

Iconography of mourners in Coptic art: A tangible feature of Egyptian Heritage

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Abstract:

Wailing women are the ones who voice the pain and whose laments serve as memory of what and who were lost. From the Dynastic Period until the Coptic Period, mourning rites are associated with public expressions of emotions. These ritualized emotional concern the feminine group of "weepers". Among this group, some distinctive expressions of affliction can be observed: attitudes of sadness supported by particular words, or noisy and clearly organized demonstrative weeps and screams. This research deals with the mourners in Coptic Egypt throughout the study of some representational illuminations for them in the Coptic manuscripts, as well as the description of some icons. This paper will explore the gestures used to express grief in Coptic Egypt by the women. Through detailed analysis of some important examples of Coptic manuscripts, icons and murals to know more details about the various depictions of the mourners in Coptic art. The purpose for which this study is prepared is to describe and to analyze some important examples for the sake of interpreting and analyzing the physical movements and facial expressions.

Keywords: Mourners, Women, Virgin Mary, Marys , Icons, Coptic manuscript

1. Introduction:

The role of women in mourning was clear, and almost frequent but with certain differences in regard of details, from the Dynastic Period until the Coptic Period. It is worth mentioning that there were two types of mourners in Ancient Egypt. The first one is represented as two ladies who play the roles of Isis and Nebet-Hwt, they were known as the major and minor mourners, and were being depicted on the right and left facets of the sarcophagus, and had further roles in some funerary rituals.⁽¹⁾ The second one, is represented as a traditional mourner that were depicted in funerary parades, with unruly hair hanged down on the face, hitting her chest with the hand, she usually stands with a group of mourners who follow the deceased during his last journey heading to the tomb.⁽²⁾

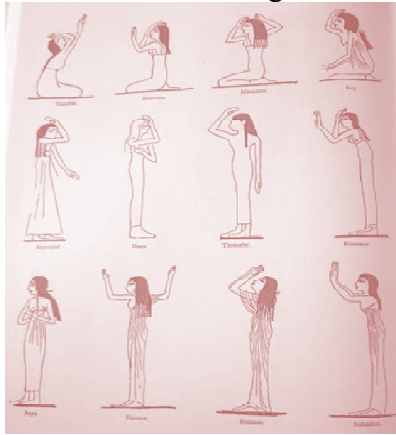
The rituals of whining and mourning in Ancient Egypt were derived from the mythology of Osiris, as during his death, the Egyptians were in total sadness. His sisters Isis and Nephthys, were his first mourners, as they strongly sobbed, and grieved his death, thereafter, they were called "The Two Mourners". In real life, the two goddesses were replaced by the wife and daughter of the deceased who were still performing the

(1) For an exposition of the role of the Egyptian mythical wailing women Isis and Nephthys play in the cult of Osiris, see, Bleeker, C.J., "Isis and Nephthys as wailing women" *Numen* 5, (1958), 1-17.

(2) Martin, R.V., "Les cheveux des pleureuses dans le rituel funéraire égyptien: le Geste Nwn", In: proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists (Cairo, 2000), vol 2, 548.

same rituals the two goddesses used to do, along with the participation of the family's women.⁽¹⁾ The rituals included phrases that refer to "Searching for Osiris" by Isis and Nebet-Hwt.⁽²⁾

The Egyptian scenes represent mourners while accompanying the funerary procession and performing the mourning and whining rituals. The mourners recited certain phrases with attitudes that touch the soul. Furthermore, they shed tears⁽³⁾ and did some acts that express sadness, such as raising their hands in a wailing position (Fig.1), slapping their cheeks and chests or hitting their heads and stirring up the dust over it (Fig.2).⁽⁴⁾



Fig(1):The different positions and physical movements of the mourners in the new kingdom

After: zakaria, D., The Social Survival from the ancient Egyptian Civilization in the field funerary practices, PH[D faculty of tourism and hotels, Alexandria university, 1999, PL.43.



Fig(2):Squatting mourners throwing dust on their head, tomb of Ramose TT55

After: El-Shahawy, A. (2005), "The Funerary Art of Ancient Egypt", Farid Atiya Press, Cairo, fig.24.

The papyri indicate that some women in Ancient Egypt took this profession as a paid-work⁽⁵⁾, meanwhile archaeological evidences confirm that the artist did not make clear differences between the mourner from the family, and that who took it as a paid-work⁽⁶⁾. The phenomenon of mourning in Hellenic Civilization differed from that of the Egyptian. It was whether without reciting any words or it included chanting a hymn written by a professional poet who is specialized in rhyming lamentation. In addition, it included women grabbing their hairs or placing their hands over their heads.

(1) ياروسلاف تشرنى (1987)، الديانة المصرية القديمة، ترجمة أحمد قدرى، القاهرة، 149-152.
(2) Goedicke, H., "The Story of a Herdsman," in: *CdE*. 45, 1970, 25.
(3) Faulkner, R.O. (1934). *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys*, Institut francais d'archéologie orientale, 377.
(4) Wenig, S. (1969). *The Women in Egyptian Art*, edition Leipzig, 49. أميمة على أحمد زهره، المرأة العاملة في مصر تحت حكم البطالمة و الرومان - دراسة تاريخية أثرية، رسالة دكتوراة غير منشورة، كلية الآداب جامعة الإسكندرية، 2004، ص 349.
(5) Robins, G. (1993). *Women in Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press. 165 n. 16 l; أميمة على أحمد زهره (2004)، ص 349.
(6) Michalowski, K. (1968). *Art of Ancient Egypt*, New York. fig. 109.

