from which emanate four arms of equal length with angled T shaped in the corners, representing the nails used in Jesus crucifixion²⁷,

Stars: It is considered to be one of the most important geometrical ornaments; unfortunately one kind of this decorative element (hexagonal star) appeared on the edges of the springing on the iconostas and inside the gear of the polygon, this hexagonal star an emblem of the twelve apostles²⁸(Fig.10).

²³ A. Nozedar, The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Signs and Symbols, The Ultimate A Z Guide from Alchemy to the Zodiac Harper Element, London, 2008, p.319.

²⁴ J.E., Cirlot , A dictionary of Symbols, Routledge, London, 1971, p.243.

²⁵ A. Nozedar, The Element Encyclopedia,P. 335.

²⁶ فيليب سرنج، الرموز في الفن والأديان والحياة، ترجمة عبد الهادي عباس ، دار دمشق ، الطبعة الأولى، ١٩٩٢، ص ٢٤٧.

²⁷ A. Nozedar, The Element Encyclopedia, P.299.

²⁸ ميخائيل مكسى إسكندر، موسوعة طقوس الكنيسة القبطية، الجزء الأول، مكتبة المحبة، ١٩٩٨م، ص ١٣٣.

The Living Organism's Figures:

Figures of Virgin Mary: She has been represented in various forms such as the nativity, the annunciation and the crucifixion, we could be seen the angel announced her of the Christ, the most popular scene depicted the virgin Mary in a standing pose or ascending the throne carrying the Christ or suckling him, it noteworthy that the figure of the virgin Mary must be on the right of the Jesus at the sanctuary²⁹ (the queen sit on the king's right) (Fig.3).

The Animal's figures.

The Fish: An decorative element used widely in the early churches as it has various meanings and an emblem of the believer where the Christ said to St peter and Samoan come with me to make you a hunters of peoples, so the Christ like to the people like the fish, also the fish is a symbol of the Christ because its roman letters bears the initial letters of the roman word which means Jesus the son of god the savior. (Fig.9).

The Calligraphic Inscriptions:

The inscriptions which are found on the wooden works of the monasteries and churches in Assiut were varied in its styles for example; Arabic language and some in Coptic while other inscription wrote in Greek, in addition to Arabic and Coptic numbers that dated the monument. The Calligraphic inscriptions are divided into various parts as follows, Excerptions from the Bible, Supplications, Names of Saints, Craftsmen, Patronage of art and cities³⁰.

Names of art Patrons: According to the phrases which found on the iconostas in this study, we discovered some names attributed to the patrons of art that found on the iconostas and the other archeological pieces, unfortunately we didn't have information about them except the cities and the time through the mentioned date on these different pieces³¹, such as:

Arabic	المهتم بهذا الحجاب/ القس يوحنا
Translation	The one who cares for this screen the priest John. (This inscribed on the northern screen wall of Archangel Michael church in Dayr Tasa Pl.6.E).
Arabic	ثم زخرف هذا الحجاب في عهد نياافة الأنبا لوكاس المطران
Translation	This screen was decorated during the era of Anba Lukas the bishop (This is inscribed on the central screen wall at Saint George church in Abnoub, Pl.1.C).
Arabic	شهدت هذه البيعة المقدسة في عهد نياافة الأنبا ثاوفيلس الأسقف
Translation	The sacred was built during the era of Anba Sawfelis the bishop (This inscribed on the central screen wall at Saint George church in Abnoub Pl.1.C).

²⁹ For Further information about the Figures of Virgin Mary in Coptic Art, See: Z. Skalova, G. Gabra, Icons of the Nile Valley, Cairo, 2003.

³⁰ القس منقريوس عوض الله ، منارة الأقداس في شرح طقوس الكنيسة القبطية والقداس، المطبعة التجارية الحديثة ، ١٩٩٧م، ص١١٢.

³¹ القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطى، قاموس المصطلحات الكنسية، الأخوة المصريين، ١٩٩١م، ص ٤٥.