As for their representation, the artist tried to show differences between the mourners from the family of the deceased and those who were employed, this was shown through the variant details in customs. These traditions remained until the end of the Archaic Period.⁽¹⁾

During the sixth century, the manifestations of mourning developed until it became restricted to the women of the family only. They were performing the rituals of mourning and whining, as they grabbed their hairs and placed their hands over their chests.

Herodotus, speaking of the Egyptians, says, "*When a man of any account dies, all the womankind among his relatives proceeds to smear their heads and faces with mud. They then leave the corpse in the house, and parade the city with their breasts exposed, beating themselves as they go, and in this they are joined by all the women belonging to the family. In like manner the men also meet them from opposite quarters, naked to the waist and beating themselves*"⁽²⁾.

In Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, this phenomenon continued in the funerary rituals as being related to women. The documentary and archaeological evidences recorded it, and referred to employing mourners by the high-ranking class besides the women of the family in these rituals. The artist used to depict them in the Alexandrian environment while performing rituals of mourning and whining in different positions. They were sometimes depicted while raising their hands in a shouting and whining position, or they were hitting their chests with both their hands until their garments fall to their knees and reveal their breasts. During the Roman Period, they were sometimes depicted while sitting with their legs crossed in a squatting position and their faces between their arms. As for the garments, they were dark.⁽³⁾

2. The Wailing Women in the Bible:

The weeping women are the ones who voice the pain and hired to lament for particular occasions.⁽⁴⁾ The weeping women are literally called in the bible "wise women," which can also be translated as "skilled women", suggesting that the art of mourning publicly was a learned skill. By means of creative actualization of the lament tradition, wailing women vocalized what people would have said or ought to have said their laments truly represented a community response to trauma. In this regard, wailing women possessed the unique skill of being able to discern when tears were called for, moreover teaching the community to react properly in light of whatever circumstance it faced⁽⁵⁾.

In the New Testament⁽⁶⁾ the mourners represent the mothers of Bethlehem's infants, their maids and the Marys who were mentioned during the events of crucifixion. Herod

(1)Pomeroy,S.,(1976). *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, New York, 43-44.

(2) Herodotus.,II,85

(5) أميمة على احمد زهره (2004)، 352.

(4) Claassens, L., Juliana M. (2012). *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 27.

(5)Claassens, L., Juliana M."Calling the Keeners: The Image of the Wailing Woman as Symbol of Survival in aTraumatized World," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* , vol.26,No.1 , (spring 2010), 67.; Claassens, L., Juliana M , 2010, 67.

(6)2 Samuel 1:24; Ezek. 32:16-18; Amos 5:16

the Great was the King of Jews the moment Jesus Christ was born, he reigned from 37-4 BC as the Roman emperor's client. His reign is marked with the "Massacre of Innocents" in which he ordered to slaughter all the male infants under the age of two. Furthermore, the Gospel of Matthew mentions that once Herod had been told by the three Magi about the birth of a king in Bethlehem, he commanded his orders of slaughtering in this area and its surroundings⁽¹⁾

The mothers of the infants play an important role in the story of Massacre of Innocents. They were mentioned in the New Testament within the theme of the incident of the "Massacre of Innocents", their response to the murder of their infant sons is instead evoked by a quotation from Jeremiah that mentioned the mothers of Bethlehem's infants and their maids while crying, shouting and whining because of slaughtering their infants.⁽²⁾ This theme represents a realistic event inspired by the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 2:16-18), it represents the orders issued by Herod the Great when he had been told by the Magi about the birth of the new prophet who can take over the rule instead of him, so he ordered his soldiers to slaughter all the infants under the age of two.⁽³⁾

Furthermore, the mourners "Marys" were mentioned during the events of crucifixion in the New Testament, they were the Virgin Mary and Marys accompanying her. As Christ carried the cross beam through the streets of Jerusalem, he was accompanied by a great crowd of people, among whom were women in mourning for him.⁴

The Gospel of John refers to the weeping of Mary (John 11:33). Surprisingly, only the Gospel of John referred to the existence of the mother of Jesus Christ, or Mary of Clopas⁽⁵⁾. It mentioned the three Marys as; Mary the Jesus Christ's Mother, Mary Magdalene⁽⁶⁾ and Mary of Clopas,⁽⁷⁾ as all were standing beside the cross⁽¹⁾, In the

(1) Kupelian, M., The Journey of the Holy Family in Egypt and Its Representations in Coptic Art and Christian Heritage, *IAJFTH Volume 6, No.1* .2020,68.

(2) Nolan, K., "loratus et Ululatus: The Mothers in the Massacre of the Innocents at Chartres Cathedral", *Studies in Iconography* 17, 1996,95.

(3) France, R., (1979). Herod and the Children of Bethlehem, *Novum Testamentum, Vol. 21, Fasc. 2*, 117-118.; Kupelian, M., 2020,68.

(4) The episode is mentioned in St Luke's gospel: "And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? (Luke 23:27-31)".

(5) Mostafa, R., Women Accompanying Virgin Mary in Crucifixion Scenes: A Study in the New Testament Scenes, *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality* 17, 2019,4.

(6) Mary Magdalene was the first disciple in the Gospel of John to hear the Good News of Jesus' resurrection. During the Jesus Christ's crucifixion, Mary of Magdala was amongst the women who attended the incident (Matthew 27: 56, Mark 15: 40, John 19: 25).. However, her presence is described in the Gospel of John during Jesus Christ's burial, in this regard; she attempted to anoint his body on Easter Morning. (John 20:1-18); Renfro, K., "Faithful Disciple, Feminine Witness: Mary Magdalene Revisited," *Review and Expositor*, vol.110, no. 1, 2013, 131; Klerck, B. (2015). *Mary Magdalene's Conversion in Renaissance Painting and Mediaeval Sacred Drama*. Lardinois, A., Levie, S., Hoeken, H., and Luthy C. (eds) *Texts, Transmissions, Receptions*. Boston: Brill, 176.

(7) Ehrman, Bart D. (2006), *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend*, Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 223.

Gospel of John , it is recorded; “*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene*” (John 19:25). On the other hand, the other three gospels instead, name Mary of Jacob (Gospels of Mark and Matthew), Sons of Zebedee’s mother⁽²⁾ (Gospel of Matthew).It is attested in the Synoptic Gospels that numerous women from those who followed Jesus Christ from Galilee noticed, from a distance, his crucifixion³. In the Gospel of Mark, it is recorded; “*among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome⁽⁴⁾*” (Mark 15:40b).

On the other hand, in the Gospel of Matthew, we read; “*Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons*”.(Matthew 27:55-56).Also, the Gospel of Matthew says; “*When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things*” (Luke 23:48-49).

3. Iconography of Mourners in Coptic art:

There are many representations of the mourners in Coptic Art in Egypt, usually in the form of Icons and manuscripts in different compositions.

3.1 Iconography of Mourners in the Scenes of Bearing the Cross (Fig 3):

Date: 1249 A.D (12th century)

Manuscript name: the four Gospels -gospel of Luke

Dimensions: 8.6cm ×9.4cm

Accompanied inscription: Arabic inscriptions

In page 57 of the New Testament manuscript that is preserved in the Catholic Institute in Paris, “Bearing the Cross” is depicted in the third triangle. To the left, Jesus Christ while embracing his cross, turning to talk to two of the Marys, who wore garments of pale green, blue and brown colors, and both of them seem to be crying, one of them is staring harshly at two soldiers.⁽⁵⁾ The deep emotions of the Two Marys are strongly emphasized, as one of them is touching her face with the right hand as a sort of horror of the calamity. This portrays the importance of the body attitudes.

(1) Hornik, H. (2009) *Mary and the women from Galilee*. United States: center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University,51.

(2) Culpepper, R., (2000). *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, 2nd edn., Minneapolis: Fortress, 7–23.

(6) Hornik, H. (2009) , 51.

(4) Salome’s name is attested for only once in the Gospel of Mark; as she is mentioned as the third of the three female followers of Jesus Christ in his crucifixion in Galilee; and observed his crucifixion from a distance (Mark 15:40-41). See: Mostafa, R.,2019, 3.

(5) Leroy J. (1974). *les Manuscrits Coptes et Coptes arabes illustrés*, Paris,129-130.



Fig(3) :The mourners "Marys" in the Scenes of Bearing the Cross, the manuscript of Four Gospels 'gospel of Luke', - Catholic institute in Paris

After:Leroy J.,1974,pl.57,.82;

<https://bibliothequenumerique.icp.fr/viewer/4790/?offset=#page=120&viewer=picture&o=&n=0&q=:> Accessed in 8/8/2023 at 7:30 PM

3.2 Iconography of Mourners on crucifixion scenes:

3.2.1 ICONS:

3.2.1.1A triptych of the Crucifixion and the Holy Week Events (Fig. 4):

Date: 13th century

Provenance: Unknown provenance, Now at Coptic Museum, Inv no 3349 , cairo

Material: Tempera and gilding on linen and wood

Dimensions of the Central Panel: 78 × 57×2cm

Inscribed: In Greek IC ×C (On the cross)⁽¹⁾

A triptych icon of the crucifixion and the Holy Week Events; From Egypt or Palestine; In this scene Virgin Mary is shown bordered with the three other Marys, who were mourning and giving her the support through patting her body in order not to be fallen, they are suffering but still trying to support her, and two of them were gazing at her, while the third was watching the scene of crucifixion⁽²⁾. In such representation the mutual exposed emotions of pain, sympathy, helplessness and somber of the ladies are forming a unique combination of various artistic influences with a pure focus on the Coptic Art.⁽³⁾

(1) Gabra, G. and Skalova, Z. (2003) ,170.