Names of Saints:

Virgin Mary:

She was the mother of Jesus Christ; she was died in 48 A.D, and lived for fifteen years after the ascension of Christ to heaven and lived for sixty years³².

St. George:

The church call him the prince of martyrs, he was born in Cappadocia in Asia minor in the half of third century AD, his father was a governor died when George was twenty years of age he was a famous of martyrs, there are various accounts of the history of Saint George, known in Arabic Mary Gergis, respected by the Christian in all over the world, the church celebrate his martyrdom in the twenty third day of baramoudah³³.

St. Mina:

He was born in the city of Nakiyos (Nikiu) in the late 3rd century A.D, he was born from two Egyptian parents, his father called Euxoxius and his mother Euphemia, his father was a governor of nakiyos, after the death of his father he become a soldier in the roman army, saint mina left his position and went to desert and stayed many days worshipping the god with all his heart, he was martyred in 15th of hatour and he was taken by his sister to Alexandria, where he was buried in his famous monastery at mariut³⁴.

St. John the Baptist:

He was born in 30th of Ba'una month, his father priest Zacharias and his mother Elisabeth were both righteous before god, there appeared into him and angel of the lord standing on the right side of the alter of incense, the angel said to him fear not Zacharias, for the prayers heard and the wife Elisabeth shall beer thee a son and thou shall call his name john, he was martyred in the 2nd day of tut month 31 A.D³⁵.

Archangel Michael:

At twelfth day of Ba'una month the church celebrated with commemoration of the angel Michael, the archangel the intercessor of the human race, the one he was appeared to Joshua the son of nun, and the Copts of Egypt celebrated annually with the festival of archangel Michaela at twelfth of Abiab month³⁶.

³² بطرس الجميل وأخرون، السنكسار الجامع لأخبار الأنبياء والرسل والشهداء والقدسين المستعمل في كنائس الكرازة المرقسية في أيام وأحاد السنة التوتية، مكتبة المحبة، القاهرة، ١٩٧٩م، ص ٩٩.

³³ اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس، السنكسار الجامع لأخبار الانبياء والرسل والشهداء والقدسين، مطبعة أميرال بعابدين، الطبعة الثانية، ٢٠١٣م، ج١، ص٤١١.

³⁴ بيتر جروسمان، دليل عن مركز الحج التاريخي بأبي مينا، معهد الآثار الالمانى بالقاهرة، ١٩٧٦، ص٩.

³⁵ اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس، السنكسار، ج٢، ص ٣٦٦، ٣٦٦.

³⁶ اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس، السنكسار، ج٢، ص ٣١٧، ٣١٨.

Phrases of Glorification and Exaltation:

The word of glorification and exaltation means giving dignity and honor to god, I noticed that these phrases had been found at the central part of the iconostas in the main sanctuary and rarely its place had changed³⁷, such as:

Arabic	هذا هو باب الرب وفيه يدخل الأبرار
Translation	This is the gate of god in which the innocents enter (This inscribed on the southern entrance of the screen wall of the church of holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah,(Pl. 3.D).
Arabic	هذا هو باب الرب وفيه يرتلون الأبرار
Translation	This is the gate of god in which the innocents. (This inscribed on the third part of screen wall of the church of john the Baptist in Abnoub(Pl.1.C), and in the screen wall of the church of Archangel Michael in Dayr Tasa ,Pl5.D).
Arabic	السلام لمريم العدرى
Translation	Peace be to the virgin Mariam, (This inscribed on the central entrance of the first screen at Archangel Michael church in Dayr Tasa Pl.6.A) ³⁸ .
Arabic	السلام لهيكل الاله
Translation	Peace be to the sanctuary of god (This inscribed on the screen wall of the church of Archangel Michael church in Dayr Tasa, Pl.6.A)

Phrases of Dedication: The term of sanctification means dedicate to or devote to ,and it attributed to the name of saint such as manufactured by the name of the Mary, while the names of martyrs preceding by a permanent terms like peace for the glorify martyr , made for the name of martyr that means the person who killed for the sake of god and religion, while the word (great) derived from the sacrifice for god and religion , moreover the name of the virgin Mary proceeding by permanent terms such as made for the name of the virgin Mary³⁹ , made for the name of the virgin Marti Mary , the mother of the Christ the salvation of the world, and from these phrases appeared in the screen wall's such as:

Arabic	عمل هذا الحجاب المبارك برسم هيكل الشهيد ماري جرجس بابنوب
Translation	Screen made for the sake of dedication the sanctuary of the great martyr Mari Gergis in Abnoub. (This inscribed on the screen wall St. George Church in Abnoub, Pl.1.C)
Arabic	مريم مما عمل لك برسم بيعت الست السيدة مرت
Translation	Made for the sake of the lady the holy Virgin Mary. (This inscribed on the northern entrance of screen wall of holy Virgin Mary church in Dayr Rifah, (Pl. 3.E).

³⁷ أحمد سليمان عبدالعال، كنائس وأديرة محافظة أسيوط منذ بداية العصر العثماني حتى نهاية حكم محمد علي، مخطوط رسالة ماجستير، كلية الآداب، جامعة سوهاج، ١٩٩٨، ص ٩٨.

³⁸ القمص تادرس يعقوب، قاموس المصطلحات الكنسية، ص ١١٢،

³⁹ G. Ferguson, Signs& symbols in Christian Art, Oxford university press,1953,p.99.

Phrases of Supplication and Intercession:

The supplication means someone supplicates god asking him for mercy and forgiveness, we had noticed that the invocation phrases on the iconostases are very little and limited in I ask the virgin Mary, ask your beloved son, your acceptable intercession, oh god mention your servant, oh god mention the wrong-doer, it worth mentioning that the donor or the patronage asking the Christ to intercede him in front of the god⁴⁰, and from these phrases that appeared in the screen wall, such as:

Arabic	اذكر يارب من له تعب في هذه البيعة المقدسة
Translation	O god remembers who is toiled and partnered him in the holy church. (This appeared in the central screen wall of the church of St. George Church in Abnoub, Pl.1.C).
Arabic	سامح واغفر يارب خطاياي
Translation	O god forgives my sins, (This appeared in the southern entrance of the screen wall of the church of holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah.,Pl. 3.D).

The Titles:

Everlasting doors (الأبواب الدهرية): *El-Dahriya* from the word *Dahry* and it come as a title for the doors to describe it by the oldest and strongest doors⁴¹.

King of Glory (ملك المجد): It's a title which added for the glory to call the king of the glory Jesus Christ⁴².

The God (الرب): It's the name of Allah and it was written in the iconostases to describe Jesus Christ peace be upon him and Prophet Mohammed⁴³.

El-Anba (الأنبا): It's a Coptic word which means Aba and translated father and it was used by the Coptic by the mean of *El-Anba Johan*⁴⁴.

His Grace (نيافة): It's a title came before the title of Bishop or Metropolitan and its means the word lord⁴⁵.

Metropolitan (المطران): It is derived from the Greek word *Metropolit* and it's meant the city⁴⁶.

Bishop (الأسقف): It is derived from the Greek word *Abeiskobos* and its mean the overseer⁴⁷.

⁴⁰ G. Gabra, Christianity and Monasticism in Middle Egypt, The American University in Cairo press, Cairo,2015,p.113.

⁴¹ عبد المسيح صليب المسعودي، تحفة السائلين في ذكر أديرة رهبان المصريين، القاهرة، ١٩٩٩م، ص ١٧٨.

⁴² سامح حلمي، كنيستي الأرثوذكسية ما أجملك، القاهرة، ٢٠٠٢م، ص ٢٧٧، ٢٧٨.

⁴³ خالد سيد مرزوق، ألقاب رجال الدين المسيحي (دراسة وثائقية)، مجلة كلية الآداب، جامعة القاهرة، العدد السادس، أبريل ٢٠٠٤م، ص ٢٧٢؛ عبد المسيح صليب المسعودي، تحفة السائلين، ص ١٨٠.