(2)Gabra, G. and Skalova, Z. (2003) , 171.

(3) Gabra, G. and Skalova, Z. (2003) ,172; Gabra, G. , Eaton-Krauss, M. (2006). *the Treasures of Coptic Art: In the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press,200.



Fig 4 :A triptych of the Crucifixion and the Holy Week Events

After: Gabra, G. and Skalova, Z. (2003, Pl,6A, p.171; Gabra, G. , Eaton-Krauss, M. (2006). *the Treasures of Coptic Art: In the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press. .200-205,pl.127.

3.2.1.2.Marys in Crucifixion icon (Fig. 5)

Date: 14th century

Provenance: the church of St. Claudius, Meir Upper Egypt

Material: Tempera and gilding on linen and wood

Dimensions: 53 × 43×1cm⁽¹⁾

An icon shows the scene of crucifixion in Egypt. The Virgin Mary is depicted swooning, while being accompanied by a group of ladies who are whining, trying to keep her body stable while standing. In this regard, the artist was skillful enough to show the extreme passion and pain. The women who accompany her are known as the Three Marys. The empathy they are showing is shown throughout the facial features, as if it is a severe pain. Therefore, they are depicted while supporting, embracing and holding her.⁽²⁾



Fig. (5): Marys in Crucifixion icon

After: Gabra, G. and Skalova, Z. (2003),173.

(1) Gabra, G. and Skalova, Z. (2003) , 173.

(2) Mostafa ,R.,2019,7.

3.2.1.3 Crucifixion scene represents Marys as mourners (Fig.6)

Date: 18th century

Provenance: the suspended church in Old Cairo

This icon shows the crucifixion scene. On the right side, Mary Magdalene is depicted kneeling underneath the Christ's feet holding the cross¹ while the Holy Virgin is depicted the other side in a standing position; she holds along white napkin with her left hand and tries with right hand to dry her tears. Her facial features represent her with crying eyes and narrower eyebrows.⁽²⁾

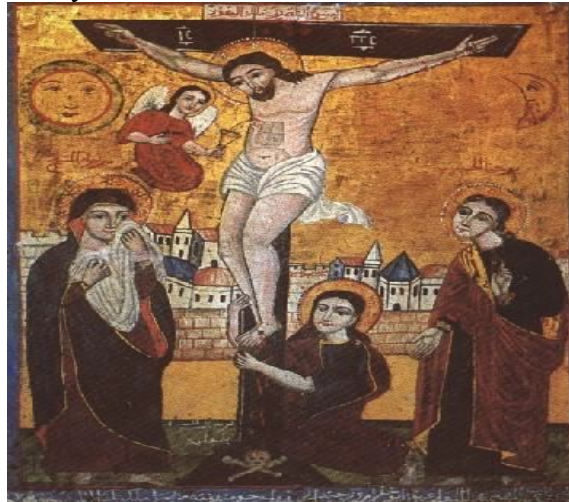


Fig (6): crucifixion scene represents Marys as mourners

After: Khalaf,A., Body Language of the Holy Virgin Mary in Coptic Iconography, Journal of association of Arab universities for tourism and hospitality , vol.20 No .1,2021,Fig.8.

3.2.2 Manuscripts:

3.2.2.1 Iconography of Marys in Crucifixion scene- manuscript of the four Gospels, the National library of Paris (Fig 7)

Date: 1179-1180 A.D (12th century)

Manuscript name: the four Gospels

Dimension: 12cm ×17cm

Manuscript number: Coptic 13

Copier: Anba Michael, Bishop of Damietta

Accompanied inscription: Inscriptions written in Coptic and translated in Arabic.

The illuminator of the manuscript of the Four Gospels for Abba Michael, the Bishop of Damietta in the Gospel of Matthew, portrayed the theme of "Crucifixion of Jesus" Christ. To the extreme left, the Four Marys appear, including the Virgin Mary, wearing blue, brown and green garments while they raise their hands, crying, shouting and whining with a slightly bended head upwards to the crucified Jesus.⁽³⁾ The manuscript is written in 2 languages; Arabic and Bohairic dialects read as:

"صلب المسيح الثوب وهم يقرعون عليه"

(1)Mostafa ,R.,2019,7.

(2)Khalaf,A.,2021,Fig.8.

(3)Leroy J. (1974),130.



Fig 7:Iconography of Marys in Crucifixion scene- manuscript of the four Gospels, the National library of Paris

After: Leroy J. (1974),83,pl.57.;http://warfare.6te.net/12/Copte_13-fol83v-Crucifixion.htm:Accessed in 10/5/2023 at 10.00Am

3.2.2.2 Scenes of mourners" Marys" on the crucifixion scene in the manuscript of Four Gospels', Catholic institute in Paris (Fig. 8)

Date: 1249-1250 A.D (12th century)

Manuscript name: the four Gospels -gospel of Luke

Dimension:8.6cm ×9.4cm

Accompanied inscription: Arabic inscriptions

In page 57 of the New Testament manuscript that is preserved in the Catholic Institute in Paris, “Crucifixion of Jesus” is depicted in the fourth triangle. To the right of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary stands, with a blue garment while she is crying, and beyond her a soldier stands with a spear with which he is stabbing Jesus Christ.⁽¹⁾



Fig 8: Scenes of mourners" Marys" on the crucifixion scene in the manuscript of Four Gospels', Catholic institute in Paris

After: Leroy J. (1974),pl.57,.82

;<https://bibliothequenumerique.icp.fr/viewer/4790/?offset=#page=120&viewer=picture&o=bookmark&n=0&q>

(1) Leroy J. (1974), 130-131.