⁴⁴ مجدى إبراهيم جرجس، السجلات القضائية لبطريركية القبط الأرثوذكس (١٨٥٣-١٨٨٣)، مخطوط رسالة ماجستير، كلية الآداب، جامعة القاهرة، ١٩٩٧م، ص ٢٦؛ خالد سيد مرزوق، ألقاب رجال الدين المسيحي، ص ٢٦٢.

⁴⁵ سمية حسن محمد إبراهيم، دير السلطان بالقدس من خلال الوثائق، في مؤتمر عن فلسطين في ضوء البرديات والنقوش، في الفترة من ٥-٩ سبتمبر ١٩٩٨م، القاهرة، ٢٠٠٠م، ص ١٥٧، ١٥٨؛ خالد سيد مرزوق، ألقاب رجال الدين المسيحي، ص ٢٦٩.

⁴⁶ ميلاد شرفاوي حبيب، الكنائس الصخرية في مصر، مخطوط رسالة ماجستير، كلية السياحة والفنادق، جامعة حلوان، ٢٠٠٨م، ص ٢٩١، ٢٩٢؛ الأنبا ديمتريوس، القاموس القبطي للكلمات الكنسية، مصلحة مطرانية ملوى، المنيا، ج١، ص ٧٢.

Priest (القس): It's Syrian word means the *Sheikh* to refer to its dignity. In Greek is known as *Prspetimos*, while in Coptic is *Bkhilo*⁴⁸.

Martyr (الشهيد): This word means in the Christianity, the one who was lived in the righteous life until he was killed because of his Christianity⁴⁹.

Concluding Remarks

In the light of this descriptive and analytical study, the researcher concluded the following:

The study of Screen Walls (Iconostases) in middle Egypt churches shows that, the churches of Assiut possess great number of artifacts which have historical, artistic and religious importance.

The Screen Walls of Assiut church are made of similar materials as wood and silver are most used, wood is mainly used in manufacture of iconostases.

The date of the Screen Walls that furnishes the church of Assiut ranges from the end of the nineteenth century till the beginning of the twelfth century.

Geometrical decorations like cross- pattern and star-pattern are the main decoration of the Screen Walls.

Floral decorations like olive branches are used in the decorations of the entrances of Screen Walls.

The panels which topped the Screen Walls are inscribed with Arabic and Coptic writings, it includes some Biblical inscriptions and name of the maker and sometimes the date of manufacture.

The study dealt with six Screen Walls (Iconostases) published for the first time.

The study refer to the appearance of some titles appeared for the first time such as the king of glory and the Everlasting doors.

The study refers to the using of inlaid of the wood by the ivory.

⁴⁷ طوبيا العنيسى، تفسير الألفاظ الدخيلة في اللغة العربية مع ذكر أصلها بحروفه، دار العرب البستاني، القاهرة، ١٩٦٥، ص٣؛ عوني برسوم، علم الإكليروس، الكتاب الثاني، ريجسنبورج، ألمانيا الغربية، ص ٢٧.

⁴⁸ خالد سيد مرزوق، ألقاب رجال الدين المسيحي، ص ٢٥٩؛ الأنبا ديمتريوس، القاموس القبطي، ص٤٤؛ فؤاد حسنين علي، الدخيل في اللغة العربية، مجلة كلية الآداب، جامعة فؤاد الأول، القاهرة، مجلد ١١، ج١، مايو ١٩٤٩، ص١٥.

⁴⁹ فيليب سرنج، الرموز في الفن والأديان والحياة، ص ٤٧٥.

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The Figures and Plates.

Fig.1. An illustration shows the Nard flower and a horse-shoe arch in the central Screen wall of the Holy Virgin Mary church in Dayr Rifah.

(The Researcher).

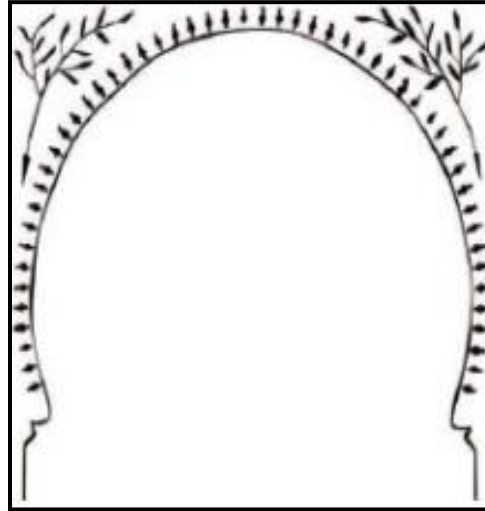


Fig.2. An illustration shows the central window at the church of Holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah.

(The Researcher)



Fig.3. An illustration shows the Holy Virgin Mary in central window of the Screen wall at the church of Holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah.

(The Researcher)



Fig.4. An illustration shows two bulbous vases with olive branches, lotus, and carnation or dianthus and a horse-shoe arch from the northern entrance at the church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah.

(The Researcher)

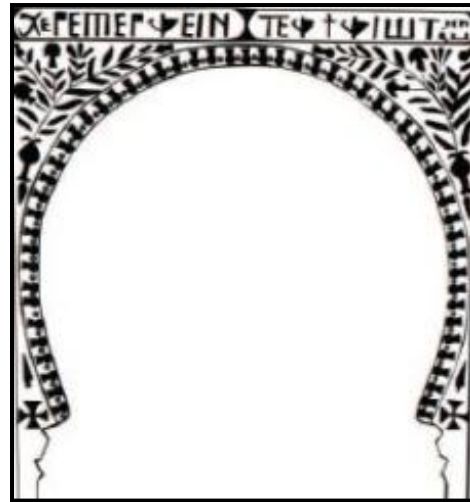


Fig.5. An illustration shows olive branches and Nard flower from the central Screen wall at St. Mina church in El-Nekheila.

(The Researcher)

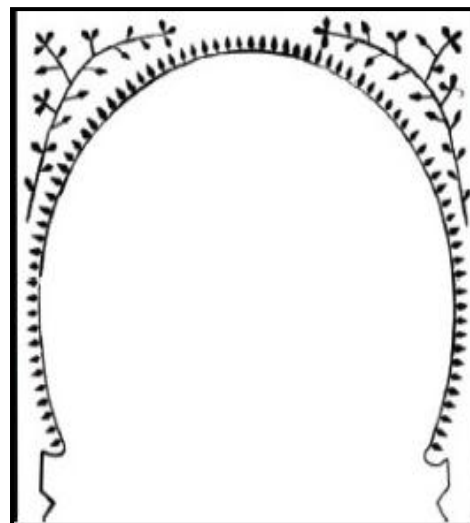


Fig.6. An illustration shows two circles having a hexagonal star and small triangles from the first part of screen wall at St. John the Baptist church in Dewina.

(The Researcher)

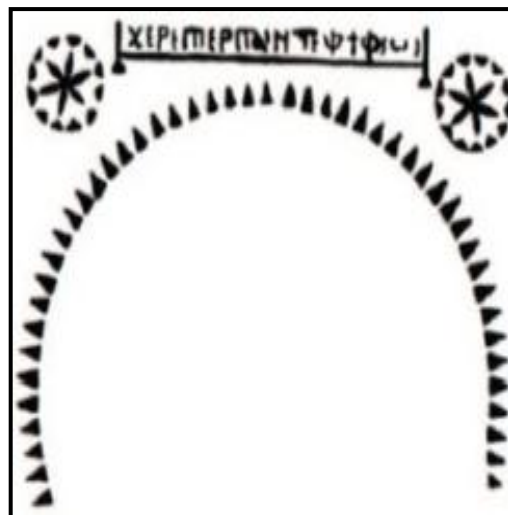


Fig.7. An illustration shows a horse shoe arch and a large cross from the third part of the screen wall at St. John the Baptist church in Dewina.