3.2.2.3 Iconography of Mourners in the Scenes of Jesus Christ's Descent from the Cross (Fig 9)

Date: 1179-1180 A.D (12th century).

Manuscript name: the four Gospels

Dimension:10cm ×17cm

Manuscript number: Coptic 13

Copier: Anba Michael, Bishop of Damietta

Accompanied inscription: Inscriptions written in Coptic and translated in Arabic.

In the manuscript⁽¹⁾ of the Four Gospels for Bishop Michael, the scene of Jesus Christ's descent from the cross is illuminated. To the left of Jesus Christ, two Marys are shown crying and mourning while they hold large napkins with which they are waving. The illuminator here was skillful enough to portray the features of sadness and sobbing over their faces throughout simple lines. The first Mary (probably Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus), wears a pale blue garment, topped with another purple one. On the other hand, the second Mary, wears a pale blue garment. Their heads are encircled with a golden yellow hallow.⁽²⁾ The manuscript is written in 2 languages; Arabic and Bohairic dialects read as: "نزول المسيح عن الصليب".



Fig(9): Iconography of mourning Marys in manuscript of the four Gospels, The National library of Paris

After: Leroy J. (1974),p1.85; gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Départementdes Manuscrits. Copte 13 Accessed in:20/4/2023

3.3 Iconography of Mourners in the Scenes of entombment:

By the eleventh century, Byzantine artists had added a chorus of attendant weepers to depictions of the Entombment in order to bring extra pathos to the burial of Christ.³ The four canonical gospels (Mark 15: 46-47, Matthew 27:59-61, John19:39-41, and Luke 23 : 53-61) are distinguished with their main narration of Jesus Christ's burial process. The Holy Virgin attends the incident of the Christ's burial.

(1) This manuscript forms a copy of the four Gospels written by bishop Michael of Damietta; adorned by some scenes accompanying the main text.

(2) Leroy J. (1974),130-131.

(3) Leroy J. (1974),145.

3.3.1 Icon of the Entombment, Anastasi Al Roumy, 19th CE., Church of St. Mercurius , Akhmim (Fig. 10)

Date: 19th century

Provenance: the church of Abu Sayfien, Akhmim

An icon shows the scene of entombment. In this icon Virgin Mary is shown larger in size as a prominent main figure by the Coptic iconographer. She stands as a fully-shown figure behind Jesus Christ's body. The gestures could be interpreted as follows: In the upper part, she is depicted raising her arms with open palms. Her head is bended to the right side, which is personifying the wailing attitude.⁽¹⁾

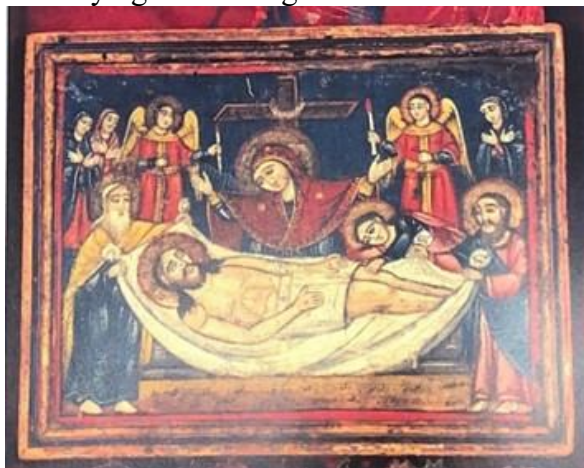


Fig (10):Icon of the Entombment, Anastasi Al Roumy, 19th CE., Church of St. Mercurius , Akhmim

After; Gabra, G., Van Loon, Gerturd J.M.(2007). *The Churches of Egypt from the Journey of the Holy Family to the Present Day*, Cairo-New York: The American University in Cairo Press,274.

3.3.2 The three mourning women at the tomb, the monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea (Fig. 11)

Date: 1232 / 1233 A.D

Provenance: eastern wall of khoras - Old church of St. Antony – the monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea.

The Three Marys are represented coming to the tomb, bearing spices, and finding the guards paralyzed with terror, and an angel who tells them that the Lord is risen, the guards were omitted (Matthew 28:1-9) . The three mourning women depicted on top of stone of the Christ tomb. The first lady looks to the angel in front of her while the second turns her face toward the third one. They raised hands and furrowed brows as a sign of astonishing at the empty tomb.⁽²⁾

(1) Khalaf,A.,(2021),8.