(The Researcher)

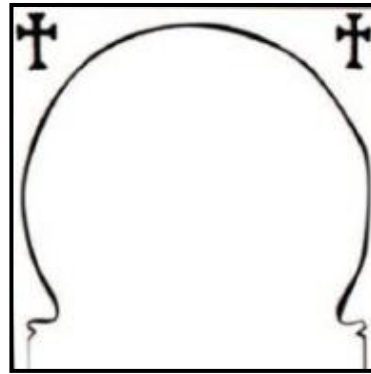


Fig.8. An illustration shows half crosses decorations and two chandeliers shape from the central screen wall at Archangel Michael church in Dayr Tasa.

(The Researcher)

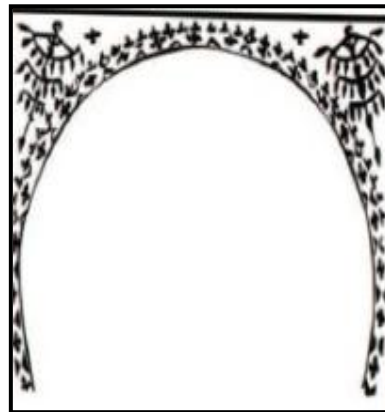


Fig.9. An illustration shows a fish with tail a star or rosette having six pointed buds from the first wooden screen wall in the church of Holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah.

(The Researcher)

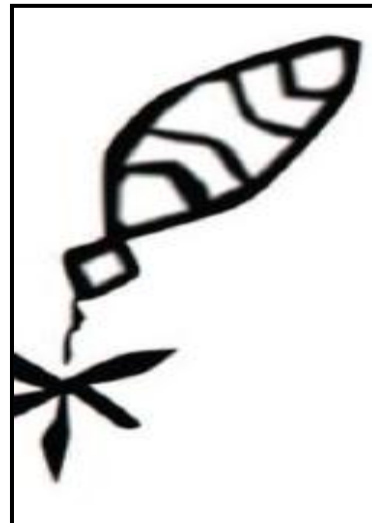
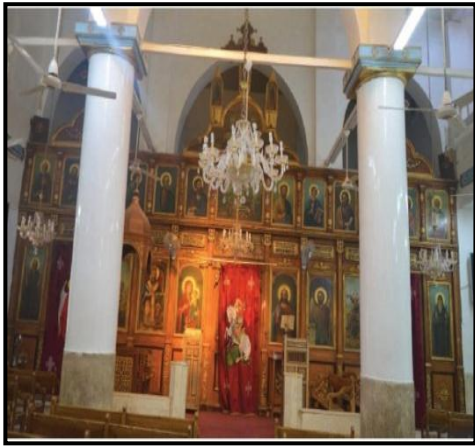


Fig.10. An illustration shows a hexagonal star and a crescent from the southern Screen wall at St. George church in Abnoub

(The Researcher)





Pl.(1). The Screen Wall at St. George Church. (The Researcher).



Pl.(1,A). The S. Section of Screen Wall (The Researcher).



Pl.(1,B) The N. Section of Screen Wall at St George Church (The Researcher)



Pl.(1,C) The Screen Wall Inscriptions of St. George Church (The Researcher).



Pl.(2) The screen wall of St. George Sanctuary in El-Ghanayem(Researcher).



Pl.(2.A).The Entrance of St. George Sanctuary in El-Ghanayem(Researcher).



Pl.3.The Screen Wall of Holy Virgin Mary Church in Dayr Rifah(Researcher)



Pl.(3.A)The Central Window of the Screen Wall of the Holy Virgin Mary Church in Dayr Rifah(Researcher)



Pl.(3.B) The Southern Entrance of the Screen Wall of Holy Virgin Mary Church in Dayr Rifah (Researcher)



Pl.(3.C) The Northern Entrance of the Screen Wall of Holy Virgin Mary Church in Dayr Rifah (Researcher)



Pl.(3.D) Inscriptions above the Southern Entrance of the Screen Wall on the Church of Holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah (Researcher).



Pl.(3.E) Inscriptions above the Northern Entrance of the Screen Wall on the Church of Holy Virgin Mary in Dayr Rifah (Researcher).



Pl.(4) The Southern Screen Wall at St. Mina Church in El-Nekheila (Researcher).



Pl.(4.A) The Entrance of the Southern Screen Wall at St. Mina Church in El-Nekheila (Researcher).



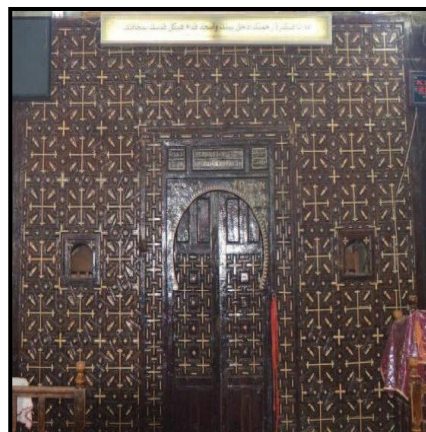
Pl.(4.B) The Inscriptions of the Southern Screen Wall at St. Mina Church in El-Nekheila (Researcher).



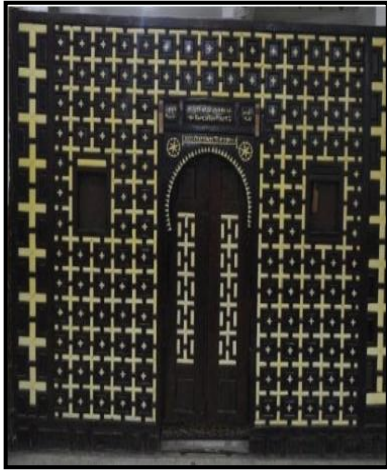
Pl.(4.C) The Middle Screen Wall at St. Mina Church in El-Nekheila (Researcher).



Pl.(4.D) The Inscriptions of the Middle Screen Wall at St. Mina Church in El-Nekheila (Researcher).



Pl.(4.E) The Northern Screen Wall at St. Mina Church in El-Nekheila (Researcher).



Pl.(5) The First Part of the Screen Wall at St. John the Baptist Church in Dewina (Researcher).



Pl.(5.A) The Inscriptions of the First Part of the Screen Wall at St. John the Baptist Church in Dewina (Researcher).



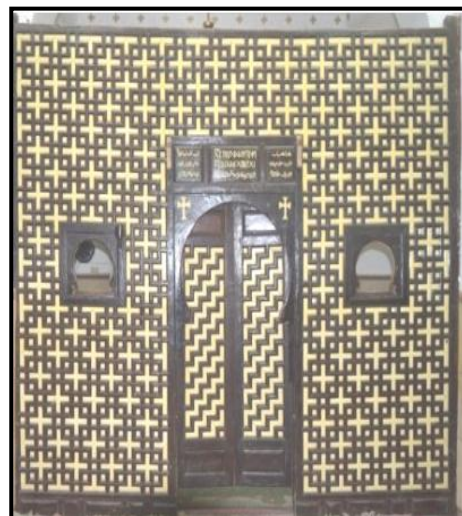
Pl.(5.B) The Second Part of the Screen Wall at St. John the Baptist Church in Dewina (Researcher).



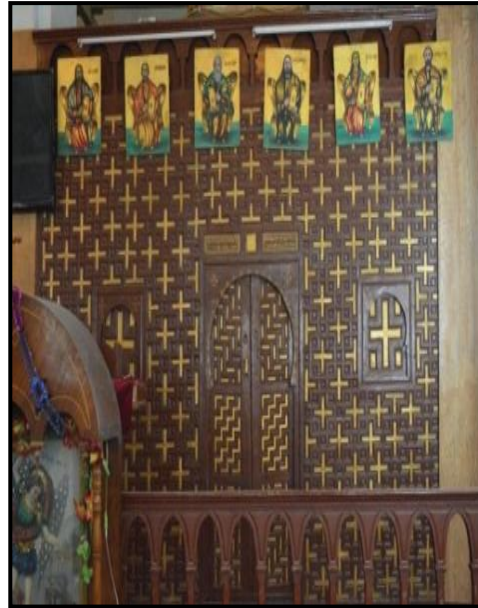
Pl.(5.C) The Third Part of the Screen Wall at St. John the Baptist Church in Dewina (Researcher).