(2) Elizabeth S. Bolman,(2002). Monastic visions. Wall Painting The Monastery Of St. Antony At The RedSea , *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 96 (1),130; Saad,N., *Study of the Scenes of Angels in Coptic Paintings* (Master's thesis, Helwan University, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, 2008) , .187.; Moorsel,P., (1995).*Les peintures du Monastère de Saint-Antoine près de la Mer Rouge* , le Caire, 106-108, pl. 52-53.

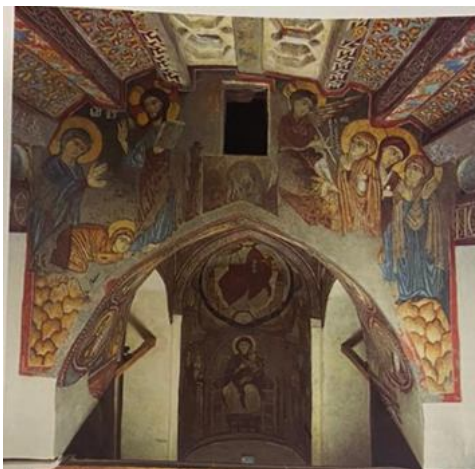


Fig. (11) : The three mourning women at the tomb, the monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea

After: Elizabeth S. Bolman,(2002). Monastic visions. Wall Painting The Monastery Of St. Antony At The RedSea , *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 96 (1),fig. 8.4, 8.5, p. 129, 130.

3.4 Iconography of Mourners in the Scenes of the Herod's slaughtering the Children of Bethlehem:

The Mourners "mothers of the infants of Bethlehem " are powerfully present in medieval pictorial representations of the Massacre of the Innocents.⁽¹⁾ This scene inspired from the Apocryphal Gospels; this scene spread on a great scale in the eastern fresco paintings of Byzantium.⁽²⁾ Also, Some Coptic manuscripts represent the soldiers of Herod while they execute the orders of slaughtering the infants of Bethlehem.

3.4.1 Iconography of Mourners in incident of the “Massacre of Innocents”, manuscript of the four Gospels,The National library of Paris, Coptic 13(Fig. 12)

Date : 1179-1180 A.D (12th century).

Manuscript name: the four Gospels

Dimension: 6cm ×5cm

Manuscript number: Coptic 13

Copier: Anba Michael, Bishop of Damietta

Accompanied inscription: Inscriptions written in Coptic and translated in Arabic.

An illumination from the Gospel of Matthew in the manuscript of the Four Gospels for Abba Michael the Bishop of Damietta, that is discovered in Damietta, shows the scene of “Slaughtering the Infants of Bethlehem” in which mourners exists.

The scene is divided into four registers, the first one shows four female figures on the left side, they are the mothers of the infants of Bethlehem and their maids, one of them is shown while she carries a dead infant in her left hand, while she holds a green napkin in her right hand with which she is waving and mourning, she wears a white garment,

(1) Nolan,K.,(1996),p.95.

(2) D' Amato, R., (2018), “Iconography of Roman Military Equipment in Egypt: The Deir Abou Hennis Frescos,” In *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea; Aspects of War, Diplomacy, and Military Elites, History of Warfare* 118, Leiden: E. J. Brill , 133-134; Clédat, J ,“Notes archéologiques et philologiques,” BIFAO 2,1902, pp. 41-70./, 49, pl. I

and in front of her, an old bended lady with a dark blue garment stands. Besides, a girl that seems to be younger in age wears a brown garment topped with an orange one, she wears a blue napkin with which she is waving and mourning.

In addition, a lady wears a red garment stands behind. The second register show the soldiers of Herod while they execute the orders of slaughtering the infants, then Herod himself appears overseeing the process. Then comes the last register in which three ladies are shown on the extreme left while they are crying and wailing because of slaughtering their infants, therefore, a lady with a blue long garment fall downwards to her feet, topped with a loose blue one and a black tresses (an established sign of mourning)¹ on her shoulder, is shown. She holds a yellow golden napkin with which she is wailing and shouting. Behind the latter, a lady with a black hair wears an orange garment place her hands over her face while crying, next to her, a lady with a black hair runs down on her back, wears a yellow golden garment². The manuscript is written in 2 languages; Arabic and Bohairic dialects read as; "قتل هيرودس للاطفال".



Fig 12: Iconography of Mourners in incident of the “Massacre of Innocents”, manuscript of the four Gospels, The National library of Paris, Coptic 13

After : [http://warfare.6te.net/12/Copte_13-fol6v-Massacre des innocents.htm](http://warfare.6te.net/12/Copte_13-fol6v-Massacre_des_innocents.htm): Accessed in 10/5/2023 at 9:00 Pm ;Leroy J. (1974),pl.45.

Through [TABLE 1], some observations about the iconography of the mourners in the Icons of Coptic Egypt and Coptic manuscripts outside can be summarized as follows:

PLA TE	Description	Mourner's Posture	Mourning gestures	Location	Period
3	the manuscript of Four Gospels 'gospel of Luke'	Two Marys- Right of the Christ – Standing position- pale green and blue-brown garment-both	Weeping	Catholic Institute in Paris	12 th century
4	icon of the	Virgin mary,	facial features :	Coptic	13th

(¹). Skálová, Z., (2012),“If the Woman had been Weak in Spirit”: the Restored Ottoman Coptic Icon of St. Rebecca and her five Children, Agathon, Peter, John, Amun and Amunah, by Ibrahim al-Nasikh, Cairo, 136.

(²)Leroy J. (1974), 117-118.

	crucifixion	the three -other Marys- Right of the Christ- Standing position	full of sorrow and sadness emotions of pain, sympathy, helplessness and somber of the ladies <u>Marys</u> mourning and giving her the support	museum in Old Cairo	century
5	icon of the crucifixion	Virgin Mary- the three -other <u>Marys</u> - Right of the Christ- Standing position		the church of St. Claudius, Meir Upper Egypt	14 th century
6	icon of the crucifixion	Virgin Mary- Right of the Christ- Standing position	Crying-holds along white handkerchief with her left hand	Mar Mina Church in Sanabu village, Asyut	
7	manuscript of the Four Gospels- Crucifixion of Jesus” Christ	Four Marys- blue, brown and green garments	raise their hands, crying, shouting and whining with a slightly bended head	National Library in Paris	12th century
8	manuscript of the Four Gospels- Crucifixion of Jesus” Christ	Virgin Mary- Right of the Christ- Standing position- a blue garment	Crying	Catholic institute in Paris	12th century
9	manuscript of the Four Gospels – Coptic13- Jesus Christ’s Descent from the Cross:	two Marys- left of the Christ- Standing position- a pale blue garment, topped with another purple one.	crying and mourning - they hold large napkins with which they are waving	The National library of Paris	12th century
10	Icon of Entombment	Virgin Mary - behind Jesus Christ’s body	raising her arms with open palms- - Her head is bended to the right side - the wailing attitude	the church of Abu Sayfien, Akhmim	19th century
11	Mural- The three mourning	three women- standing position	Mourning- raised hands and furrowed brows	eastern wall of khoras -	12th century

	women at the tomb			Old church of St.Antony – the monastery of St.Antony at the Red Sea	
12	manuscript of the four Gospels " Massacre of Innocents"	four female figures- left side- one of them carries a dead infant in her left hand- white garment, - an old bended lady with a dark blue garment. - younger in age with brown garment topped with an orange one- a lady with red garment stands behind	crying – one of them place her hands over her face Green, a yellow golden and blue napkin in her right hands with which they are waving and wailing shouting and mourning	National Library in Paris	12th century

According to the previous table, certain points could be noticed:

The Coptic Art reflects, with its different branches, different facial expressions refer to different meanings,⁽¹⁾ one of which is the expressions of the female mourners that were depicted in different artistic themes inspired by the Holy Bible with varied body language that illustrate the emotions of anguish and sorrow. In all icons and manuscripts the iconographer succeeded in expressing deep sad feelings with facial features and hands gestures. With studying and analyzing the body language of the mourners that include both the facial expressions and physical movements, the different positions and physical movements of the mourners in the Coptic Art could be recognized:

As for the emotions: The whining and crying emotions appeared in the facial expressions of the Three Marys and the mothers of the infants of Bethlehem (See Fig:12), the artist expressed it with the movement of the hand in the position of whining and crying within the depicted scenes over the icons and manuscripts that are inspired from the biblical themes .The gestures of resting the head on the hand or holding the hand against the chin are found in the most sacred contexts, such as the Crucifixion, and are made by persons of the greatest sanctity referring to the deep emotions of sadness (See Fig.12). Furthermore, the small closed firm mouth for mourner women referred to the deep emotions of sadness.

During the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, The feeling of fear is also highlighted through placing the hand over the chest with an open palm. On the other hand, sadness and fear can be noticed through the handkerchief used to dry the shed tears of Virgin Mary (See Fig.6) In addition, the crying eyes, looking down, gazing sadly at him semi-closed eyes

(1) Khalaf, A., (2021), 2.

and outstretching arms with open palms, are all gestures that showed deep emotions such as wailing and sorrow (See Figs: 3,7,8,10). The two gestures that reflected negative feelings of anxiety, restrain and despondency were clenching hands and head.

As for the body posture:

Converting the biblical texts into paintings is a sort of creating a vivid visual language. This was highly executed by the Coptic iconographer. He could use hands, and head to highlight the theme's core. The movement of the ladies' hands, as they mark the nerve connection and reveal the feeling comparing to the other parts of the body. The hands and head are used in most regards because they are effective in expressing the meaning in both the theme and the text.

The wailing women are always represented on the right side of Christ. The position of placing the two hands over the head⁽¹⁾ or raising the two arms upwards and waving was one of the movements that were used by women. It expressed the emotions of anguish and sorrow.⁽²⁾ This appeared in numerous representational illuminations in the manuscripts (See Figs:7,10,12), as well as in Coptic icons (Fig.10). It was a hallmark for expressing sadness and impatience.