Pl.(5.D) The Inscriptions of the Third Part of the Screen Wall at St. John the Baptist Church in Dewina (Researcher).



Pl.(5.E) The Fourth Part of the Screen Wall at St. John the Baptist Church in Dewina (Researcher).



Pl.(6) The Southern Screen Wall at the Archangel Michael Church in Dayr Tasa (Researcher).



Pl.(6.A) The Inscriptions on the Southern Screen Wall at the Archangel Michael Church in Dayr Tasa (Researcher).



Pl.(6.B) The Central Screen Wall at the Archangel Michael Church in Dayr Tasa (Researcher).



Pl.(6.C) The Inscriptions on the Central Screen Wall at the Archangel Michael Church in Dayr Tasa (Researcher).



Pl.(6.D) The Northern Screen Wall at the Archangel Michael Church in Dayr Tasa (Researcher).



Pl.(6.E) The Inscriptions on the Northern Screen Wall at the Archangel Michael Church in Dayr Tasa (Researcher).

سنة أحجبة خشبية (حوامل أيقونات) بكنائس أسيوط

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الملخص العربي

تعد دراسة الأحجبة الخشبية من أهم دراسات المشغولات الخشبية والتي احتلت جانباً هاماً من تطور الفن القبطي في مصر، وحامل الأيقونات أو الحائط في الكنيسة يستخدم لكي يقصل بين الهيكل ومنطقة الصلاة، أما عن فكرة عزل الهيكل فقد بدأت مع بداية الكنيسة الأولى وقد بدأت في المناطق البيزنطية في القرن السادس الميلادي، وقد عرف الحجاب الخشبي باسم الحجاب في اللغة العربية أو الستارة إلا ان الاقباط لم يفضلوا إطلاق كلمة حجاب كمصطلح إلا أن بعض الكتاب والمؤرخين ذكروا أن مصطلح الحجاب خطأ في الترجمة ولكن الأصح هو حامل الأيقونات ويعتبر الحجاب رمز للكنيسة والذي يشير الى حقيقة الكنيسة قبل الأيقونة المقدسة بفلسطين. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة ونشر مجموعة من الأحجبة الخشبية دراسة أثرية فنية، متبعاً المنهج الوصفي التحليلي الذي يقوم على الدراسة الوصفية للأحجبة الخشبية وكذلك أهم الزخارف التي زخرفت بها الأحجبة والمادة الخام المصنوع منها الأحجبة ثم الدراسة التحليلية لما سجل عليها من كتابات باللغة العربية والقبطية وأهم طرق الحفر على الأحجبة وأهم أشكال الزخارف الهندسية والنباتية التي ظهرت في الأحجبة موضوع الدراسة. ومن أهم النتائج التي توصلت إليها الدراسة إلى أن كتابات العتب الخشبي بالأحجبة مكتوبة باللغة القبطية والعربية والتي تحوى مجموعة من الآيات من الإنجيل، والإشارة الى الزخارف الهندسية والتي تمثلت في أشكال الصليب والنجوم الواردة بالأحجبة الى جانب الزخارف النباتية والتي تمثلت في زخرفة الزيتون، كما أشارت الدراسة الى ظهور مجموعة من الألقاب القبطية وظهور لقبين جديدين وهما (ملك المجد، والأبواب الدهرية)، كما قامت الدراسة بنشر ستة أحجبة خشبية بكنائس أسيوط لأول مرة.

الكلمات الدالة: أحجبة خشبية، حوامل أيقونات، الكنائس، أسيوط.