Raising arms upwards is a metaphor for the mother care, and protecting her infants. This expression bears all the connotations of the dread and anxiety that befalls her when a danger is threatening her infant. It also bears all of what is generated from that feeling of alertness to the senses, speed in performance and charging energies. In the moment she is able to rescue him, then she is totally ready to embrace him with her outstretched arms, and it is the same position that expressed embracing, encompassment and care in ancient Egyptian thought and extended to the Coptic Art.⁽³⁾

The movement of the two arms was marked in the depictions of mourners that date back to post-eleventh century, as it seemed full of expression and sincerity of performance during this period. Sometimes women lose the ability to cohesion and balance due to the severity of their trauma and the pain of separation, so their bodies fall apart and their arms dangle at their sides, a position that reflects both their physical and emotional imbalances, while some of them collapse to the ground amongst those who support and care for them (See Figs: 3,4).⁽⁴⁾

Mourners in Egyptian Heritage:

The modern women of Egypt kept most of these movements and positions, as well as the rituals of whining and lamentation even if they lost their connotations by the time. They kept performing them after the incidents of death, especially the female villagers and those of the rural areas(Figs: 13,14) .

(1) Schaefer,H, "Eine unerkannte trauergebaerde und ein angebieher ploetzlicher tod" ,ZAS72,1963.104.

(2) Werbrouck,M.,(1938). *Les pleureuses dans l'egypte ancienne*,bruxelles ..144-148;Ranke,H., Ein Ungewoehnliche Darstellung des Neun Reiches ,*BIFAO* 30 (1931) ,587.

(3) Hornblower, G.D, Predynastic figures of woman and their successors. *JEA* 15, 1929,40; Pet,J.E, ,The Art of the predynastie period, *JEA* II, 1915,92.

(4) Schaefer,H, (1963),104.



In Fig. (13), a mother who lost one of her sons, is shown full emotions of anguish and sorrow, she raises her arms upwards in an attitude similar to the female mourners, as she is totally wrapped up in her performance, with all her vocal, kinetic, and emotional energy as if she is exerting herself for him, for the sake of reviving him, whilst, she is keeping the old role of Isis in which the latter surprisingly lamented her husband, with an excessive accuracy and continuity.

In modern Egypt, the severe sadness that fell the one's soul when one of his relatives dies, is a deep sadness that is inherited from the past, and still remains, he lives with it until now. The society innovated social systems that cope with the incident of death, systems that coordinate crying, shouting and prayers, systems created the role of a mourner.

In Modern Egypt, some families still employ a mourner that keep whining and mourning from the moment of death, and during the funeral and burying rituals, this is done as a paid-work. In this instance, she keeps narrating the good deeds of the deceased in pain, and participating in sobbing, crying, slapping the cheeks, and wailing for the deceased. Furthermore, black and dark blue colors remained the colors that are being worn by the modern Egyptian women during death and mourning incidents. (See Figs No.5 ,6,14).

Conclusion:

The role of women in mourning was clear from the Dynastic Period. The Egyptian scenes represent mourners while accompanying the funerary procession and performing the mourning and whining rituals. Sometimes professional female mourners were employed to weep and wail. During the sixth century, the manifestations of mourning developed until it became restricted to the women of the family only. In Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, this phenomenon continued in the funerary rituals as being related to women.

The Bible mentioned the mourners in both the old and New Testament. According to the holy bible, wailing women possessed the unique skill of being able to discern when tears were called for, moreover teaching the community to react properly in light of whatever circumstance it faced. it is significant that not only those trained in the art of keening are called to wail but that God addressed all of the women of Israel, urging them to teach their daughters a dirge and their neighbors a lament. The appearance of the wailing women in Old Testament corresponds to the well documented phenomenon in both ancient and contemporary societies of public and communal lamentation, especially weeping at funerals, being associated with women. The mothers of Bethlehem's infants and their maids were mentioned in the New Testament within the theme of the incident of the "Massacre of Innocents. They depicted in Coptic art crying,

shouting and whining because of slaughtering their infants. Furthermore, the mourners were also the Marys who were mentioned during the events of crucifixion in the New Testament.

There are many representations of the mourners in Coptic Art in Egypt, usually in the form of Icons and manuscripts; they appeared in the Scenes of Bearing the Cross, crucifixion, Jesus Christ's Descent from the Cross, Entombment and the Massacre of the Innocents. The depiction of the marys in crucifixion themes appeared around 12th century and they depicted on the right side of Jesus the Christ. Virgin Mary is also depicted on the right side of him.

the expressions of the female mourners that were depicted in different artistic themes inspired by the Holy Bible with varied body language that illustrate the emotions of anguish, sorrow, pain, sympathy, helplessness and somber and gloomy. The wailing women appeared crying and mourning and holding large napkins with which they are waving

The Coptic iconographer used the hands and the heads to highlight the theme's core. The hands and head are used in most regards because they are effective in expressing the meaning in both the theme and the text. The position of placing the two hands over the head or raising the two arms upwards and waving was one of the movements that were used by women. In modern Egypt the modern women kept most of these movements and positions, as well as the rituals of whining. Lamentation of the dead and the comforting of mourners were strongly ritualized, and remain so today among peasant Arab women – Christian and Muslim alike.

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تصوير النائحات فى الفن القبطى : ملامح مادية للتراث المصرى

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